

SPORTS ZONE!

HUT! HUT! HIKE!



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**For Alison, Eliza, Charlie, and Kendall,
in celebration of our "Joey Stories!" — AM**

**To my "teammates" who helped me in completing
this book. And to Satvik for cheering for your
"Aishwarya deeedeeeee!!!" — AT**

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Maraniss, Andrew, author. | Tandon, Aishwarya, illustrator.

Title: Hut! Hut! Hike! / Andrew Maraniss ; illustrated by Aishwarya Tandon.

Description: First edition. | New York : Branches/Scholastic, Inc., 2025. | Series: Sports Zone! ; 1 | Audience: Ages 6–8 | Audience: Grades 1–3 | Summary: Neighborhood friends Jasper, Mo, and Ruby learn about facing insecurities and also teamwork, competition, and love for sports when they try out for an organized flag football team and play their first real game. Includes football history, player biographies, and flag football rules. Identifiers: LCCN 2024016377 | ISBN 9781546120056 (paperback) | ISBN 9781546120063 (library binding)

Subjects: LCSH: Flag football—Juvenile fiction. | Football for children—Juvenile fiction. | Football teams—Juvenile fiction. | Football stories. | CYAC: Flag football—Fiction. | Football—Fiction. | Football teams—Fiction. | LCGFT: Sports fiction. Classification: LCC PZ7.1.M36976 Hu 2025 | DDC [E] —dc23/eng/20240528 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024016377>

ISBN 978-1-5461-2006-3 (hardcover) / 978-1-5461-2005-6 (paperback)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

25 26 27 28 29

Printed in India 197
First edition, September 2025

Edited by Katie Carella
Book design by Jaime Lucero

LIVING-ROOM FOOTBALL



The first thing nine-year-old Jasper McCoy learned about playing living-room football is that you need pillows. Lots and lots of pillows. And a beanbag chair, dog bed, Hula-Hoop, and fluffy blankets. Plus a football, of course—preferably a red squishy one.

You also need an announcer voice, the kind you hear on TV on Sunday afternoons. When Jasper is playing ball, he often hears this voice in his head: *And there's a pass from Jasper . . . to Jasper! He races around the beanbag chair, leaps over two pillows, and lands on the fluffy blankets for a touchdown! Jasper wins the Super Bowl!*



Every day when Jasper gets home from school, he has a favorite routine. He takes his dog, Kendall, for a walk around the block. He finishes his homework, practices the piano, and reads a book on the couch with his mom.

At around 5:30 p.m., he peeks outside, watching the driveway for his dad's car to pull up.

When his dad walks in the door, Jasper leaps up. "Ready to play football?!"

Sometimes Jasper's dad is tired. Sometimes he needs to mow the lawn or do something super important like set his fantasy football lineup. But he always says yes to playing ball with Jasper.

"You're on!" his dad replies, grabbing the football.

Jasper lines up beside his dad, ready to go out for a pass on a play that his dad named Steamboat Springs.

"Hut, hut, hike!" barks Mr. McCoy.



Jasper runs across the room, turns at the sofa, skips over the Hula-Hoop, and holds up his hands as he dashes by the bookcase.

Jasper's dad raises his right arm. Then he throws a perfect spiral five feet in front of Jasper's path.

Jasper dives across the blankets and soars through the air. He's headed toward the beanbag chair. But the throw is a bit too far, and Jasper can't get there in time.

Crash! A vase filled with flowers smashes to the floor. Water and broken glass fly everywhere.



“Jasper, you’re never playing football in the house again!” his mom yells from down the hall.

His dad shrugs his shoulders.

“She’s probably right,” he says.

“But it was *your* throw that broke the vase, Dad,” Jasper replies.



“I think the point is that the living room isn’t the best place to play football,” his dad says. “You’ll have to play outside from now on.”

Jasper sighs in frustration. *And just like that, living-room football is over!* Jasper hears his announcer voice say. *The best player in history, Jasper McCoy, is forced to retire at age nine.*

“Is it okay if I go over to Mo’s for dinner tonight?” Jasper asks as he helps his dad clean up the mess. Mo Garcia, a fellow third grader at Raintree Elementary, is Jasper’s best friend.

“Sure thing, kiddo,” his dad replies.



Jasper runs down the hall, through the screened-in porch out back, and over to the house next door. Mo will never believe what’s just happened.