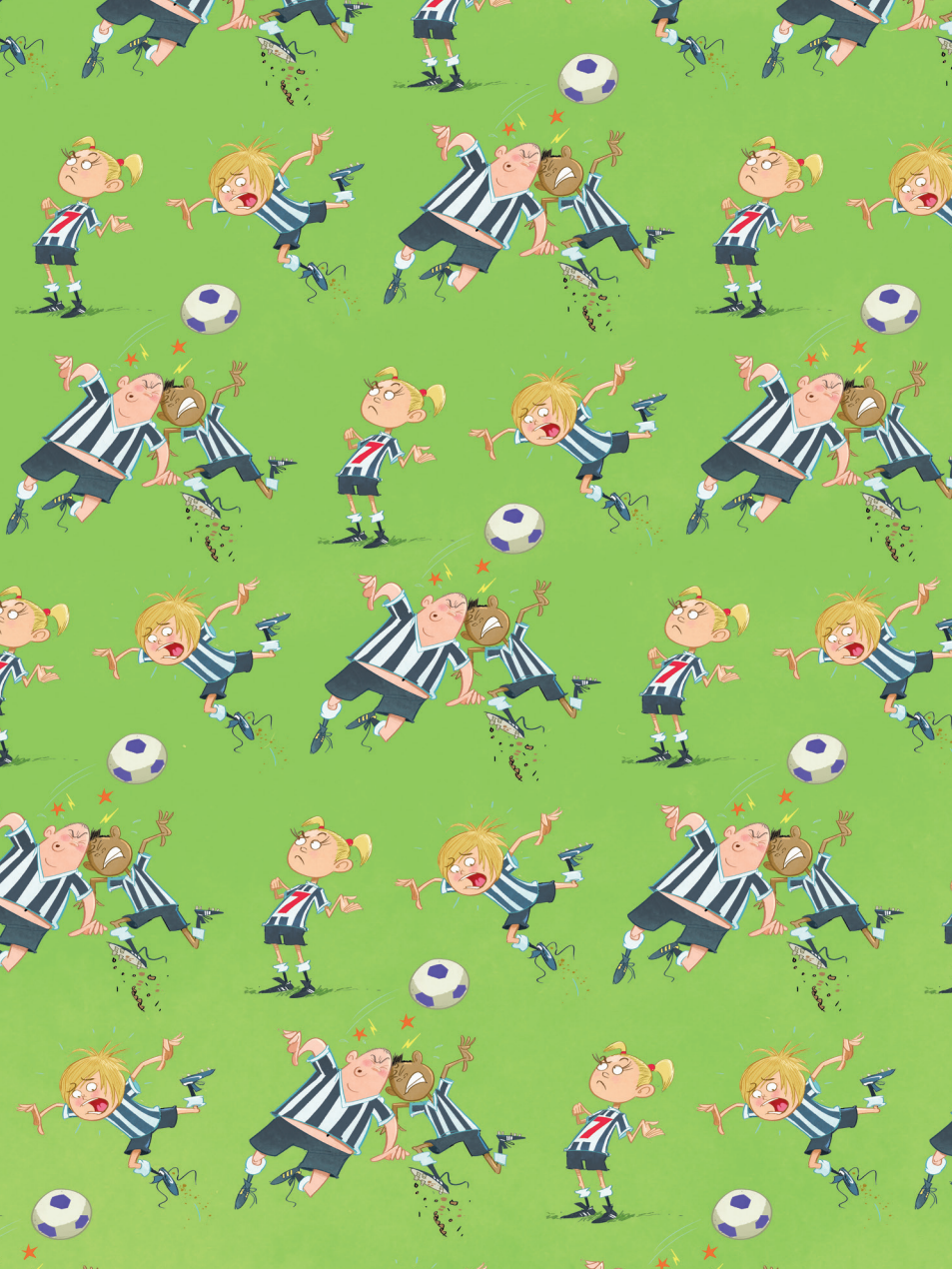




For my son, *Stan of the Saints*.

Proud of you pal ...



THE UNLUCKY ELEVEN

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Barrington Stoke

First published in 2019 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-850-3

Printed in Malaysia by Times Offset

This book is super readable for young readers beginning their independent reading journey.

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CHAPTER 1
WHAT A CLOD!

As the ball left Stanley's boot, the world stood still.

The grass stopped growing, the crowd stopped yelling, a small dog froze with its leg cocked against the goalpost.

This was the moment Stanley and his team had been waiting for. The moment when they would score at last. But just as the ball was about to find the corner of the net, it hit an enormous clod of earth and span at a right angle, away from the goal and out for a throw-in.

The world came alive again. Even the dog showed its disgust by breaking wind.

Stanley fell to his knees, not caring that they happened to land in the muddiest of puddles.



"Noooooooo!" he cried.

They were, without doubt, the unluckiest eleven in the whole league. Their team name was the Saints, but right now they felt like a bunch of losers.

*

It had been the same all winter.



There'd been injuries and illnesses, terrible linesman decisions, games that had been rained off when they were in the lead, plus a traffic jam that made them miss kick-off and see the game awarded to the worst team in the league.

Stanley's rotten luck today summed up the whole season. The score at the final whistle felt like a slap across the face with a soggy stinking fish.





They had lost 1–0.

Their eleventh defeat of the season. Eleven more than last year.

The Saints were devastated. And no amount of Jaffa Cakes or hot chocolate could cheer them up.