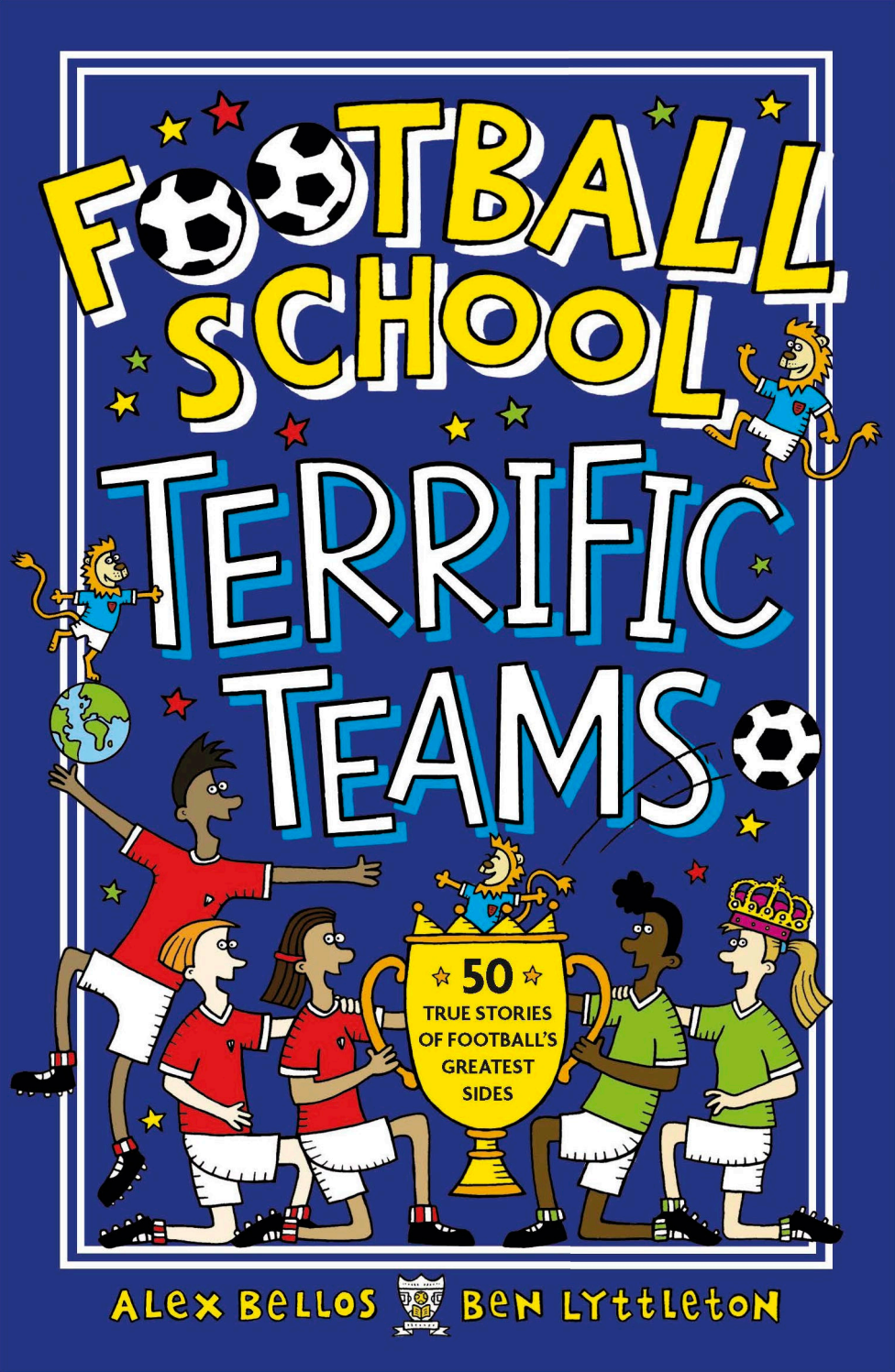
FOOTBALL SCHOOL

TERRIFIC TEAMS



ALEX BELLOS BEN LYTTLETON

To infinity! – A.B.
To ABBC, with love – B.L.
For David & Veronica – S.G.

