

## 9 GREAT SOCCER READS FOR THE WORLD CUP

The World Cup is fast approaching--and if you love the game like me, I'll bet you can barely wait. Here are a few selections, from picture books through memoir through graphic novels, to tide your whole family over. Some are fun, and more about relationships, others are more about the love of the game.

### 1. [KEEPER](#), Mal Peet

Published originally in the United Kingdom, this unusual novel won the 2004 Branford Boase Award and was short-listed for the Nestle Children's Book Prize. Framed as an interview between a South American sports reporter and the world's best soccer goalkeeper, the now 30-year-old "El Gato" relates how he developed his skills, achieved great fame, and won the coveted World Cup. His story is one of poverty and isolation in a small logging community, of strong family ties in a beloved jungle being inexorably denuded, and of intense focus on the game of soccer. If a coming-of-age tale meeting an environmental message framed by sports narrative weren't enough, a mystical element is added, as El Gato describes his rigorous soccer training by a ghost in a magical clearing hewn from dense foliage. El Gato's remembrances do not consistently take the reader with him, and disparate elements don't always gel. Rich depictions of family and forest are marred by stilted, implausible dialog and choppy transitions between present and past. With its lengthy descriptions of the game, this may appeal most to soccer fans. Holly Koelling for Booklist

### 2. [TANGERINE](#), Edward Bloor

Tangerine is a town in Florida with problematic new housing developments, frequent lightning strikes, sinkholes, and muck fires. Seventh grader, Paul Fisher, his older brother and parents are leaving Texas for Tangerine, Florida where Paul's dad will take a job as a civil engineer. Paul, who is legally blind, enrolls at the middle school in town after his trailer classrooms at the first school are swallowed by a sinkhole. Paul, a soccer goalie, is in competition for his parents' attention with his older brother who is a football star. Football practice is not canceled even after one of the players is killed by lightning. Paul makes friends at the new school and learns some valuable lessons by working in the tangerine groves with his peers from the town school. Paul's brother's involvement in the death of his friends' uncle brings back memories of how he lost his vision. Tangerine is the first novel of Edward Bloor who taught middle and high school in

Florida. It is written from Paul's point of view and rings true of the middle school experience. The unexpected plot twists keep the interest of the reader.--The Alan Review

### 3. [FEVER PITCH](#), Nick Hornby

In America, it is soccer. But in Great Britain, it is the real football. No pads, no prayers, no prisoners. And that's before the players even take the field.

Nick Hornby has been a football fan since the moment he was conceived. Call it predestiny. Or call it preschool. Fever Pitch is his tribute to a lifelong obsession. Part autobiography, part comedy, part incisive analysis of insanity, Hornby's award-winning memoir captures the fever pitch of fandom - its agony and ecstasy, its community, its defining role in thousands of young mens' coming-of-age stories. Fever Pitch is one for the home team. But above all, it is one for everyone who knows what it really means to have a losing season.--Jacket copy

### 4. [SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING PANTS](#), Ann Brashares

In this feel-good novel with substance, four teenage girls, friends since they were all born just weeks apart, are about to embark on their first summer as separate young women. Carmen, half-Hispanic, has a knack for math; Lena, the beauty of the group and self-conscious about her appearance, demonstrates artistic talent; Bridget is the tall soccer star; and Tibby, the rebel, sports a nose ring. Visiting grandparents for the first time in Greece, attending soccer camp in Mexico, spending the summer with dad in South Carolina, or working at home, how will these girls survive their time alone? Leave it to a pair of secondhand jeans, which, despite their various body shapes, fits all four perfectly. These magical jeans, dubbed the Traveling Pants, span the world, one week at a time, lending their mystical powers wherever they go. The pants become a metaphor for the young women finding their own strength in the face of new love, unexpected friendships and death, a father's remarriage, and a reckless relationship--and without their best friends. Debut novelist Brashares renders each girl individual and lovable in her own right, emphasizing growing up without growing apart. Move over, Ya Ya Sisters.--Kirkus

### 5. [SERGIO SAVES THE GAME](#), Edel Rodriguez

Sergio has big dreams of being a star soccer player. In reality, though, the young penguin often stumbles and falls running after the ball and does not attain the success he yearns to have. Then his mother suggests that he try playing goalie. The game against the big, bruising Seagulls becomes his test of talent. Beginning soccer players will relate to Sergio's frustrations and admire his resolve. Rodriguez uses an attractive, yet simple palette of aqua, golden yellow, rust red, and

penguin black, and the colors stand out sharply against the white background. Action is created with varying perspectives on the ball flying at the lone goalie. –Blair Christolon, Prince William Public Library System, Manassas, VA for School Library Journal

**6. [SOCCER CHICK RULES](#), Dawn Fitzgerald**

Tess Munro is the soccer chick in question, a hard-playing forward who puts the team first. But soon there may be no team; if the school levy fails, sports programs, along with plenty else, including some of the teachers, will be gone. So Tess becomes involved with something besides sports: getting the levy passed. But can she score? FitzGerald takes a serious subject--school finance problems--mixes it with plenty of action-filled sports, and frosts the whole thing with best friends and rivals. The result is just what kids, especially girl jocks, want: a fast-moving, true-to-life, amusing take on school life. The dialogue is especially spot-on, even without the use of swearwords (FitzGerald comes close, but manages to find clever ways to avoid the actual words). Plenty of girls play sports, yet few writers tackle fiction for them. Happily, FitzGerald serves it up with ease.--Ilene Cooper for Booklist

**7. [DEFENDING IRENE](#), Kristin Wolden**

Irene Benenati, 13, is living in Italy with her family for one year. Because there are no girls' soccer teams in Merano, she must play on the boys' team. Daily, the teen faces the reality that she is an outsider in her father's homeland and an outsider on a team with a few boys who want her to quit. Nonetheless, this likable protagonist befriends the girls in her class and finally wins the respect of her teammates, even her arch detractor. What keeps this tale from being just another soccer story with play-by-play action is the unique setting; the inventiveness of the chapter headings, which consist of Italian words, pronunciations, and definitions; and Irene's determination.–Blair Christolon, Prince William Public Library System, Manassas, VA for School Library Journal

**8. [PRETTY TOUGH](#), Liz Tigelaar**

Sisters Krista and Charlie Brown could not be more different. Krista, the eldest, is blond, smart, pretty, and popular, and, of course, is dating a popular boy. Charlie, who endures bullying and teasing at school (not helped by her last name), prefers solitude and surfing the Malibu waves. When they are recruited for their high school soccer team, the teens have to face their differences and learn to work together. This is a well-paced book with solid character development and witty, authentic dialogue. The relationship between the siblings is both strong and complicated. With its

classic themes of sisterhood and romance, the book is an updated version of Francine Pascal's "Sweet Valley High" series (Random), with a sports twist.—Sharon Morrison, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Durant, OK for School Library Journal

9. [SHAOLIN SOCCER](#), Andy Seto et. al

Young kung fu adept "Sing" is an honor bound disciple of the legendary Shaolin Temple. His sole goal in life is to find a way to package the philosophy and physical teachings of his beloved Shaolin kung fu so that contemporary masses can learn, benefit and apply these doctrines to their daily life. When he hooks up with a former soccer champion, he quickly realizes that the world's most popular sport may just be the vehicle to spread Shaolin kung fu all over the globe. But first he must assemble a team worthy of the Shaolin name. But his secular, out of shape former kung fu brothers are far from impressed with his idea. Kung fu action and sidesplitting comedy are heading your way!--Promotional material