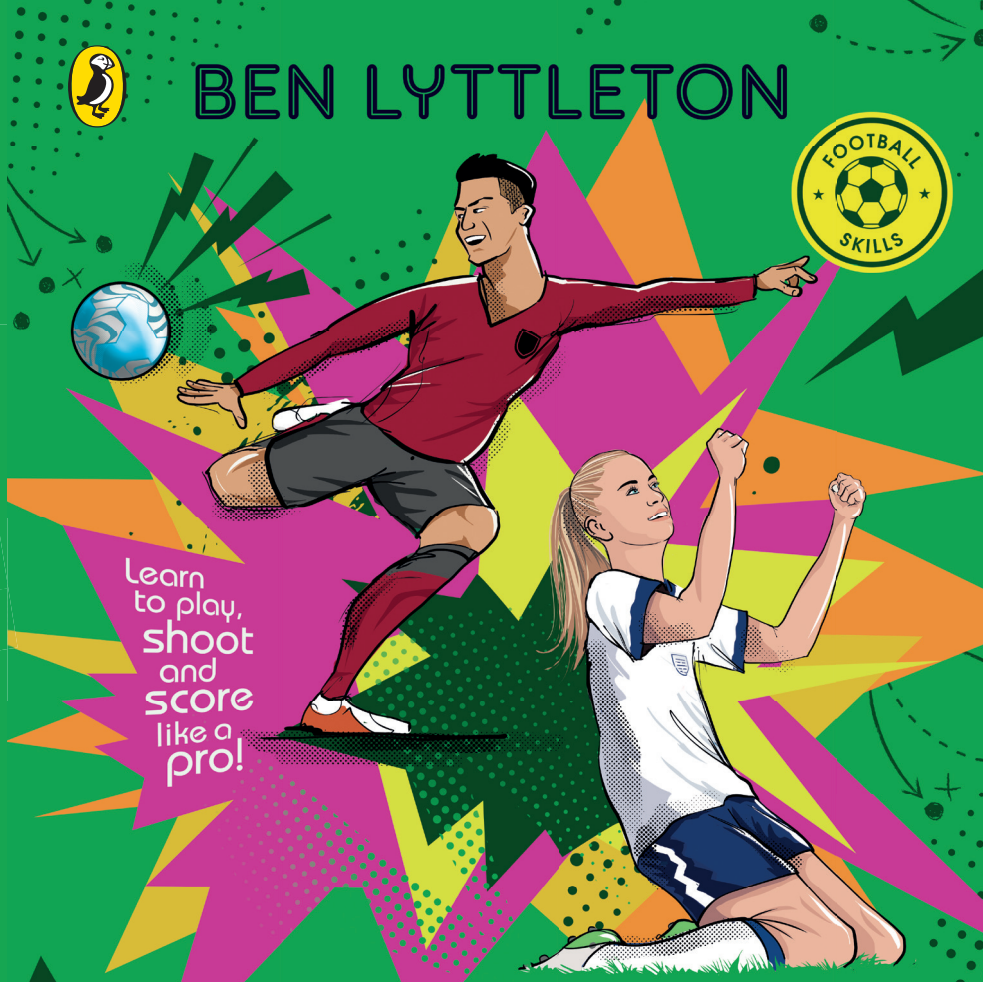
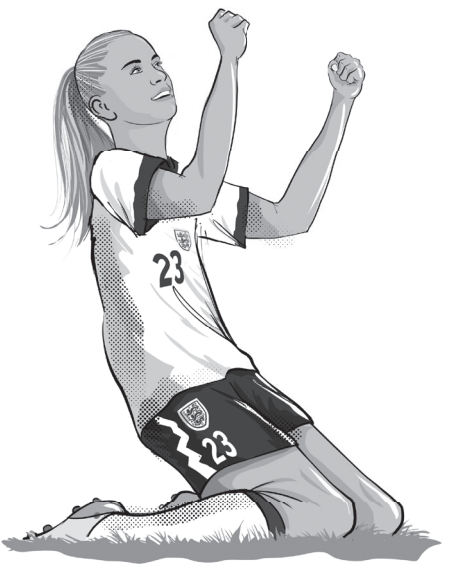
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SCORE LIKE A STRIKER

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To ABC, with love

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine if it was your birthday every day. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

You'd be woken up with breakfast in bed. Open some presents before you get dressed. You might be let off doing homework. You'd be the centre of attention at school. Everyone would go out of their way to be extra nice to you. You could throw a fun party with your friends. And cake! You'd definitely have cake.