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FOOTBALL SCHOOL TERRIFIC TEAMS



ALEX BELLOS & BEN LYTTLETON

Illustrated by Spike Gerrell

Welcome to Football School Terrific Teams.

We're terrifically pleased to meet you! I'm Alex.

And I'm Ben. Welcome to the team!

Let's huddle in as we explain our tactics.

In this book, you will be reading about 50 fabulous football sides, including amateur clubs, Premier League giants and World Cup winners.

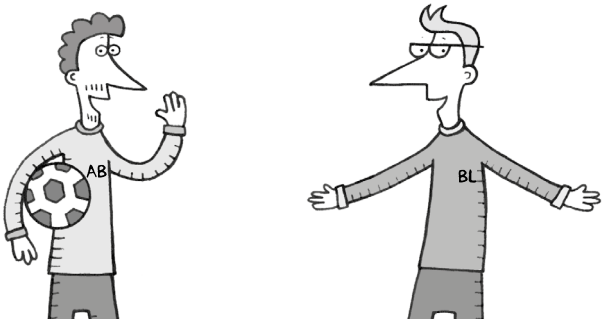
We've chosen men's and women's teams who have written football history ...

... with towering tallies of tremendous trophies.

And teams whose innovations have changed the game we love.

We have inspiring stories of underdogs who achieved the impossible.

And stories of real dogs and ghost dogs too. Have we got tails for you!



You will recognize some of the biggest names in club football, like Manchester United, Arsenal and Real Madrid.

And some of the best national sides, like Brazil, Germany and France.

We have also chosen lesser-known, but no less extraordinary, line-ups from history, and from across the world.

Join us as we travel from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, from Suffolk to South Africa, and from Orkney to Australia.

We're lucky to have illustrator Spike on our team. He's our MVP (Most Valuable Painter).

He has drawn hilarious images inspired by the crests of each team.

The crest, or badge, is the proudest symbol of what a club or national side stands for. It's what you kiss when you score!

You don't need to kiss this book. Only Alex's mum does that!

Come on, team, let's be serious! Together we can do this.

Remember, there is no I in TEAM.

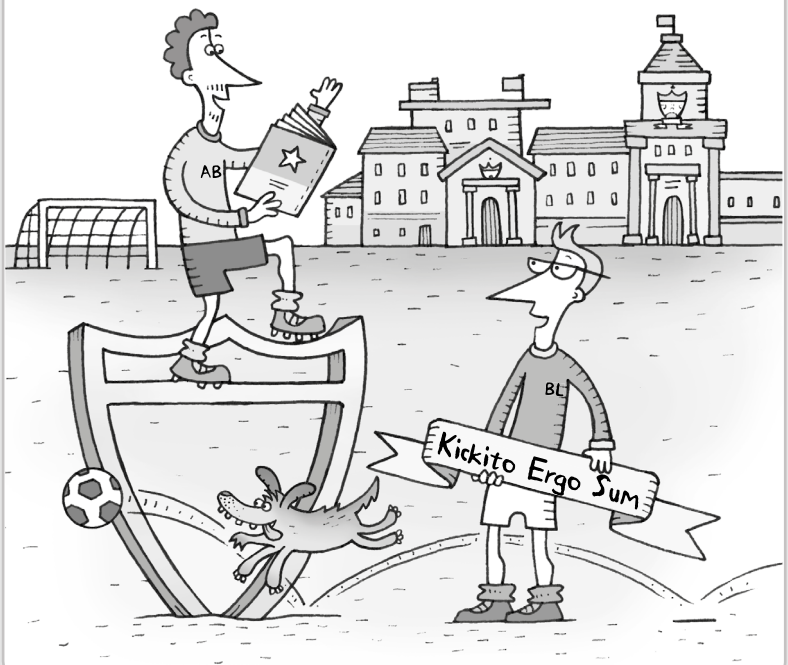
But there is an oo in Football School!



FOOTBALL SCHOOL

Best of the crest:

The Football School motto is a play on words, in which the English word "kick" is placed in the Latin phrase *cogito ergo sum*, or "I think therefore I am", to mean "I kick, therefore I am".



Mascot:

Ben's dog, Buddy

Home kit:

Pencil, paper, computer

Stadium:

Rotates between bookshops

The team that plays it by the book!

