



GOAL!: The Dream Begins

By Robert Rigby

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While growing up on the tough streets of Los Angeles, Santiago's greatest joy is playing soccer. So it is a dream come true when a British scout sees him playing in the park and offers him a trial with one of England's top Premiership clubs. Determined to succeed, Santiago leaves behind his struggling family and his modest home, and flies halfway around the world to give it his best shot.

But it's not smooth sailing when Santiago arrives in northern England. Team practices are intense, and in this place where people live and breathe the sport, many seem eager to find fault with the new Latino player from L.A. The pressure even spurs Santiago to keep a secret that could sabotage his performance. There is no doubt that Santiago has skill, flair, and dedication. But does he have the stamina he will need for the English game?

Based on the action-packed movie, *Goal!* is a gripping tale of trial and tribulation set against the backdrop of the world's most popular and exciting sport.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

ROBERT RIGBY is a playwright, novelist, and television scriptwriter. His award-winning work with youth theater companies has been staged in Britain, Europe, the United States, and Africa. He is also the writer of the long-running BBC children's drama series *Byker Grove*.

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Life was better now. Santiago eased his lean, toned body back on the pool lounge and gazed out over the shimmering, clear water.

He adjusted his aviator glasses slightly as the afternoon sunshine beat down from a clear blue sky. Even the crucifix around his neck was hot against his brown skin.

All around was luxury—sheer Southern California luxury. Palm trees swayed slightly in the warm, gentle breeze and water sprinklers played on manicured lawns, forming minirainbows as the sunlight caught the droplets. Beyond the pool, steps led up to a wide terrace and beyond that sat the sprawling mansion itself.

Santiago glimpsed the Aztec tattoo he wore proudly on the inside of one forearm and his thoughts drifted back. To before. To ten years ago . . .

He sees himself, a ten-year-old boy, dazzling his playmates in a game of soccer on a dust-dry patch of waste ground down in the poorest quarter of a poverty-stricken Mexican town.

Close to the makeshift playing field, tin shacks sit among overcrowded apartment blocks, their walls plastered with colorful graffiti. Washing lines stretch between the shacks and the soccer-mad kids' game is accompanied by a cacophony of salsa music, shouts, crying babies, and the roar of traffic.

But the boys are oblivious to all this. They think only of their game as they scamper about in the dust.

Santiago is in a class of his own. He takes the ball on his chest, allows it to drop from knee to instep, and in a liquid movement he rounds another kid and slots the ball deftly between two beer crates serving as goalposts.

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And then the memory, and the picture, shifts, like a television flicking from one channel to another.

Santiago is sleeping. He feels himself being shaken and he opens his eyes. His father, Herman, is staring down at him.

“Get your things, Santiago.”

The small boy scrambles from his bed, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. His grandmother, Mercedes, is lifting his baby brother, Julio, from the cot.

“Quickly, Santiago.”

The bewildered ten-year-old grabs his photograph of the World Cup, which he long ago tore from an old magazine, and then dives beneath his bed for his one truly prized possession—his soccer ball.

The mental picture shifts again, fast-forwarding to the inside of a battered truck as it bumps along in total darkness. Santiago and his family travel in silence. Another family and a number of young men are also crammed into the ancient truck. Everyone has handed over the required amount of money for this one-way journey.

A baby starts to cry. A match flares as a young man lights a cigarette, and in the sudden light Santiago sees nothing but frightened faces. He clutches his soccer ball even tighter.

When the truck stops, the weary travelers climb out onto a dirt road, and as the vehicle rumbles and wheezes away they are ordered to follow their two guides through a maze of cactus and sagebrush.

They reach the border. Searchlights, mounted on a U.S. Border Patrol wagon, scythe through the inky darkness. The illegal immigrants run up an incline toward a gaping hole in the high border fence.

Just as Santiago reaches the gap, his soccer ball slips from his hands. It bounces away, downhill. He turns to chase after it, but his father grabs one arm.

“Forget it, it’s only a stupid ball,” he hisses.

Santiago catches one final, fleeting glimpse of his beloved soccer ball before he is bundled through the gap in the fence and his father urges him to “Run! Run! Run!”

Ten years ago. A long time.

Santiago glanced at his tattoo once more and sighed. He heard footsteps, but before he could turn to see who was approaching, a heavy hand cuffed him, none too gently, across the back of his head.

“Get off there. You want to lose us this job? There’s leaves to be cleared from the drive. Go get the blower.”

Santiago said nothing. He just got up, grabbed his T-shirt, and shrugged as he walked away to carry out his father’s orders.

Sure, life was better now. But not much.

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