Now imagine that happening on a regular basis. ***Every. Single. Day.***

By **day three**, you might get a bit sick of everyone giving you the special treatment.

By **day five**, you might fancy a quiet evening in, without a party.

By **day seven**, you might look forward to not opening a present once in a while.

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By **day ten**, your stomach might request some time without cake.

By **day twelve**, you might actually want to do some homework (or maybe not).

In fact, having a birthday every day is not quite as good as it first sounds. The fun of a birthday, and all the joy and celebration that goes with it, is because it only happens once a year. The beauty of a birthday . . . is because ***it's rare***.

You can say the same for goals.

Goals don't come along every match. Some football matches end up with no goals at all (a 0–0 final score is one of the most common results in English football). Sometimes you can score one goal and win the game; at other times you can score two goals and lose the game. Goals are the most exciting and dramatic part of football; they are what makes football the game we love so much. But it's hard to score goals. Really hard.

For a start, every team has a goalkeeper – their most important job is to **stop you scoring**. Add three or four

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defenders, and maybe a defensive midfielder, and that's another five or so players who will be trying to stop you from getting a goal. The coach might also ask a few of the attacking players to drop back and help out in defence. Overall, it seems like the odds are stacked against you actually getting that ball in the net.

In fact, scoring goals has been a problem ever since the first international match, played between Scotland and England, more than **150 years ago**. That game, which took place on a crisp autumn day in November 1872, summed up the challenges of scoring. England started the game with **eight forwards** and Scotland started the game with **six forwards**. With that many forwards on the pitch, you'd think there would be lots of goals! But there weren't. Final score: 0–0.

If you compare football to other ball sports that involve teams and scoring, you'll see what I mean. On average, there are 228 points per game in basketball. In rugby, the average points per game is 48. And in football? The average goals total per game is between **two** and **three**. Whether you score a goal with a shot from the half-way line, or after running half the pitch and dribbling past eight players, or if you score from one yard away after

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the ball has bounced off your bottom – these all count as just one goal. Unlike other sports (which have totally different points systems), it is much harder, and rarer, to score in football.

Now think about the number of moments that involve the ball during a football match: passes, tackles, interceptions, headers, free kicks, deflections, dribbles, throw-ins. How many of each of these do you think take place per game? It would take a long time to count them all!

Luckily, there are computers that can work this out very quickly. There can be up to **3,000 actions** during a professional game. If that results in two goals – and the most common scoreline in football is 1–1, so that's a realistic outcome – then that means, on average, it takes around **1,500 actions for each goal**.

In the Premier League, each team runs an average of around 100 kilometres per game. With two teams, that means the players are running, in total, around 200 kilometres per game. And often with hardly any goals to show at the end of it. What an awful lot of effort to get the ball into the net!
But don't worry. That's exactly why I have written this

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book. I want to teach you how to play, think and score like a top striker.

After all, goals are the most exciting and dramatic part of football. It's why we go to matches, support our team and watch the game! It's all for those



Because the joy of watching a goal, cheering after a goal or, if you're really lucky, scoring a goal yourself, is unlike anything else. When the ball goes into the back of the net is often unpredictable, and it's always wonderful.

Why me? Well, even though I didn't score many goals when I played football, I do know how to spot a goalscorer. I have worked as a talent scout for many professional teams, evaluating players from other teams, assessing their skills and ability, and working out whether they would do well at a potential new club. This helps the club decide whether to sign the player or not.

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Sometimes the best thing a scout can do is recommend that the club does not sign a player. Signing a player costs a lot of money – clubs often have to pay a transfer fee to the player's current club, and they need to pay the player a salary. I help clubs make sure they only sign the right players for their team, because if a transfer doesn't work, it can be a very expensive mistake!

