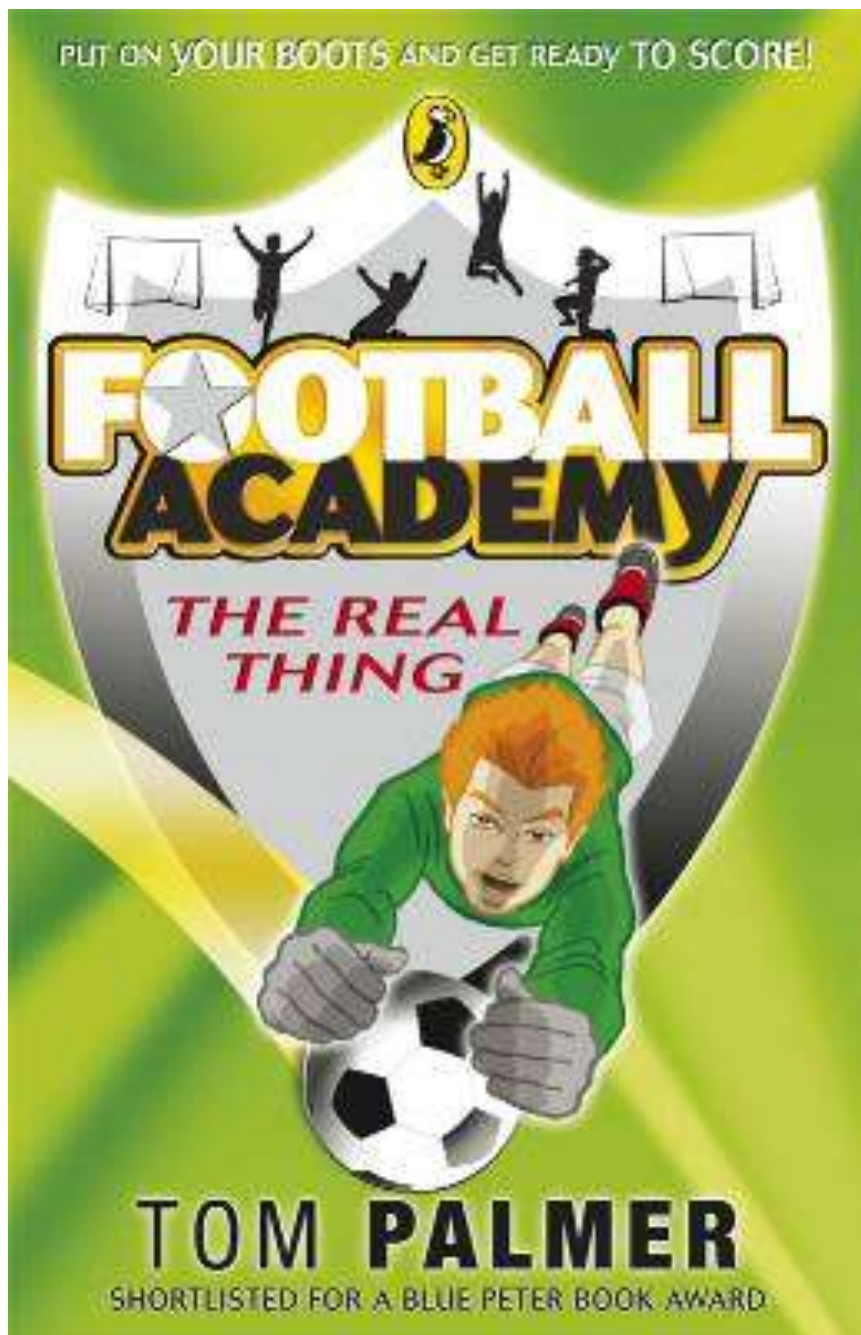


TOM PALMER

FOOTBALL ACADEMY 3 : THE REAL THING



**Put on your boots and
get ready to score!**



The Real Thing

'What is *that*?'

Ryan was standing in the doorway of the dressing room, his bag over his shoulder. His friend, Ben, was standing next to him. Although Ryan was talking to Tomasz, United's goalkeeper, he really wanted the whole room to hear.

'A football shirt,' Tomasz said in a quiet, but firm voice.

Eight other boys watched and listened, each of them sat on one of the benches around the edge of the dressing room. Most of them were still in their normal clothes.

'No, *this* is a football shirt,' Ryan said, pulling his jumper off, displaying the latest Real Madrid top. It was white with purple trim.

Tomasz's top was white with black trim. The club badge read Legia Warsaw. It was the team he had always supported. And now it was the team he missed, since he had moved to England with his parents over a year ago.

'Nice top,' Ben said, looking Ryan up and down.

'And who are Legia Warsaw?' Ryan said, ignoring his friend.

'My team,' Tomasz said calmly.

'Never heard of them,' Ryan said. 'Are they Polish by any chance?'

A couple of the boys sitting down laughed.

James - one of the team's central defenders - had been listening to the conversation from the corner of the dressing room. He stood up and walked towards Ryan and Ben. He was the team's steadiest influence. He was also the son of a former England international.

'Leave it,' James said.

Ben stepped back. He always did what James said. Even more than he did what Ryan said.

Ryan was about to say something to James, but Steve, the team manager came in. Whatever it was he had to say would have to wait.

'Right lads,' Steve said.

Steve had been the manager of United's under-twelves for three years. The team he coached were all on schoolboy contracts at United's famous academy, a huge complex of buildings and football pitches on the outskirts of the town. The team included some of the best young English players of their age group. Some were from that town, others from the rest of the UK. The cream of them - those who worked hard - would become professional footballers one day.

Tomasz sat back, relieved. He'd been saved from another load of hassle by Ryan. Ryan: team captain. Ryan: team bully. He could think about the game now.

Today United were playing Rangers at home. A friendly against another Premiership under-twelve side.

Steve went on: 'This lot are a good team. They've won every game they've played this season. They pass the ball around really nicely.' Steve looked at Ryan. 'A bit like your precious Real Madrid.'

Ryan grinned.

Steve was famous for his deep voice. If you heard it coming across a football pitch, you listened to it. And if he was doing a team talk you took in every word - and did lots of nodding.

'So what we need today is teamwork,' Steve went on. 'If anyone's playing at 50% today we'll be exposed. But as long as we play *together* as a team and look after each other, we'll be all right.'

The boys nodded and started to get changed.

This season they'd played six games, winning four and losing two. A good start.

But Rangers at home was going to be the hardest game yet.

In the first two books of Football Academy, Tomasz Bobik gets a lot of trouble from the team captain, Ryan Flynn.

Mainly because he is Polish and Ryan uses that to bully him.

But the Ryan-Tomasz trouble takes an unexpected twist, when United's under twelve's are invited to play in an international tournament against Real Madrid and AC Milan. In Poland!

Then, when Ryan is watching his team mates being bullied for being English, he sees Tomasz come to the rescue, and he is forced to change his ways.

Read on...

Follow Tomasz's footballing adventures and live the dream in *The Real Thing* by Tom Palmer available at bookshops and libraries.

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