

JOACHIM MASANNEK

The Wild Soccer Bunch



Translated from the German by Helga Schier

Editor: Michael Part

This is a work of fiction. All names and characters
are either invented or used fictitiously.

Original title: Leon, der Slalomdribbler

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Die Wilden Fussballkerle™ Joachim Masannek & Jan Birck

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Hi *Wild Bunch* fans!

I am a huge fan of *The Wild Soccer Bunch*! They are a crew of zany, extraordinary, fun-loving soccer players. More important, they are great friends!

Kids everywhere ask me how they can become a professional player, like me.

Well, for starters you've really got to love this game! I've been playing soccer competitively since I was five years old. I started out playing in my neighborhood park, just like many of you. There, I learned the basics: how to dribble, pass, and of course, how to score. Most of all, I learned how to be a team player.

If I was ten years old again, I would try out for the *Wild Soccer Bunch*, and hopefully I'd make the team. I know we would play some tough opponents, win close games, and share unforgettable adventures. And we'd always be the wildest bunch of soccer players anywhere!

Your Friend and Teammate,

Landon Donovan



JOACHIM MASANNEK

The Wild Soccer Bunch

Book 1

Kevin, the Star Striker

Illustrations by Jan Birck



Sole
BOOKS

TABLE OF CONTENTS



The <i>Wild Bunch</i> _ _ _ _ _	9
The <i>Wild Bunch</i> Doesn't Hibernate _ _ _ _ _	15
The End of the World _ _ _ _ _	22
Kevin's Dream _ _ _ _ _	27
Tyler, the Pain! _ _ _ _ _	32
Long Gone 'Cause Nothing Can Stop Us! _ _ _ _ _	37
Trapped! _ _ _ _ _	45
Never Give Up! _ _ _ _ _	50
With Bated Breath _ _ _ _ _	59
Larry, of Course! _ _ _ _ _	63
Moms and Dads _ _ _ _ _	68
The First Touch _ _ _ _ _	80
A Moment of Truth _ _ _ _ _	86
He Who Puts a Spell on the Ball _ _ _ _ _	95
Mr. Invincible _ _ _ _ _	100
The Best Soccer Players in the World _ _ _ _ _	103
The Bulldozer's Surprise Attack _ _ _ _ _	108
A Dark Night and an Even Darker Morning _ _ _ _ _	117
Be Wild! _ _ _ _ _	124
Roger the Hero! _ _ _ _ _	131
Even Wilder! _ _ _ _ _	135



The *Wild Bunch*

Hey you! Yes, I am talking to you! You made it!

I thought we'd never get to know each other. My name is Kevin, and that's us: the *Wild Bunch*. Right about now a *nice* children's book author would say we are eleven friends and a cute dog. And we love to play soccer.

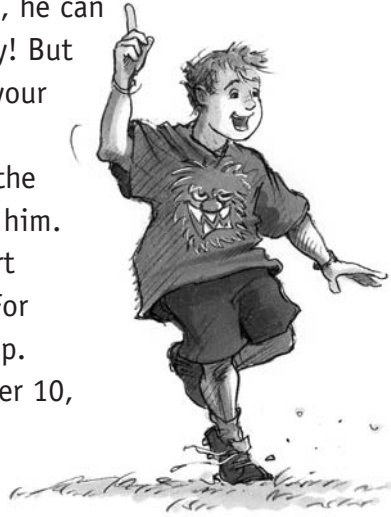


But I am here to tell you I am one of the *Wild Bunch* and what you are reading is not a children's book. It's real; it's as real as life. Totally! My dog Sox is not just cute, and we are not just eleven friends. We are much more: We are dangerous and we are wild. Bet your life on it.

Danny, for example, is my best friend. He is the world's fastest right forward. I totally rely on him, and I hope he'll never stop playing soccer. But Danny is interested in many other things, too. He's even interested in — you're not going to believe this — he's even interested in — *girls*.



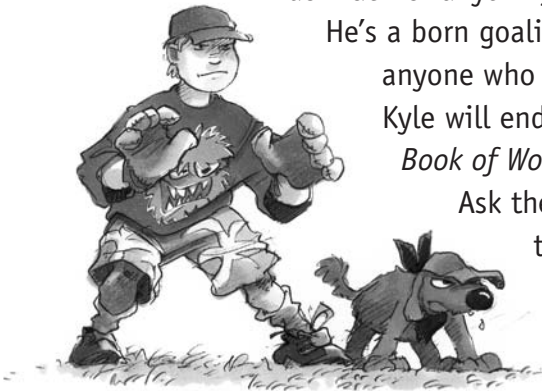
Oh man! Not even Tyler is interested in girls yet, and he's ten already! Tyler is my big brother, by the way, and like all big brothers, he can be a pain. He drives me crazy! But what can you do? You need your brother, and that's that. Like the air you breathe. And on the field, nothing works without him. He is the brains and the heart of the *Wild Bunch* machine. For one reason: He never gives up. My brother Tyler is our number 10, and I'm very proud of that. Period.



Kyle, on the other hand, comes on the sly and without his parents' permission. His father wants him to be a golf pro or a tennis ace. But Kyle has other plans. Whenever he manages to bolt, he is in our goal. And if you ask me, he won't do much of anything else. He's a natural.

He's a born goalie. In my opinion, anyone who scores a goal against Kyle will end up in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Ask the cannon. He's already in there. But that's all you're going to get out of him.



Alex Alexander, nicknamed the cannon, doesn't talk much. He's a man of action, and he has the strongest kick in the world. And there aren't any words to describe it. When Kyle got in front of him — he just hurled him into the net along with the ball.