Once, I was asked by a national newspaper to name a seventeen-year-old striker that I thought would go on to be a star of the future. I did loads of research on young strikers. I spoke to many people and I watched a lot of videos. I finally found a player who was seventeen and had not yet played a professional match in his life. He was French. I wrote about him in the newspaper.

I kept an eye on this youngster's career. He started playing for his team, which was a small club in France. He ended his first season as the French top division's young player of the year. He earned a move to a team called Borussia Dortmund, based in Germany. In his first season there, he helped them win the German cup and was called up to play for the France national team. It looked like I had identified a ***star of the future***.

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Then something even bigger happened. He was signed by Barcelona! To play alongside Argentinian legend **Lionel Messi** and Uruguayan **Luis Suárez**! For a fee of £135 million! I'm going to write that number in letters because it's so big:



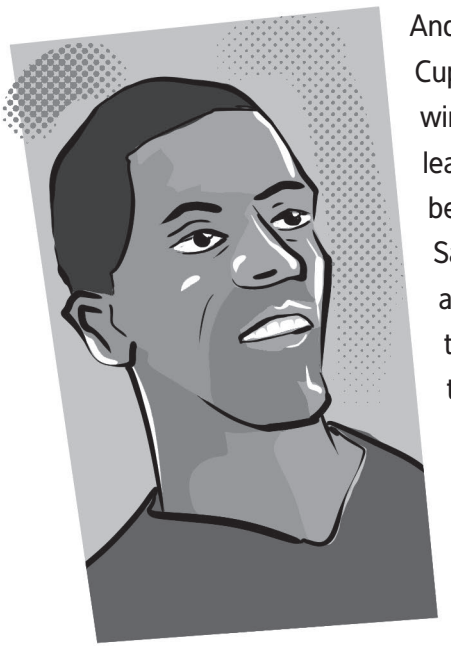
(I didn't see a single penny of that money, in case you're wondering.)

This player won the Spanish league and Spanish cup in his first season as a Barcelona player. He then played for France at the 2018 World Cup when they won the trophy!

Have you worked out who this player is yet?
His name is . . .

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OUSMANE DEMBÉLÉ.



And after that 2018 World Cup success, he kept on winning. He won more league titles in Spain before he moved to Paris Saint-Germain in France and won another league title. He also started in the **2022 World Cup final!**

What am I looking for when I assess strikers? **Shooting skills. Movement and the ability to find space. Composure under pressure. Anticipation. Resilience** and a **desire to keep working hard even when things are not going so well** (especially after a missed chance). **Teamwork** and **being generous in giving assists**. **Decision-making** and **strategic thinking**. **The ability to create chances**, and much more. Don't worry if you don't

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know what some of these words mean. I will explain them all later in the book!

I look at missed chances, too, and see if they were on target and saved, or miles off target and nowhere near going in.

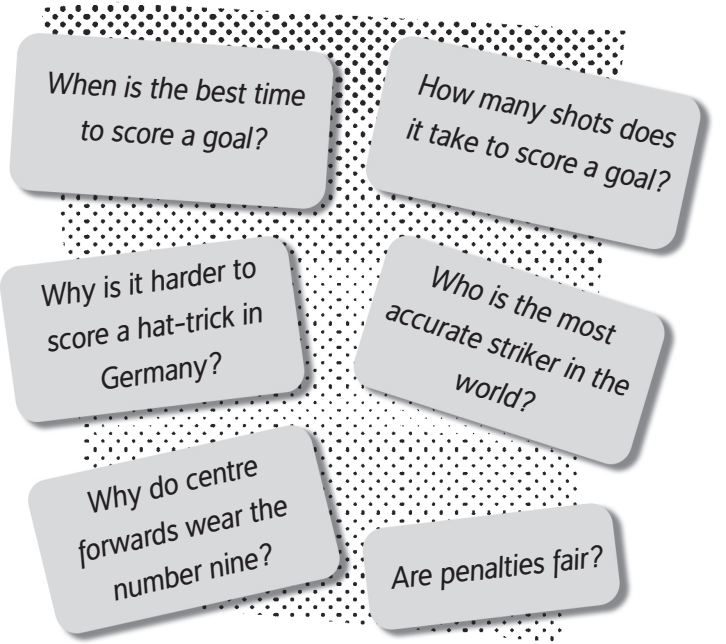
And finally, I look for a **good celebration** – the more extravagant, the better. That's not really true. But everyone loves a player who can do a backwards somersault with their shirt over their head after they score!



