

Soccer At Sandford

Rob Childs

Random House Children's Publishers UK

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

1. Kick-Off

2. Seven-a-Side

3. League Ups and Downs

4. Up for the Cup

5. Mudlarks

6. Cup Cliffhanger

7. Winter Tactics

8. Struck Down

9. Cup Clash with Tanby

10. Shooting Practice

11. The Championship Decider

Appendix

About the Author

Also by Rob Childs

Copyright

About the Book

Jeff Thompson is delighted to be picked as captain of Sanford Primary School's football team. With an enthusiastic new teacher and a team full of talent - not least that of loner Gary Clarke, with his flashes of goal-scoring brilliance - he is determined to lead Sandford to success. Their goal is the important League Championship - and their main rivals are Tanby, who they must first meet in a vital Cup-tie . . .

From kick-off to the final whistle, through success and disappointment, penalties and corners, to the final nail-biting matches of the season, follow the action and excitement as the young footballers of Sandford Primary School learn how to develop their skills and mould together as a real team - a team who are determined to win by playing the best football possible!

SOCCER AT SANDFORD

Rob Childs

**ILLUSTRATED BY
TIM MARWOOD**

RHCP DIGITAL

For all young footballers

1

Kick-Off

'HI, SCOTTY. BACK to school again!'

'You don't have to remind me,' Jeff's best friend replied with a grimace. 'What are you so cheerful about anyway? We've got a new teacher today, remember.'

The two boys wandered up the village road towards Sandford Primary School.

'I know, I know,' responded Jeff Thompson, laughing. 'He can't be too bad - he *is* taking us for football as well!'

'Huh, it's all right for you people in Year Six,' muttered Scott who was just as soccer mad. 'It's not fair that us younger ones never get a chance to play in the school team.'

'Well, don't worry, I felt just the same last year. Your turn will come.'

At morning assembly a sea of faces swung round to inspect the newcomer as Mr Turner, the Headmaster, introduced him to the children. 'We haven't enjoyed much sporting success here for several years,' he boomed on, 'so let's wish Mr Kenning and his teams good luck this season. Try your best, that's the thing, everybody.'

In the classroom afterwards Mr Kenning was kept busy settling himself and the pupils in after the long summer holidays. But when the playtime bell sounded and most of the class trooped cheerfully out of the door Scott, Jeff and two other lads, Ricky Collier and Dale Gregson, grouped themselves around his desk.

Jeff spoke first. 'Do you think we'll have a good team this year, Mr Kenning?'

The teacher laughed. 'Well, I shall have to see you all play before I can answer that question. Did any of you play last year?'

'None of us,' answered Dale. 'We were too young.'

Mr Kenning looked surprised. 'That's a pity, it would have been good experience for you. Age won't matter from now on anyway, boys, it's ability that counts. Anyone who's good enough will be considered for a team place as far as I'm concerned.'

The lads were delighted to hear that, especially Scott Peters, who suddenly became very enthusiastic about school.

'But everyone will have to keep playing well in order to stay in,' continued the teacher. 'I'm looking forward to seeing how many stars we have here!'

They all grinned. 'We can't wait to start,' said Ricky. 'We've been dreaming about it all through the holidays.'

Mr Kenning immediately became very popular as the other younger boys quickly heard the good news about their unexpected opportunity to play for the school. He put a notice on the sports board for footballers to write their names for practices. Very soon over thirty names appeared, mostly from his own Class 2 and Mrs Cowper's Class 1, but also some from the lower junior classes.

'Any talent here?' he asked Mr Turner, showing him the list.

'Oh yes, I've seen some of them play during games lessons. But they'll need a lot of encouragement and help. It'll be a real treat for them this year to have someone as keen as you to improve their football. It should make quite a difference.'

'They're certainly raring to go already.'

'Jeff Thompson especially, no doubt,' smiled the Head. 'He ought to have been able to play last year.'

He skimmed through the list again, picking out various names. 'There is one missing, however, which should be on.'

'Oh, who's that?' asked Mr Kenning with interest.

'Gary . . . Gary Clarke. But you'll soon get to hear of him.'

There was a hint of warning in his voice that surprised the new teacher.

A few more names were added to the list on the noticeboard later that day, and right at the bottom in very careless fashion was scrawled simply . . . Gary.

'I'll see what you all can do today,' said Mr Kenning at the first practice. 'Then in future you'll mostly be in smaller groups trying to improve your skills.'