Before we start, we want to introduce you to the most terrific team in the world: Football School! This team features Alex and Ben, but also illustrator Spike, editor Daisy, assistant Maryam, designer Laurelie and, last but not least, you, the reader!

Alex and Ben write their books very much like they play football together. Alex kicks the ball to Ben, who kicks it back to Alex, who kicks it back to Ben, and so on. With books, Alex and Ben are always bouncing ideas back and forth. It is always easier – and more fun! – to get inspiration when you are doing it with a friend.

Once we agree on a subject, we research and write. Alex writes something. Ben writes something. We pass the stories between each other for feedback and comments. There is so much one-two-ing that when the stories are finished you can't tell which started as an Alex story or a Ben story. They have all become Football School stories!

Once the text is done, we show it to Spike. He is an artist of the ball, blessed with amazing technique, sublime creative skills and an enviably large bag of coloured pens. Spike can place a ball in a net with pinpoint accuracy – especially if he is drawing it!

The full list of people involved in making this book a success is a long one, including printers, lorry drivers, salespeople, booksellers – and, of course, readers. It may say Alex and Ben on the cover, but this book is a team effort. We are nothing without our terrific team!



HOME BOYS

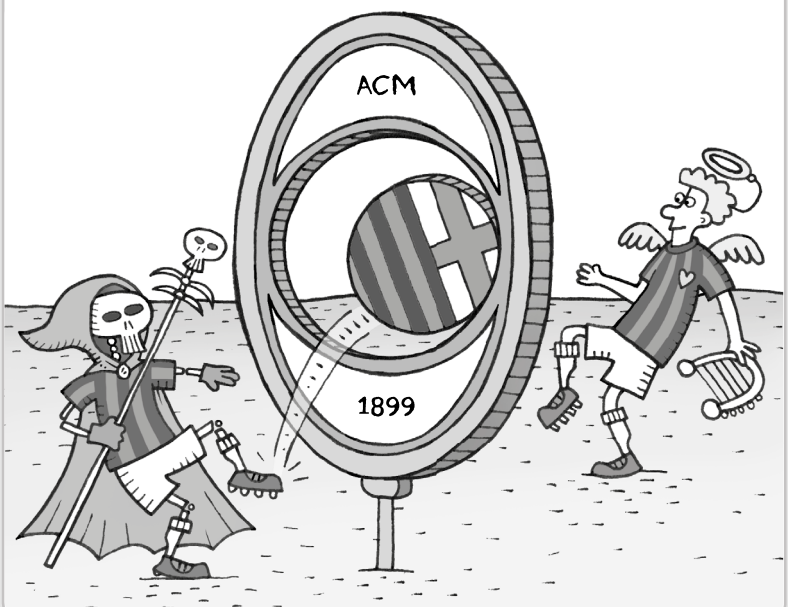
Alex and Ben used to live five minutes away from each other. When Ben recently moved house, he made sure his new house was still near to Alex. Now that's a close friendship!

AC MILAN

Nickname: *I Rossoneri* (The Red and Blacks)

Best of the crest:

The central circle is divided into two. On the left: red and black stripes. The red represents the players' passion and the black their opponents' fear. On the right: the city of Milan flag, a red cross on white.



Mascot:

Milanello the red devil

Home kit:

Red and black striped shirt, white shorts, white socks

Stadium:

San Siro, Milan, cap. 80,000

European giants with an important legacy

AC Milan are Italy's most successful team in European football. They have won the Champions League – or its predecessor, the European Cup – seven times. Only one team, Real Madrid, has won it more. But the influence of the Rossoneri extends far beyond their trophy cabinet. You red (and black) it here first!

When we see players today pressing opponents close to their own goal, defenders starting high up the pitch and using offside traps, this is all down to the influence of AC Milan. Or more precisely, to one man: Arrigo Sacchi. A tactically brilliant coach, he led AC Milan to successive European Cups in 1989 (which included a 6–1 win over Real Madrid) and 1990.

Sacchi was initially mocked when he was appointed, because he had never played the game professionally, unlike most managers at that time. "I never realized that to be a jockey you had to be a horse first," he replied. Sacchi developed his pioneering tactics after years watching and learning about football, showing that brilliant coaches need not have been top players. "He completely changed how we think about football," said Jürgen Klopp, another great coach who was not a great footballer.