This book will examine, explore and explain all of these skills. I will introduce you to players who have mastered them. And I will provide some training tips on how you

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can improve these skills to become a top striker yourself! I will answer important questions about goals, like:



But, before we start, we have to understand what a goal is.

We need to go to Law 10.1 in the Laws of the Game, in the chapter called *'Determining the Outcome of the Match'*. You'd think a goal would be the subject of the first law of football, but actually the pitch, the ball, the players, the referee and timings all come before the laws

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about goals. The first nine laws must be really important if we only start talking about goals in the tenth one! The law says:

- A goal is scored when the whole of the ball passes over the goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar, provided that no offence has been committed by the team scoring the goal.

There are two important phrases in this rule.

ONE: **'whole of the ball'**. This means that if you shoot and a defender clears the ball before all of the ball has crossed the line, it's not a goal. So even if all but a centimetre of the ball has crossed the line and is in the goal before the ball is cleared, it is still not a goal. When this happens, it's very frustrating!

TWO: **'no offence'**. This means the attacking team must not have fouled anyone or committed handball in the build-up to the goal, or be offside, for the goal to be allowed.

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There are lots of ways to score a goal – whether it's with your left foot, your right foot or your head. Inside or outside of the penalty area. At the start of the game or right at the end.

Maybe your ideal goal will be a left-footed shot from nine yards out after a cross from the left side during the middle third of the game. If so, are you Norway's **Erling Haaland**? Based on all of his goals, that's his favourite kind!

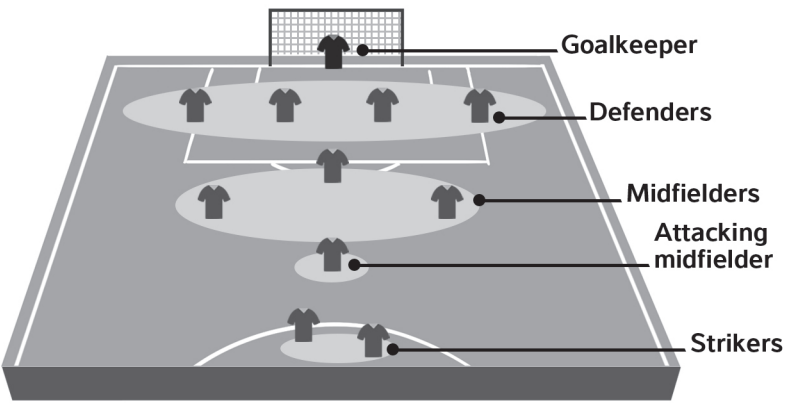
Strikers come in all different shapes and sizes. They are usually the most expensive players in the team – in a list of the top twenty highest-valued players in the world today, there was only one defensive player. And they have all mastered the skills I'm going to tell you about. By the time you finish this book, you might have too!

Let's get our boots on and start scoring.

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PLAYER POSITIONS

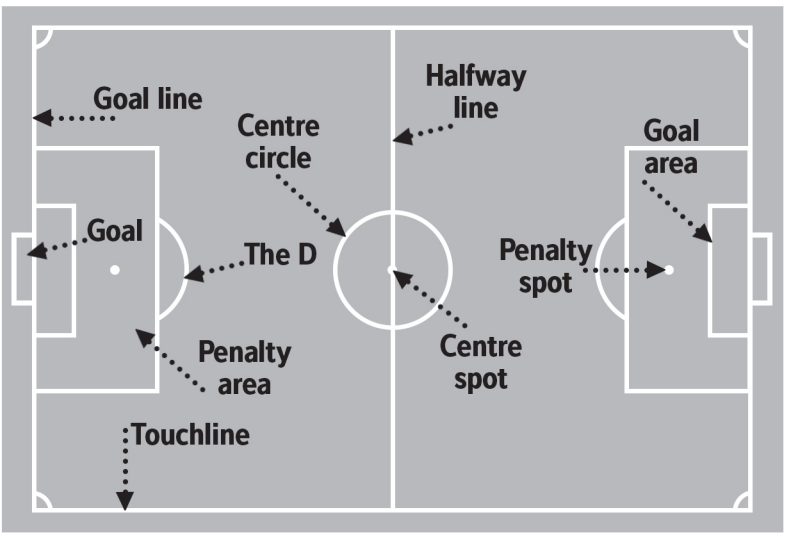
When we look at the best ways to score goals, our focus will be on the forward players, or strikers. Here is an example of the formation of how a team may line up. Different teams use different formations but they all have one thing in common: they want to score as many goals as possible!



