

BY THE AUTHOR OF **ULTIMATE FOOTBALL HEROES**

JOHNNY BALL

**ACCIDENTAL FOOTBALL
GENIUS**



**MATT
OLDFIELD**

ILLUSTRATED BY
TIM WESSON



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WALKER
BOOKS





CHAPTER 1

THE BALLS: A FOOTBALL FAMILY

If I had to pick three words to describe my family,
I'd go for:

1. FOOTBALL
2. **FOOTBALL**
- and...
3. **FOOTBALL.**



“What else is there?” my dad likes to say. He also likes to say that if he hadn’t broken his right ankle playing for Tisbury Town when he was younger, he would have been a football superstar. “I’d have won the World Cup for sure!” he says often. I used to think this was a joke, but he never laughs when he says it.

Whenever Dad talks about his right ankle, Mum rolls her eyes and stops listening. She does that when I tell her my most horrible jokes too.

“Why was Tigger in the toilet?”

“I don’t know.”

“Because he was looking for Pooh!”

“Urgh, DISGUSTING!”

Mum used to be the captain of Tisbury Town Ladies, but she never boasts about being so good.

Tisbury Town is our local football club. We go to watch their games every weekend at the Railway Road Stadium. My older brother, Daniel, already plays for their youth team, the Tisbury Tigers Under-15s. He’s a speedy striker and, according to Dad, one of the best young players that our town has ever seen. I think Dad might be right about that one, for once.

And what about me? Well, I was named after two Tissbury Town legends:

BURY TIMES ✦



JOHNNY "THE ROCKET" JEFFRIES

Tissbury's
all-time top
scorer with
911 goals.

✦ **TISSBURY TIM**

NIGEL "HARD HANDS" ANDREWS



Tissbury's
Number
One until
he was
43 years
old. He
was so
good in
goal that
he didn't
even wear
gloves!

But don't worry about all that – just call me Johnny. Nice to meet you!

Luckily, I love football just as much as my mum, dad and brother do. I love football for lots and lots of reasons: the action, the excitement, even the offside rule. When a bunch of people kick a ball around a pitch, you just never know what's going to happen next, do you?

I love reading about football,

I love looking at pictures of football,

I love collecting stickers about football,

I love talking about football,

I love listening to other people talk about football (even my dad!),

I love watching football

and I love playing football.

If I didn't, life would be really hard in my family! Who would I talk to?

You're probably thinking, "Great, so what's your problem?"

Well, unfortunately, I'M NOT THAT GOOD AT FOOTBALL. There, I've said it!

I'm not saying I'm terrible at football. No, I'm a whole lot better than some kids I know – not

naming names *COUGH* Sammy Sharples
COUGH – but I'm never going to be the next
Johnny "The Rocket" Jeffries, or the next Daniel
"The Cannon" Ball. Sadly, the fact that I really love
football isn't enough to give me special powers on
the pitch.

I'll tell you a secret: it used to get me down a little.
But now things have changed. My whole world has
changed, and that's why I'm telling you my story.
Trust me – it's a story worth hearing!

Right, that's enough of a warm-up. It's time for
kick-off...

CHAPTER 2

BILLY THE BULLY

It all started on a super-normal Monday morning. I was just doing what I always do: kicking a stone to school and pretending I was “The Rocket”. Suddenly, I heard a big, bellowing voice behind me.

OI, JOHNNY!

Uh-oh! I didn't even need to turn around. I already knew who it was: Billy, or “Billy the Bully” as I usually call him.



Billy Newland has been making my life a misery ever since I started nursery. He's in the year above me now, but back then, when we had to play together, he used to steal my toys and kick my sandcastles. Now that he can walk and talk (well, sort of...), he's even more of a bully.

What did he want this time? I tried my best to ignore him, but that never works with Billy. When he has something to bellow, he doesn't stop until everyone hears it.

"Oi, Johnny, I'm talking to you!"

"S-sorry, I, err, didn't hear you." (Yeah, I'm a rubbish liar.)

"Whatever, I wanted to ask you something. What's your middle name?"

As Billy said it, he nudged Alex C next to him, the stupidest of his sidekicks. Billy always has to have an audience.