Milan's last European title came in 2007. These days, they are back on the hunt for the top trophies again, inspired by the goals of Franck Kessié and Zlatan Ibrahimović. The Red and Blacks are red and back!



GIGI IN A HURRY

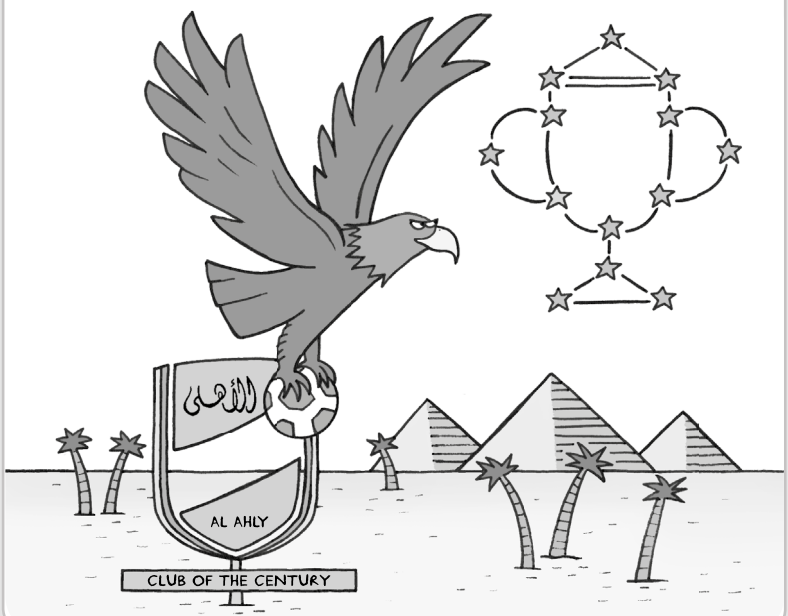
Goalkeeper Gigi Donnarumma was sixteen when he first played for AC Milan in 2015 and seventeen on his Italy debut. He captained AC Milan for the first time aged twenty-one, playing his two-hundredth game.

AL AHLY

Nickname: The Red Devils

Best of the crest:

The eagle has been a symbol of Egypt since the time of the pyramids. The thirteen stars represent nine African Champions League titles, and 40 Egyptian league titles (one star for every ten league titles).



Legend:

Mahmoud El Khatib, striker, won 10 league titles

Home kit:

Red shirt, white shorts, red socks

Stadium:

Al Salam, Cairo, cap. 30,000

Top Egyptian club overcomes tragedy to win African title

When it comes to trophies, Egyptian side Al Ahly are arguably the most successful in the world, having notched up more league titles, cup titles and continental titles than any other major club. Few clubs, however, have experienced tragedy on the scale that they have. In 2012, rival fans attacked Al Ahly fans during an Egyptian league game, causing a riot that left 72 Al Ahly fans dead. It was the greatest disaster in Egyptian football history. Yet it led to the most improbable – and treasured – of all Al Ahly's victories.

Al Ahly are based in Cairo, the capital of Egypt, and are the oldest football club in the country. They have dominated the national league since it began in 1948: there have been 61 seasons so far, and Al Ahly have won 42 of them!

In February 2012, Al Ahly travelled to play Al Masry, a team from Port Said, in a league game. After the match, Al Masry fans ran onto the pitch and attacked Al Ahly players and the visiting fans with bottles, stones and fireworks. It is thought that the violence had little to do with football rivalry, but instead was orchestrated by the Egyptian government as revenge for the involvement of Al Ahly fans in anti-government protests the year before. During the riot, the teams' players fled to the changing room. Fans were crushed in a stampede as they tried to escape the stadium. One fan died in the arms of Al Ahly captain Mohamed Aboutrika.



NATIONAL HEROES

Al Ahly, which means "The National" in Arabic, had their best season in 2005, winning the Egyptian league, Cup, Super Cup, and African Champions League in an unbeaten 46-game run. Unstoppable!

