

Youngsters will get a kick out of these books

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As an author, Rebecca Thatcher Murcia is a real team player.

The Akron woman, who wrote three new biographies of soccer superstars for children, says she couldn't have done it without her family.

Thatcher Murcia admits she knew nothing about the sport 16 years ago, when she met her late husband, Saul Murcia. The Colombia native was a lifelong fan. His interest inspired her to start playing 10 years ago and coaching five years ago. By the time she tackled writing about soccer, she had learned a lot about the topic.

The former newspaper journalist also credits their soccer-playing sons Gabriel, 10, and Mario, 8, who served as "in-house" editors.

"Mario helped me by pointing out words or concepts that were not appropriate" for the second-grade reading level of the books, she said. "Gabriel, who has a mind for soccer trivia and regularly finds mistakes in soccer books from the library, went through these books very carefully to help make sure they were accurate."

Murcia will talk about her books — "Freddy Adu," "David Beckham" and "Landon Donovan" — at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 20, at Ephrata Public Library. The program, for ages 5 and up, will include time for the audience to share their excitement about the game.

■ The books are 32-page, hardcover editions developed for school and public libraries. They are packed with color photographs and interesting moments in the lives of Adu, the Ghana immigrant who plays for D.C. United; Beckham, the Brit now with Real Madrid; and homegrown Donovan of the Los Angeles Galaxy.

All three books begin with a pivotal moment on the field and segue back into the stars' childhood, family life and career development. The books aren't filled solely with triumphant moments; mistakes and difficulties warrant mention too.

Readers learn why there is a movie titled "Bend It Like Beckham," in a recounting of the 1998 World Cup game pitting England against Colombia.

When polysyllabic words like "international" are used, they are spelled phonetically in parentheses so young readers can sound them out. The books also include a glossary that explains terms like "red card" and "corner kick."

■ Thatcher Murcia is a member of the Blue Thunder team in the Manheim Township Women's Soccer League. Her boys play with the Ephrata Attack and the Lancaster United Premier teams.

When the books came out this spring, Saul Murcia was excited. Though the Mennonite Central Committee



Jack Leonard/Sunday News

Gabriel Murcia, Rebecca Thatcher Murcia, Mario Murcia and Crystal, their dog, show off the new soccer books that will be featured Tuesday at the Ephrata Public Library program "Soccer Superstars."

executive had been stricken with a form of paralyzing bone cancer in 2004, he got used by his speaker phone to let friends and family know about their debut, his widow said. Throughout his illness, he never stopped wanting to attend his wife and sons' soccer games, she added. He died June 9.

The books are part of Mitchell Lane Publishers' Robbie Reader series for beginning readers. The Hockes-

sin, Del., company told Murcia some moms have requested the books be express-mailed to soccer-loving kids with book reports due.

Thatcher Murcia's previous books for Mitchell Lane are biographies of E.B. White, Americo Paredes, Dolores Huerta and Thomas Edison.

The soccer books will be available for purchase and signing by the author following the library program.