



Book review

Anne Dekkers

To cite this article: Anne Dekkers (2015) Book review, *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 22:6, 487-487, DOI: [10.3109/09687637.2015.1034305](https://doi.org/10.3109/09687637.2015.1034305)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.3109/09687637.2015.1034305>



Published online: 15 Apr 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 197



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Book review

Kieft, by Michel Van Egmond, Meppel: Voetbal International, 2014, 366pp, ISBN: 9789067970846

Willem (Wim) Kieft (born in 1962) is a famous former Dutch striker, who was a very valuable member of the national team that won the European Football Championship in 1988. He was a prolific goal-scorer and played for several Dutch and European top teams (Ajax, PSV, Torino, Bordeaux). Kieft won the European Champions Cup in 1988 with PSV and scored his most important heading goal against Ireland in 1988, qualifying the Dutch squad for the semi-final of EURO 1988. After retiring, he slipped out of the picture and worked occasionally as a football pundit for Dutch television. In his recently published biography (2014), Kieft revealed his long-lasting cocaine addiction and early recovery. The book received the NS Publieksprijs 2014, i.e. the public award for the best book in the Netherlands.

The biography, 'Kieft', is based on interviews by Michel van Egmond with Wim Kieft. It describes his life, with a specific focus on his football career and the period afterwards, where not only football but also alcohol and drugs formed a major part of his life. Each chapter starts with one of the many questions from the NA (Narcotics Anonymous) workbook that Kieft needs to answer every day. His answers show a glimpse of what is going on in Kieft's mind: fear, shame, insecurity, ongoing need for approval; but also hope and resilience are major themes in Kieft's answers throughout the book. The biography focuses on the very start of his football career as a young boy at Ajax, his three partners and the children he fathered with them, the start of his alcohol and cocaine use and misuse, his previous attempts to break the cycle of addiction and his latest, still successful, attempt to recover.

Where his football career starts at a young age, so also do his insecurities. His constant need for approval and his lack of confidence provide an ongoing feeling of pressure and dissatisfaction. Whether he played the match of his life or the opposite, Kieft does not know how to handle himself and the pressure of being in the spotlight is heavy to bear. Still, he only began using cocaine in an addictive way after his professional football career. While he started as a recreational user after retiring (1994), he soon lost control over the drugs which subsequently affected all of his life. After 20 years of substance misuse, leading to the loss of his fortune and his partner(s), Kieft went to rehab. This was at first sight a helpful period, being away from the destructive environment where drugs and dealers collecting their debts were all around.

Soon after coming home, things started spiralling down again. It was only after a second and third time in rehab that he stopped using drugs. While in recovery, Kieft knew that rehab was not enough and started attending NA meetings which he still attends daily. NA meetings, meditation techniques, yoga and psychotherapy, he believes, all help him not to use again. The fallen football star now survives with a minimal budget, faces significant debts and builds on the road to recovery.

This easy reading book is remarkable for providing an overview of the former top-scorer's turbulent life, shifting between his football successes, addiction and recovery. Football plays a central role in this book, but it is often linked with aspects of Kieft's personality and frailty – his insecurity, shame, guilt, sense of being powerless, and the constant pressure that he felt to achieve – which made him vulnerable for substance misuse and still affects his struggle to recover. By sharing his personal story about addiction and recovery, the reader can easily empathise with what Kieft went through and what thoughts and feelings this brought about. It is interesting to see that residential rehab per se was of limited value in helping Kieft on his recovery journey. His life story clearly illustrates the need for ongoing support to initiate and maintain recovery, which he has found in attending NA sessions every day.

From a theoretical and scientific point of view, this book is rather limited and provides few details about the recovery process and the recovery capital that helped him forward. For example, little is told about his time in rehab and especially what was (un)helpful in this programme to get him back on track. Also, his football career is described extensively to the point that it might be uninviting for readers who do not share this interest.

In brief, this biography provides an inviting and clear insight into a former sports star's life, including all the ups and downs regarding his professional football career as well as his cocaine addiction and recovery journey. It is a very personal story told by a former celebrity which may help to break the taboo around drugs and addiction and to create hope and belief in sustained recovery.

Anne Dekkers
Department of Special Education
Ghent University
Belgium
E-mail: anne.dekkers@ugent.be