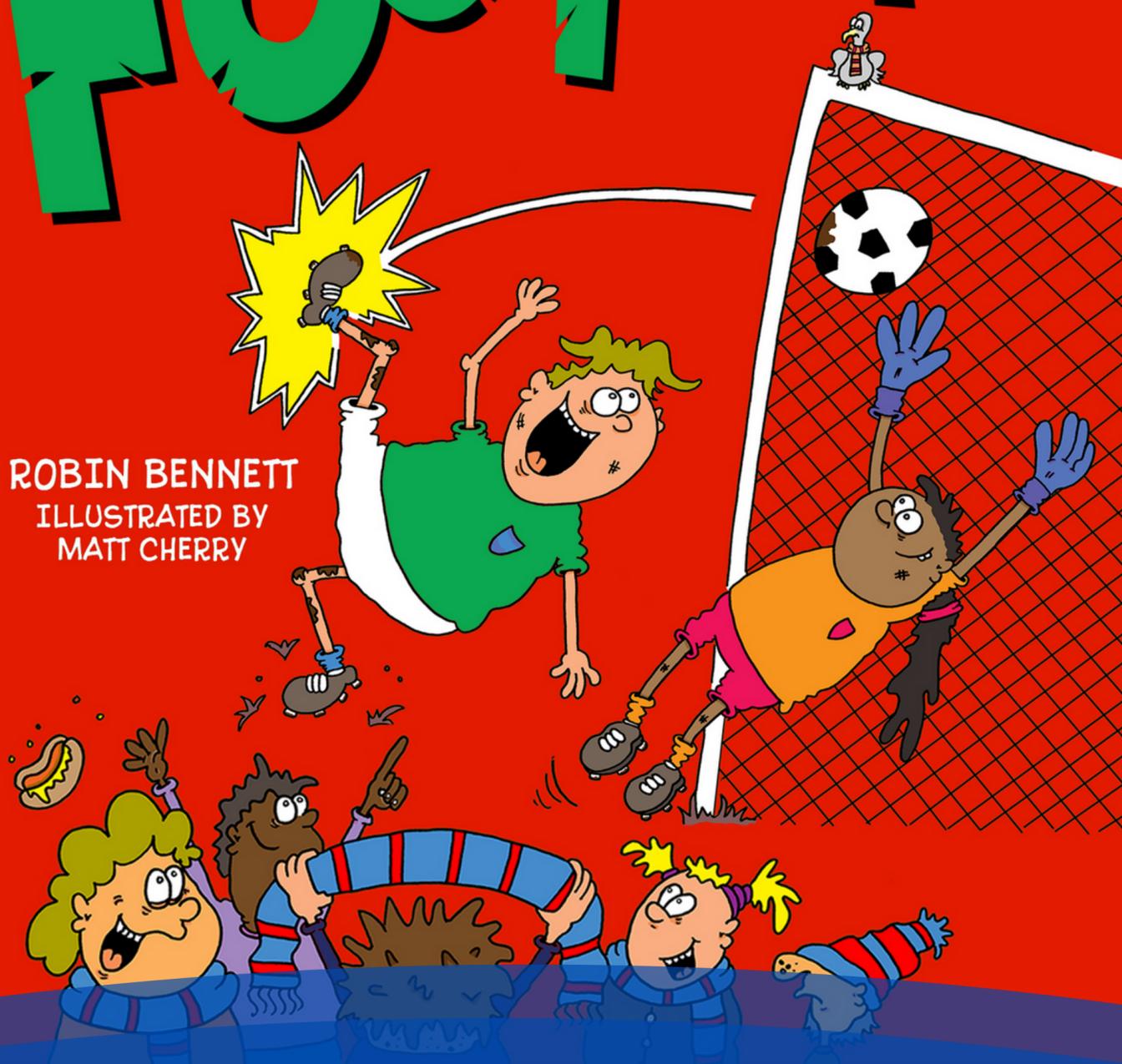




FANTASTIC FOOTBALL

ROBIN BENNETT
ILLUSTRATED BY
MATT CHERRY



TRY THE 1ST CHAPTER!

Robin Bennett

Robin is an author and entrepreneur who has written several books for children.

Aged 21, he was all set to become a cavalry officer (in charge of tanks), and aged 21 and a half, he found himself working as an assistant grave digger in south London wondering where it had all gone wrong.

Robin Bennett plays most sports. Poorly.