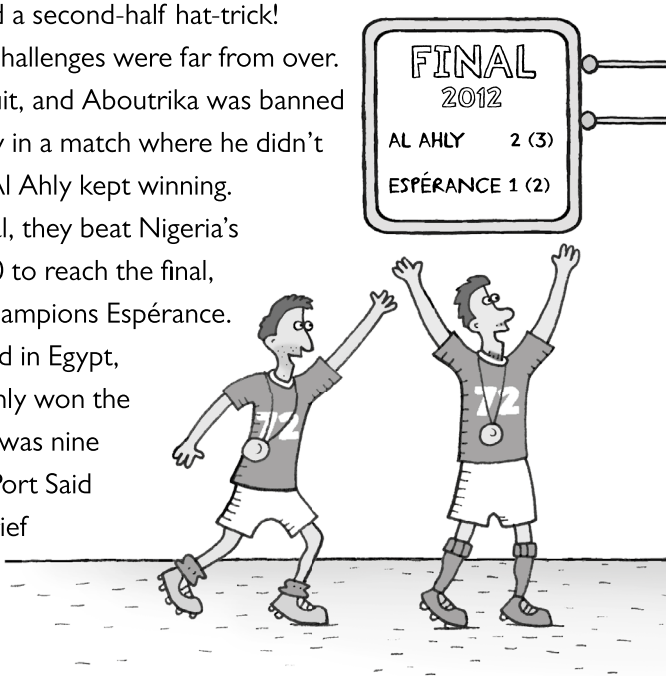
As a result of the tragedy, Egyptian league matches were cancelled. But Al Ahly were also playing in the African Champions League, and they vowed to carry on in the competition. With the trauma and sadness of the tragedy still so fresh, no one expected Al Ahly to be at their best; but the team were desperate to pay tribute to those who had lost their lives.

In the second round, they travelled to Mali and lost 1–0 to Stade Malien. Here again they faced violent scenes, although this time away from the pitch. Straight after the game, a military coup took place – this is when the army seizes power from the government – and there was vicious fighting in the streets. The players were stuck in their hotel for a week as they waited for the chance to get to an airport safely to fly home.

In the second leg against Stade Malien, at home in Cairo, Al Ahly quickly went behind. At half-time, Aboutrika came on. He scored twice to equalize, and then, with two minutes left to play, he volleyed home a glorious winner to send Al Ahly through. The captain had scored a second-half hat-trick!

But the club's challenges were far from over. Al Ahly's coach quit, and Aboutrika was banned for refusing to play in a match where he didn't feel safe. Yet still Al Ahly kept winning.

In the semi-final, they beat Nigeria's Sunshine Stars 1–0 to reach the final, against Tunisian champions Espérance. The first leg, played in Egypt, finished 1–1. Al Ahly won the second leg 2–1. It was nine months after the Port Said tragedy and the grief was still raw.

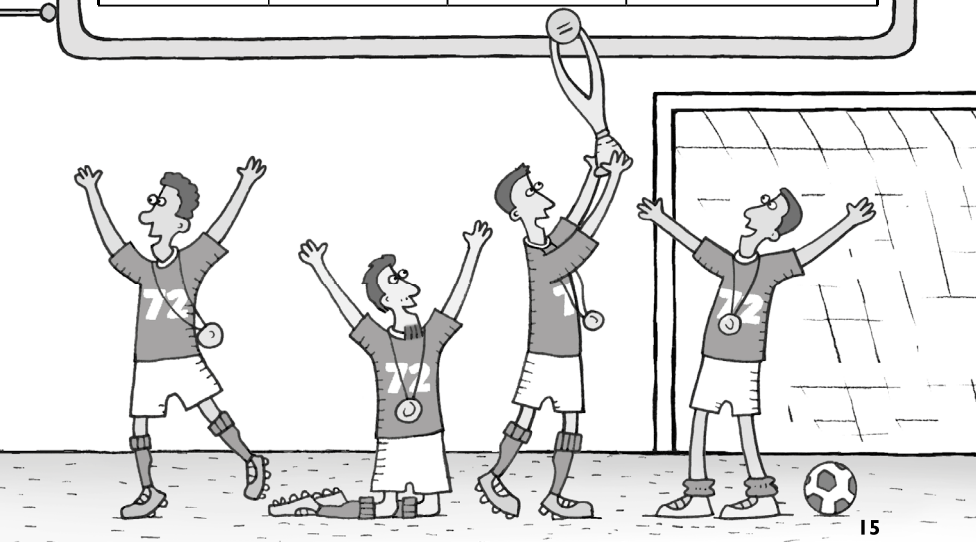


Players celebrated wearing shirts with the number 72 on the front, referring to the number of fans who died.