They had been sorted out into their favourite positions for the trial game, with Ricky Collier in goal for the Greens, while a youngster from Year Four had volunteered as keeper for the Whites.

'We've got a much stronger team than the Greens,' chuckled Dale to his pal and fellow striker Graham Ford. 'We'll tear their defence apart!'

'Hope so,' said Graham, his black face breaking up into a wide grin, 'but Ricky's pretty good, you know.'

Jeff ran up alongside. 'Where's Gary? Isn't he playing?'

'Told me he'd forgotten his boots and just went off home,' explained Dale, with a shrug.

The teacher gathered the boys together before the start. 'I want to see you all helping one another during the game. Find space and call for the ball if you're in a good position for a pass.'

The game kicked off with Graham sweeping the ball out to Dale on the left wing. But before he'd properly controlled it, ginger-haired full back Jimmy McDowell came in with great determination to win the ball.

'Well done, Jimmy,' called Mr Kenning. 'That's the way, mark tightly.'

Jeff Thompson immediately impressed in midfield for the Whites, tackling strongly, taking players on and using the ball intelligently. He seemed to have more time than the

others to do what he wanted, always a sign of a good footballer.

‘He’d make an inspiring captain,’ thought the teacher. ‘He has authority on the field and seems a popular lad too.’

Scott, Jimmy and Ricky all showed up well in the hard-pressed Green defence. Ricky’s performance was especially interesting, as his position was crucial. Mistakes in goal were fatal, and a team needed a confident, reliable keeper. He looked very promising, coming out time and again to narrow an angle or to save a shot, like when he stopped an excellent effort from Graham right on the line with a brilliant reflex dive.

‘Well saved, Ricky,’ shouted Jeff. ‘We just can’t beat you today.’

But they did at last, just before the half-time breather, when Dale pulled the ball back square for midfield man John Robinson to steer into the far corner.

After several pieces of advice and encouragement to both sides the Greens surprisingly equalized with their first attack of the second half. Right winger David Woodward tried a long-range shot which crept just inside a post with young Robin Tainton unable to reach it.

As the game went on, however, the White team’s overall strength proved decisive, with further goals coming from Graham and then Jeff.

The teacher suddenly noticed a lone figure appearing round the corner of the school building. He recognized Gary Clarke and went over to him as the match continued. He didn’t give much of an excuse, but Mr Kenning sensed something a little deeper behind the boy’s apparently flippant attitude, perhaps a note of regret at missing out on the action.

‘I expected you here, Gary. I’ve been told that you can play quite well, but you’ll have to show me that for yourself.’

The boy looked down at the ground, but Mr Kenning continued, wanting to set their future relationship on firm

lines. 'If you don't turn up you are only letting yourself down. And if you're not interested, then certainly neither am I. It's up to you entirely.' He let the message sink in. 'Do you understand, Gary?'

Gary nodded, but gave no indication of what may have been passing through his mind. He brightened up visibly, though, when he was offered the chance to show his skills. Quickly he slipped into a spare green shirt to join in for the last part of the game, to the obvious annoyance of some of the other players.

'Thanks for turning up,' Scott remarked, sarcastically. 'You needn't have bothered.'

'Shut up, Peters, you're not doing any good without me.'

'No arguing, you two. Get on with the game,' cut in Mr Kenning straightaway.

But when Gary received the ball for the first time he tried to be too clever. He jinked past two tackles but then took on one man too many and the chance was wasted.

'Not too much, Gary,' called the teacher. 'It's a team game. Look for possible passes if there's time.'

The level of ability shown by many of the boys in the match had been high. Graham and Dale's partnership up front looked especially sharp as they linked up once more to provide Graham with a second goal near the end.

Mr Kenning delayed the final whistle a minute later when Gary broke away. This time he did play a neat one-two pass with David Woodward, then burst past a weary defender. He looked as though he had taken it too far, but suddenly in a flash of obvious class he screwed the ball back into the goal from a very narrow angle.



‘Well, he’s an individualist and no mistake,’ the teacher reflected, with a sigh. ‘Very talented, but we’ll have to wait to see whether he fits in with the rest of the team.’

‘Nice goal, Gary,’ called Jeff through the crowd to the boy trailing behind the cheerful group on their way back to the changing room. The others were all chattering amongst themselves about their performances, leaving the latecomer to bring up the rear on his own.

Mr Kenning heard the remark, and the boy’s generous attitude convinced him that Jeff would be an ideal team captain.