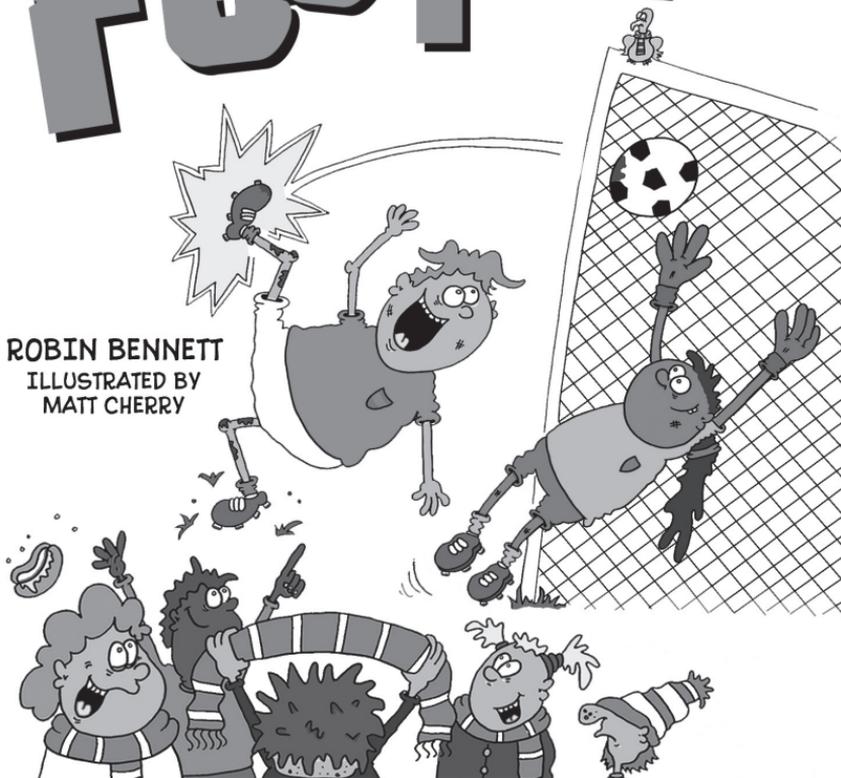
Matt Cherry

Matt grew up on the Kent coast, writing and drawing, where he still lives today with his wife and two children. He still loves to write and draw every day, so he hasn't changed much really. He's just a lot taller.



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First published in 2022
by Firefly Press
25 Gabalfa Road, Llandaff North,
Cardiff, CF14 2JJ
www.fireflypress.co.uk

Text © Robin Bennett 2022

Illustrations © Matt Cherry 2022

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A CIP catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-913102-91-3

This book has been published with the support of the Books Council of Wales.

Design by: Becka Moor
Printed and bound by: CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, Surrey CRO 4YY