Aboutrika lifted the trophy with a mixture of joy, sadness and pride: joy at their victory, sadness at the lives so tragically lost and immense pride that his team had fulfilled their pledge to honour those lives against all odds.

MOST SUCCESSFUL TEAMS IN THE AFRICAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

TEAM	COUNTRY	TITLES	MOST RECENT TITLE
Al Ahly	Egypt	9	2020
Zamalek	Egypt	5	2002
TP Mazembe	DR Congo	5	2015
Espérance ST	Tunisia	4	2019
Hafia FC	Guinea	3	1977
Raja CA	Morocco	3	1999
Canon Yaoundé	Cameroon	3	1980

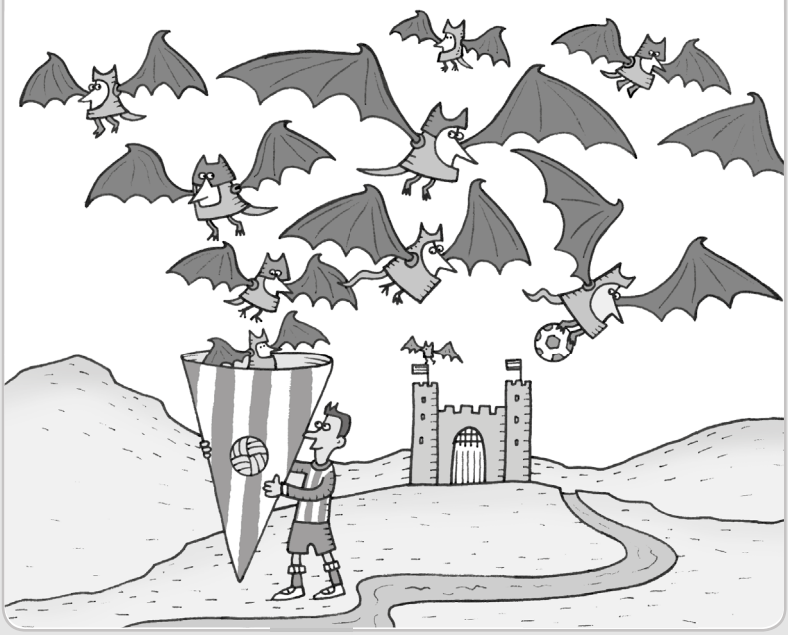


ALCOYANO

Nickname: Deportivo

Best of the crest:

The bat is a traditional symbol of the Valencian region in Spain, where the town of Alcoy is located. Bats are meant to bring good luck because one is said to have landed on the flag of James I before he conquered Valencia in 1238.



Mascot:

TiVo the bat

Home kit:

Blue and white striped shirt, blue shorts, blue socks

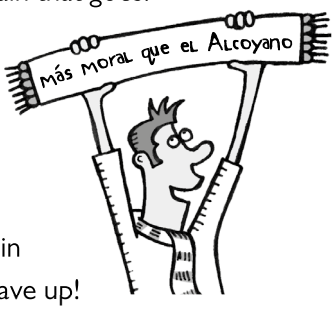
Stadium:

El Collao, Alcoy, cap. 5,000

Spirited underdogs who never give up

Alcoyano are a semi-professional team from the east of Spain, and are not used to winning big games. In 2021 they caused one of the biggest shocks in Spanish football history when they knocked Real Madrid out of the Spanish Cup. The victory fulfilled the words of an old legend.

There is a well-known phrase used in Spain that goes: *más moral que el Alcoyano*. It translates as "more spirit than Alcoyano" and is used to describe those who have a confidence in winning even if they clearly have no hope. People think it dates back to the 1940s, the last time Alcoyano played in the Spanish first division. That team never gave up!



One story has them begging the referee for a few more minutes at the end of a match against Espanyol because they thought they could win – even though they were 7–1 down at the time. Another story claims that when they were losing 13–0, they still felt they could win. That's the Alcoyano spirit!

