

Nick Hornby

Nick Hornby is the author of three best-selling novels about men, obsession and growing up: *Fever Pitch*, *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy*. He supports Arsenal and Cambridge United Football Clubs.

tossed (line 7): threw
torsos (line 8): bodies
(without the heads)
turnstile (line 14): gate to
a football stadium

The sugar mouse ritual

What happened was, Chris Roberts bought a sugar mouse, bit its head off, dropped it in the Newmarket Road before he could get started on the body, and it got run over by a car. And that afternoon Cambridge United beat Orient 3-1, and a ritual was born.

5 Before each home game we all of us trooped into the sweet shop, purchased our mice, walked outside, bit the head off as though we were removing the pin from a hand grenade, and tossed the torsos under the wheels of oncoming cars. United, thus protected, remained unbeaten for months.

10 I know that I am particularly stupid about rituals, and have been ever since I started going to football matches, and I know also that I am not alone ... I can remember having to buy a programme from the same programme seller, and having to enter the stadium through the same turnstile.

15 There have been hundreds of similar bits of nonsense, all designed to guarantee victories for one or other of my two teams.

I have tried 'smoking' goals in (Arsenal once scored as three of us were lighting cigarettes), and eating cheese-and-onion crisps at a certain point in the first half; I have tried not setting the video for
20 live games (the team seems to have suffered badly in the past when I have taped the matches in order to study the performances when I get home); I have tried lucky socks, and lucky shirts, and lucky hats, and lucky friends, and have attempted to exclude others who I feel bring with them nothing but trouble for the team.

25 Nothing (apart from the sugar mice) has ever been any good.

(Adapted from *Fever Pitch*, by Nick Hornby)