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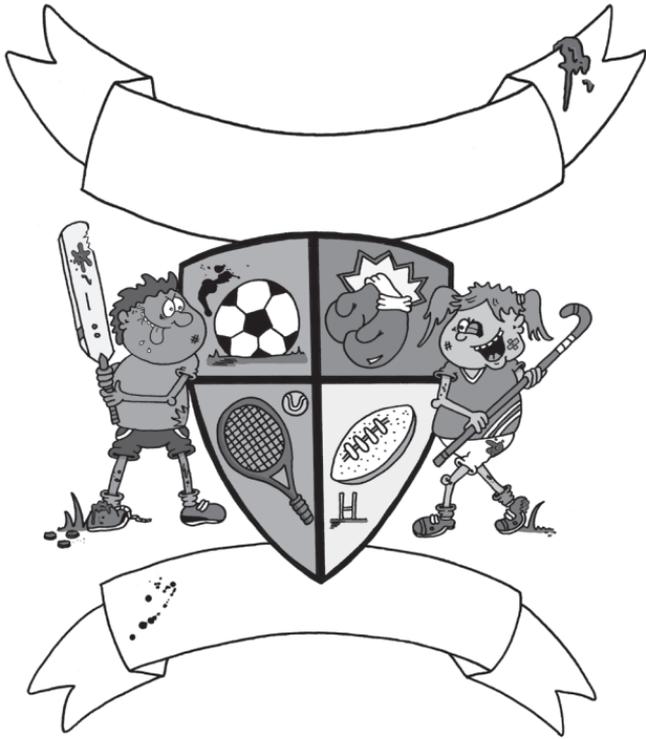
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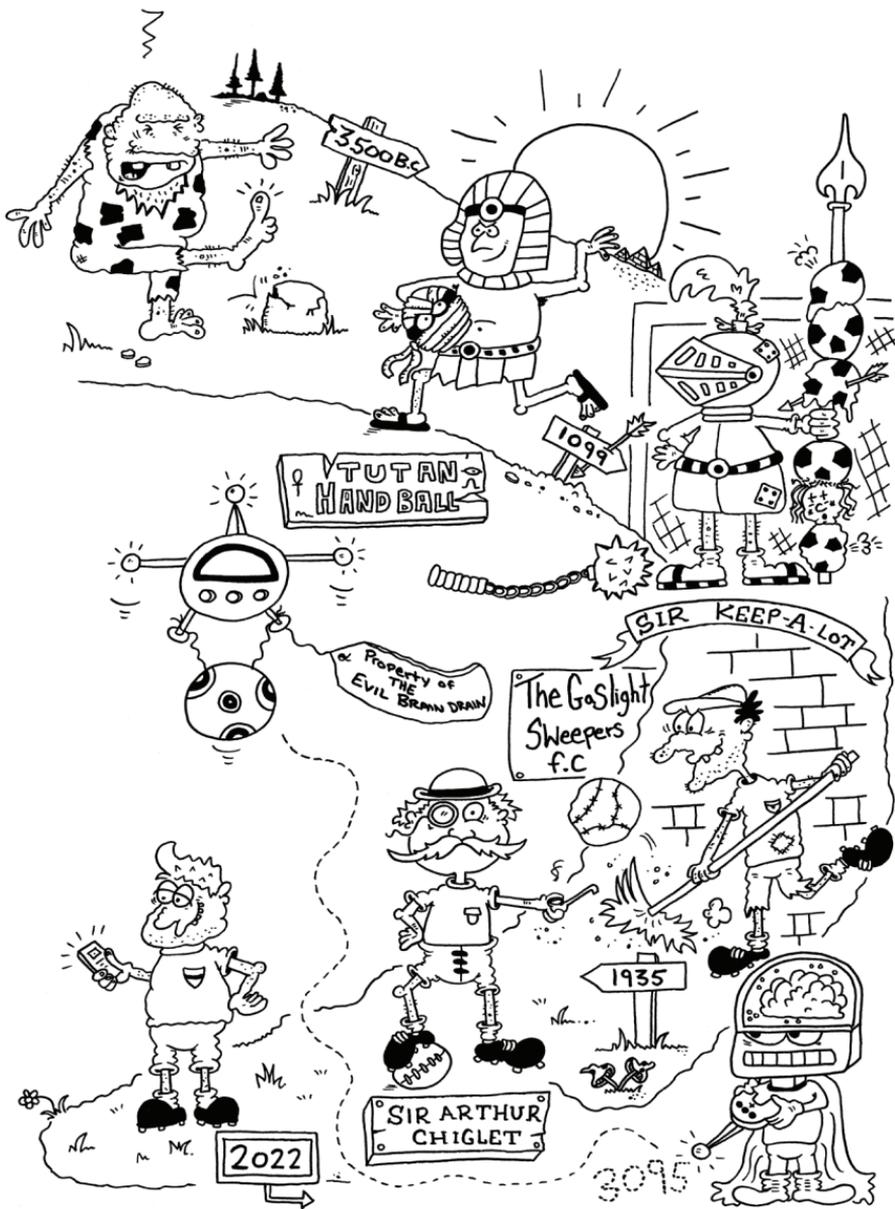
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CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORY OF SOCCER

Football is one of those games that feels like it's been around **forever**.

For example, I think we can safely say that there were a lot of rocks just lying about the place during the Stone Age, hence the name: **The Stone Age**. Owing to the fact that quite a few of them were almost certainly:

- ⚽ a) roundish
 - ⚽ b) getting in the way
 - ⚽ c) small enough to hoof at your little brother,
- it's very possible that football was first tried out by bored Velociraptors or sporty Mastadons.



Having said that, it was first played by actual **Human Beings** in China in a nice civilised way more than 2000 years ago as a game called Cuju. Then it went to ancient Greece and Rome before popping up in England calling itself ‘**foteball**’. By which time it was **not** civilised; matches lasted days, involved hundreds of players, goals nearly three miles apart and so much fighting that it was banned by Edward II in 1304.

However, as a king, people rarely ever listened to Edward and they weren’t about to start now, so football continued to be played in a rough and very violent way until the sixteenth century. It was at this moment in **Stupendous Sports** history that a schoolboy called Richard Mulcaster began to write excited letters home about playing a game ‘with a ball full of wynde’ (pumped up, nothing to do with farts) that had set positions, a referee, coach and rules:

‘not ... shouldring one an other so barbarously ... by the chiefe use of the legges’

meaning: play with your feet, try not to kill your classmates.

This was all, presumably, instead of Master Mulcaster of Eton getting on with his Greek homework, which would definitely have made King Edward (had he still been alive) very angry indeed.



Fast forward a couple of hundred years and it was a combination of British schoolboys and the invention of trains that made the modern game what it is today.

⚽ Schoolboys, because they will do almost anything to avoid doing any actual work – so making up games is always going to be popular.

⚽ And trains, because you need something faster than the school donkey to get you to matches in places with other kids.

