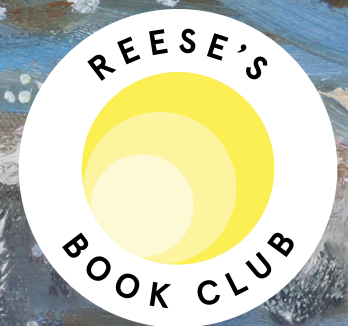


SPECTACULAR THINGS

A NOVEL

**BOOK
CLUB
KIT**



BECK DOREY-STEIN

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CRICKET LOWE

Named after Kristine Lilly, Cricket is a preternaturally talented goalkeeper—and the embodiment of both her mother Liz and her sister Mia’s own thwarted dreams of soccer stardom. She finally gets the chance to start on the U.S. Women’s National Team—right when Mia comes to her with a life-shattering question.

MIA LOWE

Cricket’s older sister, Mia (named for Mia Hamm) has always been the de facto head of house—even before their mother Liz’s untimely death. Intelligent and responsible, Mia keeps the Lowe family going—and sacrifices her own dreams and future for her little sister to have a chance.

LIZ LOWE

Mia and Cricket’s mother was a promising soccer star in her own right—a once-in-a-lifetime talent—until an unexpected pregnancy and an unsuitable partner snuffed out her future. As her daughters grow up—first Mia, then Cricket—she pours all of that unrealized potential and ambition into their own soccer careers.

SLOANE

Sloane is a competitive soccer player—and the starting goalkeeper on the Women’s National Team who has the spot Cricket wants. She thrives on rivalry, and is accustomed to a life of privilege. She and Cricket become best friends and rivals—and it can be hard to understand her true motivations.

OLIVER

Oliver is a caring and supportive partner to Mia—and Cricket’s former high school coach. He is thoughtful and considerate, often going out of his way to ensure the happiness and success of those he loves.

YAZ

Yaz is Cricket’s college girlfriend—who dreams of a future together, but can’t quite compete with the lure of the soccer field. Yaz is understanding and encouraging, providing emotional support for Cricket as she navigates her soccer career—until she hits her limit.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** *Spectacular Things* is a novel about the tangled knot between ambition, wild dreams, and sisterhood that asks *What would you give up for the person you love most? What would you expect in return?* What did you think about Mia's request that Cricket compromise her soccer career to donate a kidney to her sister? Would you have immediately said yes? Why or why not?
- 2.** Liz was a very young mother who sacrificed so much for her daughters. In what ways did her sacrifices shape her daughters' futures? How did she influence Mia's and Cricket's individual ambitions and aspirations?
- 3.** At several points in the novel, a character's individual ambition must take a backseat to her family's bigger needs. What did you think about the compromises Liz, Mia, and Cricket all made for their family over the course of the book? Have you ever had to make similar compromises for family? What did that feel like?
- 4.** Cricket develops a long and complicated friendship with Sloane. At times they are rivals, at other times they are one another's fiercest supporters. What did you think of this friendship? In what ways was Sloane and Cricket's relationship an example of another kind of sisterhood?
- 5.** Mia's relationship with Oliver is not without its own complications. Were you surprised by their relationship?

In what ways were they perfect for one another? In what ways did falling in love also entail compromise for both of them?
- 6.** Mia and Cricket grieve the death of their mother in different and complimentary ways. Have you ever faced a loss that was sudden the way Liz's death was? How did your grief express itself? Was your experience similar to Mia's or Cricket's?
- 7.** Liz always told her daughters, "You're a Lowe, not a quitter." In what ways did that mantra expand—and limit—each sister's sense of self? What role does soccer play in the novel? It means something different to Liz, Mia, and Cricket—what does it represent for each of them?
- 8.** By the end of the book, the Lowe sisters' love of soccer has been passed down to Betty. Did you think this was inevitable? What do you think it means to see this in a new generation?
- 9.** Cricket always believed that *"To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift."* How did her understanding of that quotation change over time? What did she come to learn was the true gift?

