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SATIRIST UNBOUND

## Look Out, Soccer Moms: She's Got You Nailed

By [TAMMY LA GORCE](#)

MONTCLAIR

IN “Carpool Diem” (5 Spot Publishing), the latest book by Nancy Star, a backstabbing throng of [New Jersey](#) parents plot against one another to land their preteen daughters on an elite soccer team. They bribe an egomaniacal coach. They sneak out of their well-appointed homes in the wee hours to dig game-wrecking gopher holes in athletic fields. They consider moving across town lines to better their girls’ chances at soccer greatness. And — though it will be hard for some readers to admit — they probably resemble a real-life parent near you.

“It’s a comic, satirical novel. But it’s set perilously close to the world in which I live,” said Ms. Star, 52, sitting in her comfortable, book-lined living room here. Her daughters, Elizabeth, 20, and Isabelle, 17, both played soccer in Montclair as grade-schoolers.

“Six months ago I was walking the dog and ran into two women, one I knew and one I didn’t. I told the woman I know what I was working on, and the woman I didn’t know said, ‘Oh, I know who that’s about. It’s about so-and-so.’ And this person she mentioned was someone I’ve never had a conversation with more than hello!

“There may be a long list of people like that,” Ms. Star said. If there is, the New Jersey-based Internet forums dedicated to youth soccer chatter are bound to light up like an overtime scoreboard when the book reaches shelves next month.

But Ms. Star, the author of “The Calendar Club” mystery series for second and third graders (Scholastic) and three novels for adults, would rather promote reflection on the bizarre state of youth team sports than town gossip.

“If you spend even 10 minutes online, you find stuff like this,” she said, slipping on reading glasses and grabbing a sheaf of printed pages with headlines like “Soccer Mom Accused of Attacking Coach With Chair.”

Though she characterizes her own experiences on the sidelines during her daughters’ playing years as fairly tame — “I never met a coach like Winslow West,” she said, referring to one of the main

characters in “Carpool Diem” (a creepy, borderline-abusive one) — she can’t forget an episode from those days, which is described in an “about the author” note at the end of the book.

It outlines the strategy of one of the “Set a Good Example” representatives required by the Mid-New Jersey Youth Soccer Association: “She pulled a handful of red lollipops out of her pocket. Any parent who yelled too loud, or used a verb, would be given a lollipop to suck on. On the field, 22 girls who had trained hard played like mini-professionals. Off the field, two dozen parents stood with cherry red lips and sticky fingers, a lollipop stuck in every mouth.”

“It’s true,” said Ms. Star, who is married to Larry Star, an advertising executive. “And I’m just trying to understand, you know, what is infecting all of us? That’s one of the reasons I wrote the book — to try to understand better. But I don’t think I ultimately understand anything better than anybody else. There are these coaches who want to own your kids when they’re 8, 9, 10 years old. They demand 200 percent of them. People get caught up in it.”

Ms. Star, unlike Annie, the harried soccer mom of “Carpool Diem,” may have been less caught up than most. “Being on a team is a great thing, but you want your kids to be happy,” she said. “You have to let them direct you.”

Ms. Star knows about directing; a former film executive, she is in talks with a Hollywood studio to make “Carpool Diem” into a movie. It’s a thrilling prospect, but mostly, she said, she hopes she nailed the world of corner arcs and counterattackers.

“I think there’s real truth in the book,” she said. “My dream is to connect with a lot of readers.”

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