That was the one time he outplayed Julian. Julian Fort Knox is our all-in-one defender. Truly, he's playing like four defenders in one player! We call him Fort Knox because this is where our country keeps the gold. No one gets into Fort Knox, and no one gets past Julian.





Now we come to Roger. Roger the hero! But he wasn't always called that. I don't want to trash talk anyone, but you tell me: Would a blind man think he could be a photographer?

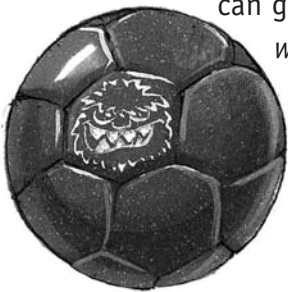
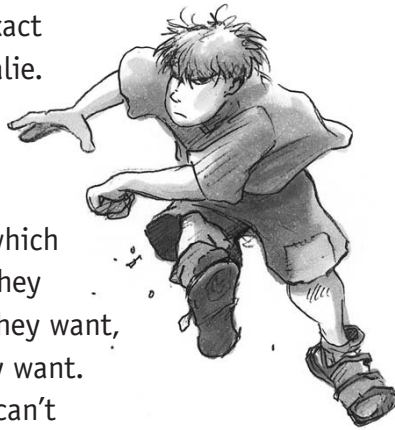
Then why does Roger think he can play soccer? But I'm not allowed to say anything because Danny protects him. Maybe Danny is right. There is definitely no one like Roger. He is one-of-a-kind!

You probably think I'm mean for talking about him like this, but what can I say?

Life is mean — especially when it comes to soccer. And soccer is Diego's life, too. Diego is our tornado. He has asthma, and when he has an attack, he's just a regular left forward. But when he's on his game, he's faster than a tornado.

Or Joey. Joey is the exact opposite of Kyle, our goalie. Kyle is rich, but Joey's mother is poor and she's out of work. That's why they live in a van, which is kind of cool because they can go wherever they want, *whenever* they want.

But Joey can't afford cleats.



He doesn't even have a jacket. Sometimes he doesn't even show up. That's because his mother drinks a lot. Joey never talks about it and he tries not to show it, but you can see it in his face when he presses his lips together real hard. You just know he's in pain. But when everything is fine, Joey plays soccer like a magician and it's a wonder to watch. It's as if he put a spell on the ball.

When Joey is on, he plays even better than me: I, Kevin, the master dribbler, the Star Striker, and the quickest assist there is.

At least that's what Larry calls me, when I'm not a ball-hog or too selfish or too stubborn. Between you and me, that's exactly what I am sometimes.

Larry is our coach and he always knows best. He may only work the lemonade stand at the soccer field and maybe he didn't get very far in life — but Larry was almost a soccer pro, and to us, he will always be the greatest coach in the world.

Together, we are the *Wild Soccer Bunch*, the best soccer team in the world. And the only team I ever want to play with. But it wasn't always this way. A lot had to happen before we got our act together and the *Wild Soccer Bunch* became a team. Don't get me wrong, it's always hard starting out, but in our case, it was really hard. As hard as the ground in our neighborhood on the north side of Chicago. The ground was hard because it was frozen solid and covered in snow. The wind blew like there was no

tomorrow. That's why they call it The Windy City. Winter, eternal and never-ending, ruled the day. And on top of that, Mickey, the Bulldozer, and his *Unbeatables*, got in our way.

123 WILDE





JOACHIM MASANNEK

Born in 1960. Studied German and Philosophy in college. He also studied at the University of Film and Television; worked as a camera operator, set designer, and screenwriter in films and TV.

His children's book series *The Wild Soccer Bunch* has been published in 28 countries. As the screenwriter and director of the five *The Wild Soccer Bunch* movies, Joachim has managed to bring about nine million viewers into the theatres. He was the coach of the real *Wild Bunch* soccer team, coaching his sons Marlon and Leon.



JAN BIRCK

Born in 1963. Illustrator, animation artist, art director (advertising, animation, CD-ROM's), cartoonist, and CD-ROM designer. Jan designs *The Wild Soccer Bunch* merchandising with Joachim. Jan lives in Munich with his wife Mumi and his soccer playing sons Timo and Finn.

COMING SOON!



THE WILD SOCCER BUNCH BOOK 2 DIEGO the Tornado

Fabio, the son of a famous Brazilian soccer player for the Chicago Fire, joins Diego's class. Diego envies the new kid when the rest of the *Wild Bunch* welcomes him with open arms. But Fabio's father has other plans. He thinks his son should play for a real club team, not for some street urchins, and signs him up to play with the Chicago Fire Youth Club.

Diego and the rest of the *Wild Soccer Bunch* are devastated, but instead of taking it lying down, they decide to become a real club team! They draft rules and create a team jersey, complete with *Wild Soccer Bunch* logo, and practice as a real club team.

Now the real test: challenge none other than the Chicago Fire Youth Team!

Can their friendship survive the challenge?

And can the *Wild Soccer Bunch* survive the game?

MORE TO COME!



THE WILD SOCCER BUNCH BOOK 3 ZOE the Fearless

Zoe is ten and soccer-crazy. She spends each day dreaming of becoming the first woman to play for the U.S. Men's National Soccer Team. Her dad believes in her dream, and encourages her to join the *Wild Soccer Bunch*. Even though Zoe would be the only girl on the team, she knows she could be their best player. But the *Wild Bunch* is not open-minded when it comes to welcoming new teammates, especially when they are girls...

Zoe's dad has a plan. He organizes a birthday tournament and invites the *Wild Bunch*. They present Zoe with a pair of red high heels, expecting her to make a fool of herself during the tournament. Zoe gladly accepts her gift. She wears the heels during the biggest game of her life, and proves that she's got what it takes to be a wild, winning member of the *Wild Soccer Bunch*.

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