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Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

A Great Soccer Tournament

Pedro Rita
Susan Adam Rita
Murilo Pruner, illustrator
978-1-4343-2249-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

A Michigan soccer team under the guidance of Coach Pedro visits Hemingway country on idyllic Walloon Lake and in the nearby town of Petoskey. They're revved up for a tournament which will test their energy and reveal their disciplined footwork. The story is told from the viewpoint of a boy named Fred who appreciates the excitement of the games and the area's pristine nature which he is later reluctant to leave behind. Fred says "Why is it that whenever you are having fun the time passes by very fast?"

The team hangs tough against in-state opponents. Parents and kids display sportsmanship and their experienced coach both instructs and supports. Fred takes the blame on behalf of the team when they give up goals because "…we were not marking the outside players as our coach had asked." That line is the only assignment of fault in the consistently positive story. The book's vocabulary is weighted toward superlatives and doesn't vary tremendously but the repetitions are not problematic.

The illustrator has rendered the children somewhat representationally with black dot eyes and limited features. The Coach is drawn a couple gradations closer to realism with shallow facial wrinkles and a mole on his temple. The illustrations convey motion elation and disappointment as appropriate. The range of colors and the compositional elements of the images are right for the story and the lower/middle-elementary age of the target audience.

For a pre-dawn game "…cars turned on their lights in order for us to see where we were playing." Murilo Pruner captures subtle details in the artificial mercury-vapor glow; shadows stretch and silhouettes of observers watch backlit from the vantage point of the hill's crest. The lake appears much as it might have a hundred years ago when a young Ernest Hemingway whiled away summers at his grandparents' lakeside cottage.

The authors' first language is Portuguese but they acquit themselves in English well. Pedro Rita is a retired professional soccer player from Brazil. He's coached a program in Ann Arbor Michigan since 1999 backed by a Master's degree in physical education and a USSF A coaching license. Brazilian-born psychologist Susan Adam-Rita is currently a doctoral candidate at Wayne State University.

A Great Soccer Tournament is spot-on for positive message. It works to spur children's participation in the sport and it could certainly encourage a few Up North getaways also. Goal!

Todd Mercer