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PITCH MARKINGS

The laws of the game state that every pitch must be rectangular and, for professional matches, have the following pitch markings. Most goals are scored inside the penalty area and certain areas of the pitch, like the goal area, the penalty area and the penalty spot, are the same size and distance in every stadium.



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SHOOTING

Let's start with a few questions.

Do you remember how wobbly you felt when you first tried to ride a bike?

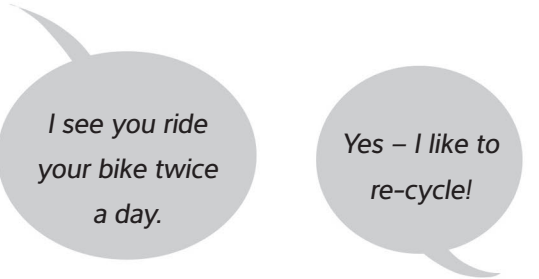
What about when you first drew a picture of your parents and your mum´s eyes were in the wrong place?

Or when you kept forgetting the number seven when you were learning to count in a new language?

Some tasks are just tricky from the start. But with practice, you get better. When it goes well, it´s incredible! There´s no better feeling!

Now you can cruise through the park on your bike and it feels amazing!

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And your mum's eyes are drawn perfectly on her face! And you can say seven in lots of languages!



(French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Turkish)

Footballers go through the same journey. They fell off their bikes as kids. They probably made weird drawings of their parents. They might have messed up their language tests. And they also missed chances to score goals. All the time!

Footballers understand that making mistakes is a great way to learn how to do things better in the future. And when it comes to goals, there is only one way to guarantee you will never score a goal: if you never shoot!

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In this chapter, we are going to meet some of the best strikers in the world and learn their approach to shooting. We will reveal football's most accurate striker, discover the ancient cricketer whose impact is still felt in football today and learn about the footballer who can jump higher than a basketball player!

LET'S GET REAL

England's Harry Kane was released by Arsenal aged twelve because a coach thought he was not good enough. Yet he went on to become England captain during their best run of results since the 1966 World Cup win. Kane scored 280 goals for Tottenham Hotspur, more than anyone else in their 140-year history. He has also scored more goals for England than any other player.

Kane said that he wanted to prove a point to the Arsenal youth coach who did not think he was good enough. We can all agree that he definitely did that! He

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explains that he always had an instinct for where the ball would end up. And this proved to be very useful. When he was around, the ball usually ended up in the back of the net!

He puts his success down to continually practising his shooting. He did this from when he was an under-15 player at the start of his career and continues to do exactly the same today. He likes to practise what he calls 'realistic scenarios'.



So, in training, he doesn't dribble from the half-way line with no one tackling him and then backheel the ball into the goal.

That never happens in a game!

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He doesn't do keepy-uppies from the corner flag to the penalty area before bicycle-kicking it into the net. I've also never seen that happen!

He doesn't balance the ball on his forehead, run three times around the pitch, reach the penalty spot, flick the ball up and head it into the goal. That would be absolutely amazing if it happened, but it doesn't!

Nope.

Kane practises shooting with his first touch from the edge of the penalty area. He practises getting into key positions in the area and shooting from different angles. And he practises shooting quickly – just after he receives the ball – with his left foot. Because these are realistic things that happen in a game.