In 2021, in the Spanish Cup third round, Alcoyano faced Real Madrid, a team packed with international superstars, which cost billions to put together. Alcoyano came from behind to win 2–1. Alcoyano coach Vicente Parras was so proud of his players. "You want to know what *más moral que el Alcoyano* is?" he said after the game. "It's this."



PANDEMIC PAIN

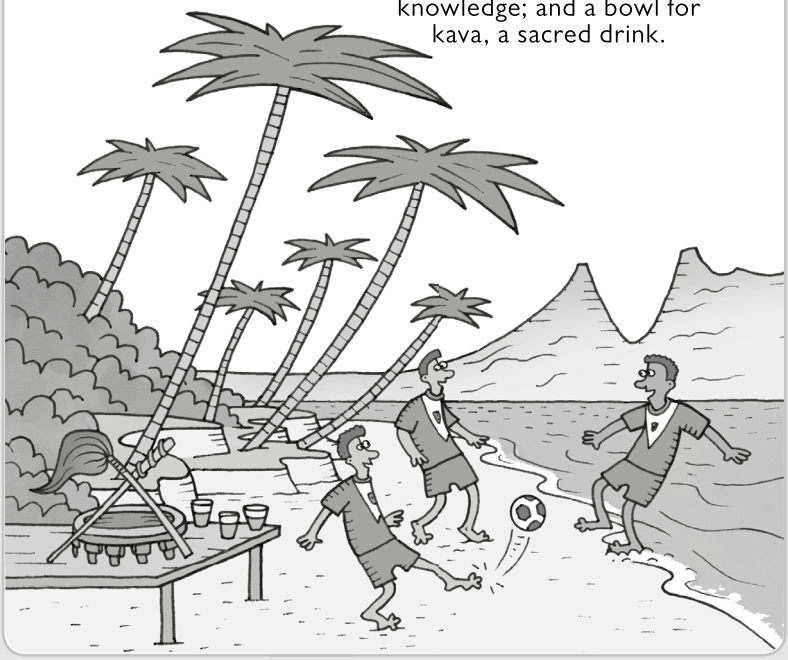
When Alcoyano beat Real Madrid, the town was struggling with the highest coronavirus infection rate in Spain. This was the positive result everyone needed!

AMERICAN SAMOA

Nickname: The Boys from the Territory

Best of the crest:

The crest features the three objects on the table, each of which represents an aspect of Samoan culture: a staff used by the islands' chiefs; the mop-like fue, a symbol of knowledge; and a bowl for kava, a sacred drink.



World Cup record:

Never qualified

Home kit:

Blue and white shirt, blue shorts, blue socks

Stadium:

Pago Park, Pago Pago, cap. 2,000

Dignified in defeat, islanders are the pride of the Pacific

Not all terrific teams win trophies – or even matches. Sometimes losing with your head held high makes a team terrific. And when it comes to terrific losses, no one has lost more terrifically than American Samoa.

This tiny nation is made up of six volcanic islands in the southern Pacific Ocean, and is not to be confused with Samoa, another group of islands about 50 miles away. Samoa is an independent nation, but American Samoa is governed by the US. The two Samoas have many cultural links, but they have many differences too, such as separate currencies and they drive on different sides of the road.

American Samoa's national football team became known across the world when they lost their first ever World Cup qualifier by a world-record margin, and then responded with astonishing dignity. The grim score in their historic defeat against Australia was 31–0!

American Samoa were the lowest-placed team in the FIFA rankings when the match was played in 2001. The odds were stacked against them before kick-off. FIFA had ordered that all players must have American passports to travel to the game in Australia, which took place in a stadium near Brisbane. Nineteen players only had Samoan passports, so were not able to play. Many players from the Under-20 team were ruled out because school exams were taking place at the same time.

