



# Johnny Ball: Accidental Football Genius

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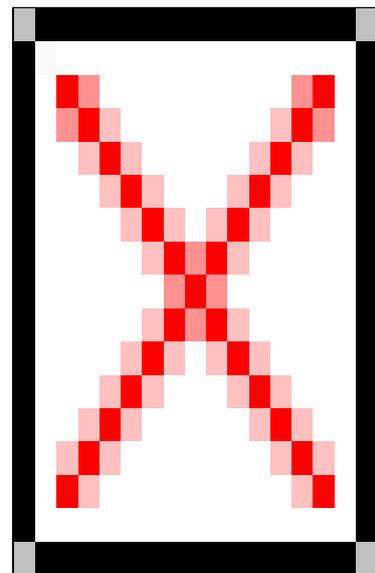
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Matt Oldfield's previous successes have been biographies of real footballers but, in this new series, he tells the story of a young football fanatic who lacks the talent to hit the big time as a player, but might just make it as a manager.

Johnny Ball is a familiar character to many school playgrounds: the kid who loves football more than anybody else - not just playing it but knowing everything there is to know about it - all the teams, all the players, and all the tactics. Johnny's whole family are obsessives, especially when it comes to the local team, Tisbury Town. Unfortunately, Johnny is not that good at football. His brother is, his best friend is, and his mum is, but he's just not that good. Fortunately, though, he has a few ideas that might help the school team.

Johnny lands himself a role as assistant to the school's clueless football manager. Mr Mann booms cliches like, 'No more schoolboy errors,' and 'That's it, lads, they don't like it up 'em.' He's not a student of the game, like Johnny, and benefits from Johnny's bright ideas. With Johnny's help, the school team embarks upon an exciting cup run. Most of the story follows the same pattern: build up to game, play game, analyse game. It's quite a predictable journey, but there is some authentic matchday drama, which is well described.

As well as the shouty, aggressive coach, the school team also has the big bully captain and the tough-tackling midfielder, but there are some refreshingly original characters, too. The silky skills and goalie saves come from unconventional sources, for example. Johnny has to manage his players' tactics and positioning but also has to work hard off the pitch. Buoyed by the advice of his talented older brother and adorably kooky grandfather, he sets about improving the friendship and camaraderie of the team, which isn't easy when there's a bully on the team.

Johnny's football journey may be accidental, but it's also a determined one. Nothing will stop him from carving a football role for himself and, with managerial vacancies common in the cut-throat world of football, it is very likely that he will be showing off his genius in more books in the future.

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