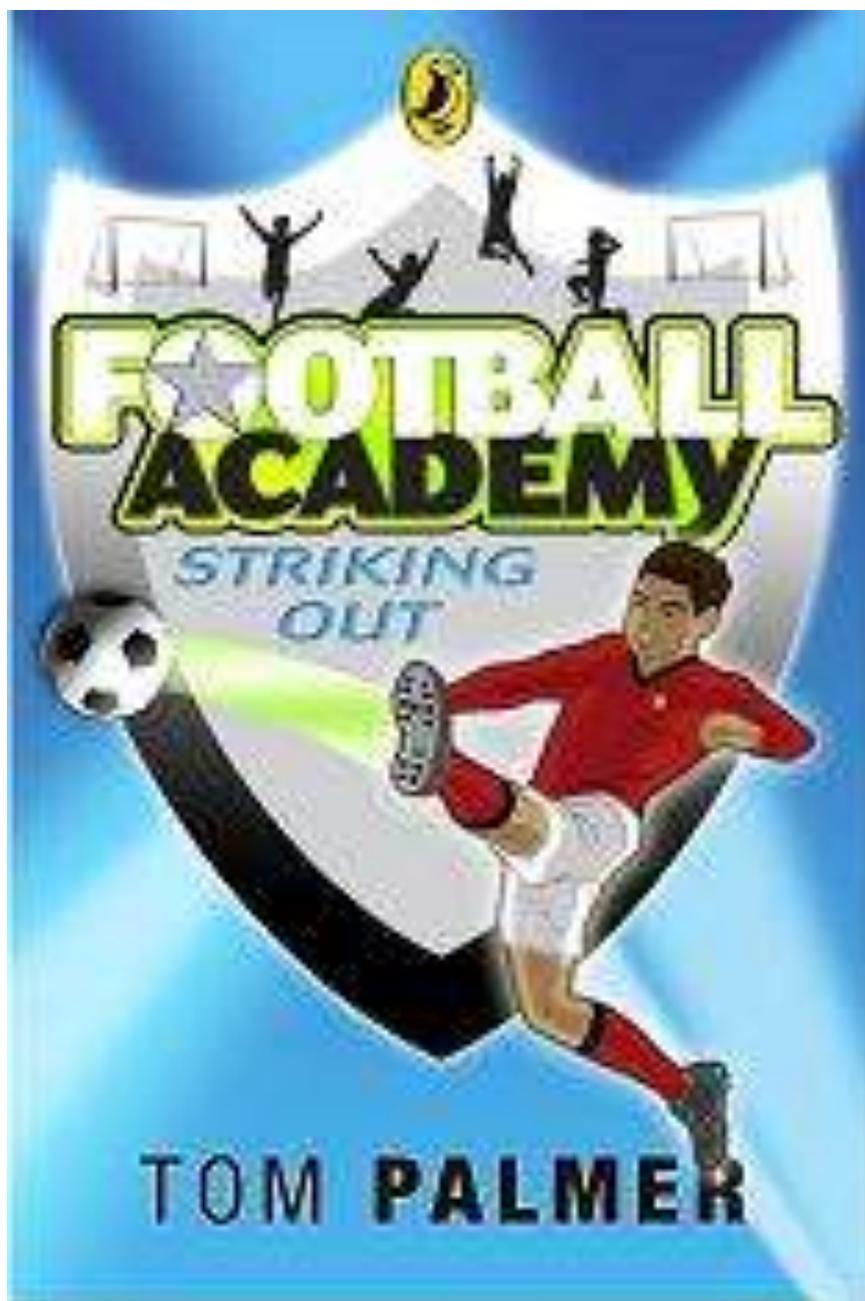


TOM PALMER

FOOTBALL ACADEMY 2 : STRIKING OUT



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



Leading Scorer

Yunis trapped the ball with his left foot and looked up. He had a second to decide: play the ball back to Jake, or try to chip the keeper and half of his defence.

He'd been practicing chipping at home in the garden. But only when his dad was out. If he got the right back spin on the ball, he could send it over the washing line, onto the roof of his dad's shed and have it bounce back to his feet.

Now was his chance to try it out for real.

Before the first defender reached him, he caught the underside of the ball hard with the top of his boot. It lofted high, then plunged downwards at speed, beating everyone. The net shook as the ball nestled at the back of the goal.

The keeper hadn't bothered moving. There was nothing he could have done. Yunis had scored his best goal yet. His third in this game. A second hat trick for United.

Jake was the first over to him, jumping on his back. Then Chi and James ran up from defence. Arms clasped his shoulder. Hands rubbed the top of his head. Even Craig came over and slapped his back, which surprised Yunis.

Craig was one player he'd not really got to know yet. He was quiet and didn't really mix with the others. Except he wasn't quiet on the pitch. On the pitch you couldn't miss him - sometimes he overdid it with his hard tackles.

Everyone was speaking to Yunis at once.

'Brilliant!'

'Awesome.'

'Fantastic goal.'

Yunis came out from under the scrum of his team mates. He looked at the players' parents standing in a long row on the touch line. All of them were applauding him. Even the parents of the Wigan players.

This was United under-twelve's fourth game of the season.

The season had started badly with two defeats. There were three new players in the team and it had taken time for them to get used to each other. Yunis was one of those new players. Along with Jake and Will. This was their first season playing for a Premiership club academy and it had taken a few games for things to gel.

But in the third game United had gone to Everton and won 4-0. And now they were coasting it at home to Wigan.

It was 5-1. And Yunis' goal total for the season was xxxxxxxx.

He couldn't believe this was happening to him.

The first thing he did every time he got to the Academy on a Sunday was check the team sheet, pinned on the wall. And every time he read it, there was his name: Yunis Khan. Wearing the number nine shirt.

But, even with all these good things happening, deep down, Yunis wasn't completely happy. Because when he'd looked at the row of parents, all clapping and cheering him, there was one set of parents missing.

His.

It was always the same: Yunis' mum and dad never came to watch him play. But it was his dad he wanted there. He knew his mum didn't come because she wouldn't want to annoy her husband.

But that wasn't going to stop him.

If anything, the more upset it made him feel, the better he played.

Five minutes later, Yunis saw Jake pick the ball up wide on the half way line. He knew what would happen next. They'd practiced this - and talked about it. So he jogged towards the other wing, keeping level with the last defender, thirty yards out.

Jake tapped the ball to Chi, who turned and fed the ball down the touchline. Jake was onto it like a flash. The perfect one-two. Three touches, at pace, and Jake was level with the eighteen-yard box.

Then suddenly Yunis sprinted towards the far post, losing his marker easily.

Jake looked up and crossed the ball, curling it onto Yunis' head.

Yunis directed it down to his right.

Goal.

6-1.

The Wigan keeper on the ground again.

And all the United parents cheering and clapping.

Yunis can't believe that he's United leading scorer. It should be the happiest time of his life, but his father wants him to give up football and work hard at school. Can Yunis convince his dad that he can do both, or will he have to hang up his boots forever?

Read on...

Follow Yunis's footballing adventures and live the dream in *Striking Out* by Tom Palmer available at bookshops and libraries.

ISBN 9780141324685

www.tompalmer.co.uk