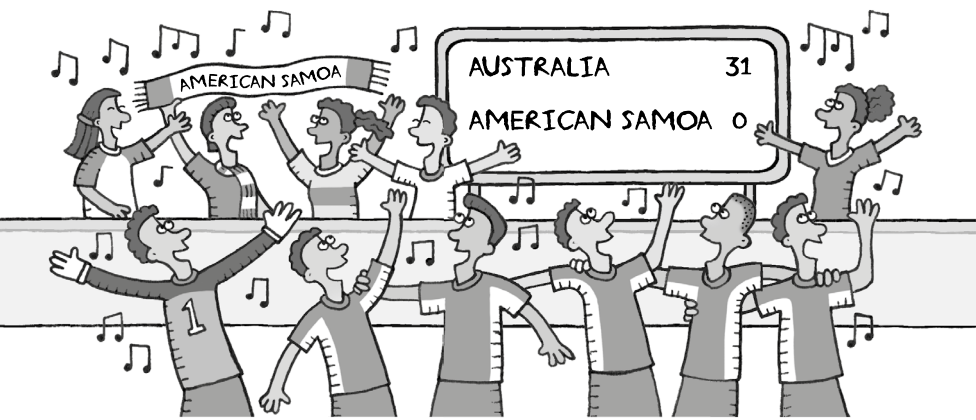


YOU'RE WELCOME!

The population of American Samoa is 55,000. The area produces more NFL players and US servicemen, per head, than any other US territory.

The American Samoa coach cobbled together a group that included three fifteen-year-olds and had an average age of eighteen. Goalkeeper Nicky Salapu was the only first-team player able to make the game – and it was just as well he did!

They were up against an experienced Australia team that included several players from the Premier League. Salapu made a series of impressive saves to keep it goalless after ten minutes. After Con Boutsianis opened the scoring, the deluge began; by half-time it was 16–0; another fifteen goals followed in the second half. Australia striker Archie Thompson ended up scoring a record thirteen goals in the game. American Samoa had only one shot at goal, when they were already 29 goals down. It was saved.



But when the final whistle blew, one team was definitely happiest. They embraced each other and sang with the fans. Can you guess which team it was? American Samoa! They were pleased they had kept the score down, given the players they had, and were grateful to their man-of-the-match, Salapu, who had made over 20 important saves.

But the game haunted him. Fans often reminded him of it and bullies teased his son about the scoreline. Salapu replayed

the fixture on the FIFA video game, playing as American Samoa and his son as Australia. To try to get over the defeat, he froze his son's controller (with his permission!) and did not stop playing until American Samoa were winning 50–0.

The impact of the match was long-lasting: FIFA changed their qualifying system so that weaker teams like American Samoa played against opposition of a similar standard in preliminary rounds, to allow them more competitive matches. It meant American Samoa were able to slowly improve and move up the FIFA rankings.

Ten years later, Salapu finally put the loss behind him, when he was part of the American Samoa team that won their first ever match. After a run of 30 successive defeats, American Samoa beat Tonga 2–1 in a World Cup qualifier. Salapu, the only survivor of the 31–0 loss to play, cried tears of joy. He declared, "I'm going to put the past behind me . . . I'm a free man!" After a long, long wait, American Samoa had won at last.



TERRIFIC TROUNCINGS

These famous games were won by huge margins:

SCORE	COMPETITION	COMMENTS
Arbroath 36 Bon Accord 0	First round of the 1885 Scottish Cup	Largest margin in an honest game of professional football.
AS Adema 149 SO L'Emyrne 0	Madagascan League 2002	Highest score in professional football, but it was a thrown game, in which all the goals were own goals scored in protest.
Hungary 10 El Salvador 1	Group stage of 1982 World Cup	Largest margin in a World Cup match. Even so, Hungary failed to progress beyond the group stage!
USA 13 Thailand 0	Group stage of 2019 Women's World Cup	Largest margin in a Women's World Cup match. USA won the tournament.

ABOUT YOUR COACHES

Alex Bellos writes for the *Guardian*. He has written several bestselling popular science books and created two mathematical colouring books. He loves puzzles.





Ben Lyttleton is a journalist, broadcaster and football consultant. He has written books about how to score the perfect penalty and what we can learn from football's best managers.

Spike Gerrell grew up loving both playing football and drawing pictures. He now gets to draw for a living. At heart, though, he will always be a central midfielder.



BE WOWED BY 50 TRUE STORIES OF THE TOP TEAMS IN FOOTBALL

Discover the clubs and national teams whose trophies and triumphs have made history. Read about pirates, devils and real-life miracles – and don't forget to count the lions!



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