Double uh-oh! How did he know my secret? You see, I don't mind the Johnny – there are millions of boys called Johnny – but Nigel? How many boys do you know with that name? I bet I know the answer: ZERO! No one needed to know about the Nigel, and especially not Billy. Someone must have

told him – but who? Daniel? Tabia? They were the only two who knew my secret.

“It’s err...”

Think, Johnny, think! When I’m watching football, I have lots of great ideas (I’ll tell you more about them later), but when I’m walking to school on a Monday morning? Not so much.

“...N-Neil.”

“Really? Because I heard your middle name was Johnny ‘CAN’T KICK THE’ Ball!”

“No, it isn’t!” I wanted to shout back but, of course, I didn’t. I was just super relieved that he didn’t know about the Nigel.

“Good one, mate!” Alex C grunted like a pig with its snout still in the trough.

As if that was even funny. Billy thinks he’s the

funniest person on Planet Earth, but he’s really not.

He tells the same jokes so many times

that they’re not just old, they’re as

ANCIENT as the pyramids of Egypt!



The worst part is that everyone in the Tissbury Primary School playground laughs at my name every time. They don't do it because it's funny. They do it because they're too scared not to. Billy is the biggest kid in Year 6 and he makes sure everyone knows it.

It's the same with football. Billy walks around our school playground like he owns it, wearing the latest Tissbury Town kit and a pair of gleaming gold boots. But he doesn't even own the ball – it's Mo's!

Anyway, every lunchtime, Billy is:

the referee,

the captain,

the coach

and the penalty-taker.

It's like there's a school rule that says:

BILLY NEWLAND MUST NEVER LOSE A FOOTBALL MATCH.

And he isn't just annoying in the playground; no, even on my morning walk to school, Billy was there, making my life a misery.

Once they'd eventually stopped laughing at that terrible joke, I thought they would just barge straight past and leave me alone. That's what Billy

usually does. But, no, he wasn't finished yet.

"Oi, Johnny, you're not coming to the County Cup team trial tomorrow, are you?" he bellowed, even though I was standing right beside him. "Don't bother; you'll NEVER make it! Shame you didn't get your brother's skills!"

And with that, Billy and Alex C FINALLY swaggered off to school, snorting and snuffling like farmyard beasts.

Let me explain. In Years 5 and 6, the Tissbury Primary football team becomes a REALLY BIG DEAL. The Under-11s County Cup is all anyone talks about. Who should be in the team, who should be out of the team, who should be captain ... it goes on and on and on. Imagine the World Cup, but just for our local area. Actually, forget the word "just" – the County Cup is SUPER HUGE!

Every year, our school gets really excited, but we've only won the Cup twice in the last twenty years. And even that was only because Daniel scored all of Tissbury Primary's goals.

Now that I was in Year 5, it was my chance to follow in my brother's brilliant stud marks. Winning the County Cup was a moment that I had dreamed

about for years. When I closed my eyes at night, I could picture the party, the pride, the glory, the winners' medal and, of course, that glittering trophy...

But now that Billy was in Year 6, did that mean he would be captain of the Tissbury Primary team? If so, he was right; I would NEVER make it.

According to Billy, he's the best player ever. That's because he thinks football is all about power. His left foot is fiercer than a mighty pirate cannon. Billy "The Blaster" Newland – that's the nickname that he gave himself in Year 4. It didn't really catch on, though, despite him having it written on the back of his Tissbury Town shirt.

If Billy really HOOFs! the ball, it flies all the way from one end of the pitch to the other. It's best to get out of the way, unless you want to be in loads of pain and have a big, red, football-shaped tattoo. He's such a kicking king that the ball makes a special sound when he kicks it: **CLANK!**

Forget footwork or tactics. If you can't boot the ball really far, Billy thinks you're rubbish at football.

Well, who cares what he thinks? brave me argued with the less brave me inside my brain as I walked through the playground. *Billy knows nothing*

about PROPER football! If I want to get on the Tisbury Primary team and win the County Cup, then that's what I'm going to do. I'm not going to let anyone stop me, especially not a big bully like him.

At the trials, I was just going to have to show him by playing the best football of my life.