Cambridge Rules and Sheffield Rules were the

first form of competitive soccer developed so people from different clubs and schools could be a hundred per cent sure they had all turned up to play the same game.

However, it's important at this point of our story to say that football isn't just amazing because it's really old **but** also because if it wasn't for football, most other team games involving balls wouldn't exist at all! This includes (in no particular order): rugby, Gaelic football, Australian rules football, American football (yup), underwater football, something called **zorkeyball** (if you only have 3 friends) ... and babyfoot, which everybody agrees is brilliant, so it is a sport as far as we at Stupendous Sports are concerned.

COOL QUOTES

'Winning doesn't really matter as long as you win.'

– Vinny Jones (member of Wimbledon FCs infamous 'Crazy-gang' during the 1990s and holder of the fastest ever yellow card record at three seconds into a match)

Nowadays football is easily the most popular sport in the world. According to **FIFA**, there are

Some people think this is a good thing – mainly the very rich and famous football players themselves (and their mums) – other people think it's a very bad thing. The rest of us just think it's a thing and get on with playing the game with our mates and having fun watching it on the telly.

FASCINATING FACTS



Football was **banned** in a lot of countries – officially in Scotland until **1906**.

Football, Association football and **soccer** are different names for the same thing.

Women have been playing Association football almost **as long as men**. However, during the First World War, women's football was possibly **bigger** than the men's game. On Boxing day 1919, Dick Kerr Ladies against St Helens Ladies was watched by a gigantic **53,000** people at Goodison Park, with more than **14,000** more spectators locked outside the stadium. The ladies were **proper celebrities**. And none more so than **Lily Parr**. Almost six feet tall with one of the most powerful kicks in the game – she even **broke a goalie's wrist** once, when they tried to stop her shot at goal.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED

There is evidence that football was played in many parts of the world. In **1586** an English explorer called **John Davis** came across a tribe of Inuits from Greenland playing the game, stopped his ship and joined in.

Great dates

1174 (roughly) First mention (by William FitzStephen) of modern football.

1824 First football club formed in Edinburgh.

1862 The oldest professional football club, Notts County, formed. It still exists today.

1871 The Football Association Challenge Cup (FA Cup) became the first important competition when it was played at the Oval cricket ground.

1872 First International between Scotland and England: 4000 spectators watched a no-score draw.

1885 The British Ladies' Football Club formed. First match watched by over 11,000 spectators.

1888 Penalty kick first introduced: Germany deliriously happy.

1904 FIFA founded by France, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

1908 Football first played in the Olympic Games.

1930 First Men's Football World Cup in Uruguay, won by Uruguay (4-2 against Argentina).

1999 First Women's World Cup in Los Angeles. It had the largest-ever attendance for a women's sporting event in world history. USA beat China 2-1.

SPOTLIGHT ON PLAYERS

MESSI

Captained Argentina, most capped player for his country, winner of seven BALLON D'OR, scorer of over 750 professional goals, FIFA Men's player

of the year ... all round smarty pants basically. I was lucky to see Messi play once in Barcelona. It was a match against REAL MADRID and I was in the perfect position to see Messi score a goal - except from where I was sitting (I was right behind him) he didn't stand a chance - it was an impossible shot. There was literally no way through two defenders and the goalkeeper. But I was wrong: Messi did something with his feet, his hips, his hands ... it was like a magic trick which fooled me and the defenders, before slotting the ball casually into the back of the net. I've never seen anything like it. If that had been me, I would have done a breakdance, followed by cartwheels and somersaults for the next five minutes and phoned my mum, but Messi just gave a slight smile and waved at the fans. All in a days' work.

Messi is not the strongest defender, or the fastest attacker, or the best jumper (he's a bit short, to be fair). But he's arguably the best player in the world today and definitely one of the best to have ever played the game.

WHY?

Well, there's his dribbling ability.

Not the fastest runner without the ball, but there are very few players who are better at dribbling, especially with his 'magic' left foot. He keeps the ball close and moves like lightening ... but most incredibly he makes it look EASY.

PATIENCE

Because of his reputation, other players will stop him getting into the game by swarming about Messi like angry bees as soon as he gets anywhere near the ball. Messi will often seem out of a game for most of it ... then, just when no-one is expecting it, he'll strike.

INTELLIGENCE

Like all the best players, he can see what is happening in a game without looking and sometimes before it happens. Being able to tell where to put a pass or run into space before anyone else is a big advantage.

ACCURACY

One of the reasons he's scored so many goals is not how hard he kicks the ball but how it is nearly always **ON TARGET**. Unlike most of us, you very rarely see him hoof it half a mile over the goal or so wide of the posts it hits a cameraman in the face.

A lot of people's favourite player, including David Beckham.