When he first started playing regularly for Spurs, there was some surprise that he kept scoring so often. He scored twenty-one league goals in his first full season in the first team, and was nicknamed a 'one-season wonder' because no

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one expected him to score more than this in future seasons. But he ended up doing so five more times! The one-season wonder became a club hero and an England legend.

Kane's biggest strength is his shooting. His technique in striking the ball so cleanly is perfect, and he usually finds the corner of the net. All of his 'realistic scenario' practice has paid off. Kane is able to score many different types of goals: from close-range, from distance, penalties, instinct, first time and set pieces.

He is also a brilliant and selfless passer, always able to recognize and find a teammate in a better position than him. In one season, he finished as the Premier League top scorer and the top assist-provider.

Kane loves scoring goals, but what has really made him so successful is that he also loves practising scoring goals. He calls the training pitch where he practises his 'happy place'. And when he scores, everyone else is happy too!

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THE APT METHOD

So how can we practise shooting?

For that, we need to know what we are practising.

There are three main elements for strikers to focus on when it comes to shooting: accuracy, power and timing.

Let's call them APT, a word that can also mean appropriate – and if you combine these three things, it's appropriate that you will score **loads of goals**.

ACCURACY

Accuracy is the ability to direct the ball towards a specific part of the goal where the goalkeeper cannot reach it. Accurate shooting increases the chances of scoring. It sounds simple: the objective is to get the ball on target and away from the goalkeeper. One Manchester United coach told his players to always look at the goalkeeper's position before taking a shot, and then aim for the corner that would be hardest for the goalkeeper to reach. The more accurate you are, the more goals you will score!

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SUPER SINCY

If you look up the term 'leading international goalscorer' online, the name of Portugal striker Cristiano Ronaldo will come up. Fair enough – Ronaldo has scored more than 135 goals in international matches. But the internet has made a mistake (yes, it can happen). The online algorithm has not counted female players. That's rude! And wrong!

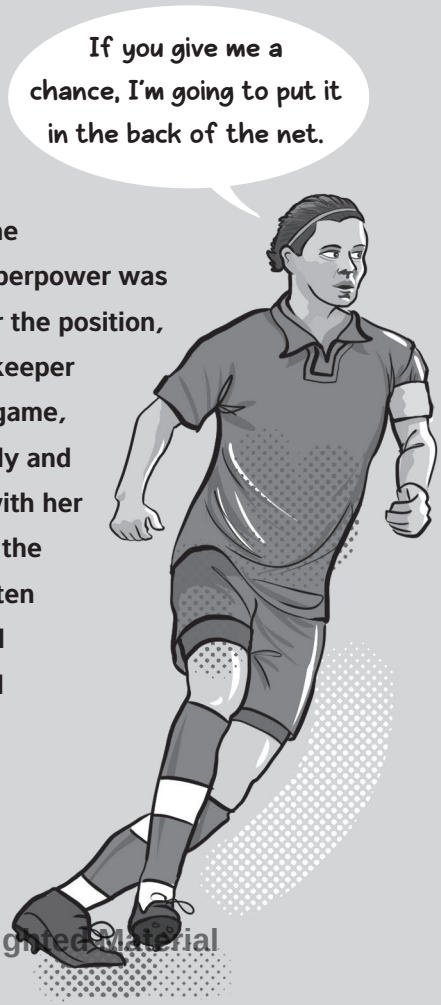
In fact, the leading international goalscorer is Christine Sinclair. She scored 190 goals for Canada, a record that even Ronaldo is unlikely to break. Sinclair has scored more goals for her country than any other player in history. The reason? Accuracy.

Sinclair could read the game well, which meant she would watch closely and predict what might happen next. So when the ball came to her from a pass, or from a rebound (when the ball bounces back into play after striking the goalkeeper or

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a post) or ricochet (when it bounces back off another player), it was no accident. She was able to be in the right place at the right time – and was ready to strike.

Sinclair never panicked in front of the goal. She always stayed cool and aimed for the corners of the net. But her real superpower was accuracy. No matter the position, the angle, the goalkeeper or the score in the game, Sinclair would simply and effectively get on with her job. She would find the target and, more often than not, she would score. One-hundred and ninety times!



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