RECIPES

CRICKET'S CELEBRATION CANNOLI

Inspired by the scene where Cricket and her friends enjoy a variety of desserts, including cannoli, this recipe will bring a taste of the book to your book club meeting.

Ingredients:

- 12 cannoli shells
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ cup mini chocolate chips
- ¼ cup chopped pistachios (optional)
- Chocolate syrup for drizzling

Instructions:

1. In a bowl, mix ricotta cheese, powdered sugar, and vanilla extract until smooth.
2. Fold in mini chocolate chips.
3. Fill each cannoli shell with the ricotta mixture.
4. Drizzle with chocolate syrup and sprinkle with pistachios if desired.
5. Chill before serving.

VICTORY'S VENTI DELIGHT

Inspired by a venti caramel Frappuccino, this drink can be made with or without alcohol.

Alcoholic Version:

- 1 cup brewed coffee, chilled
- ½ cup milk
- 2 tablespoons caramel syrup
- 1 shot of coffee liqueur (optional)
- Whipped cream and caramel drizzle for topping

Non-Alcoholic Version:

- 1 cup brewed coffee, chilled
- ½ cup milk
- 2 tablespoons caramel syrup
- Whipped cream and caramel drizzle for topping

Instructions:

1. Combine coffee, milk, and caramel syrup in a blender (and the coffee liqueur, if you're adding alcohol).
2. Blend until smooth.
3. Pour into a glass and top with whipped cream and caramel drizzle.

FUN FACTS ABOUT THE 1999 U.S. WOMEN'S NATIONAL SOCCER TEAM

- 1. Historic Victory:** The 1999 U.S. Women's National Soccer Team won the FIFA Women's World Cup, defeating China in the final match held at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California.
- 2. Record Attendance:** The final match was played in front of 90,125 fans, setting a world record for attendance at a women's sporting event.
- 3. Brandi Chastain's Iconic Moment:** After scoring the winning penalty kick in the final, Brandi Chastain famously celebrated by removing her jersey, revealing her sports bra, which became an iconic image in sports history.
- 4. Mia Hamm's Leadership:** Mia Hamm was not only a top scorer but also a leader in assists, exemplifying teamwork and selflessness.
- 5. Diverse Team:** The team was composed of players from various backgrounds, showcasing the diversity and inclusivity of women's soccer in the U.S.
- 6. Media Impact:** The team's success significantly increased media coverage and public interest in women's soccer, leading to the establishment of the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) in 2000.
- 7. Presidential Recognition:** The team was invited to the White House and honored by President Bill Clinton for their achievements and contributions to sports.
- 8. Trailblazers for Equality:** The 1999 team played a crucial role in advocating for gender equality in sports, inspiring future generations of female athletes.
- 9. Team Chemistry:** The players were known for their strong camaraderie and team spirit, which was a key factor in their success.
- 10. Legacy:** The 1999 team's victory is often credited with sparking a revolution in women's sports, leading to increased opportunities and visibility for female athletes worldwide.

FURTHER READING

FIFA: [fifa.com/en/tournaments/womens/womensworldcup/fifa-womens-world-cup-usa-1999](https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/womens/womensworldcup/fifa-womens-world-cup-usa-1999)

ESPN: [espn.com/soccer/story/_/id/40529020/25th-anniversary-uswnt-99-world-cup-win-shows-progress](https://www.espn.com/soccer/story/_/id/40529020/25th-anniversary-uswnt-99-world-cup-win-shows-progress)

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED: [si.com/soccer/video/2013/08/20/si-now-legacy-99-womens-world-cup-team](https://www.si.com/soccer/video/2013/08/20/si-now-legacy-99-womens-world-cup-team)

U.S. SOCCER: ussoccer.com/history/us-soccer-as-host/1999-fifa-womens-world-cup