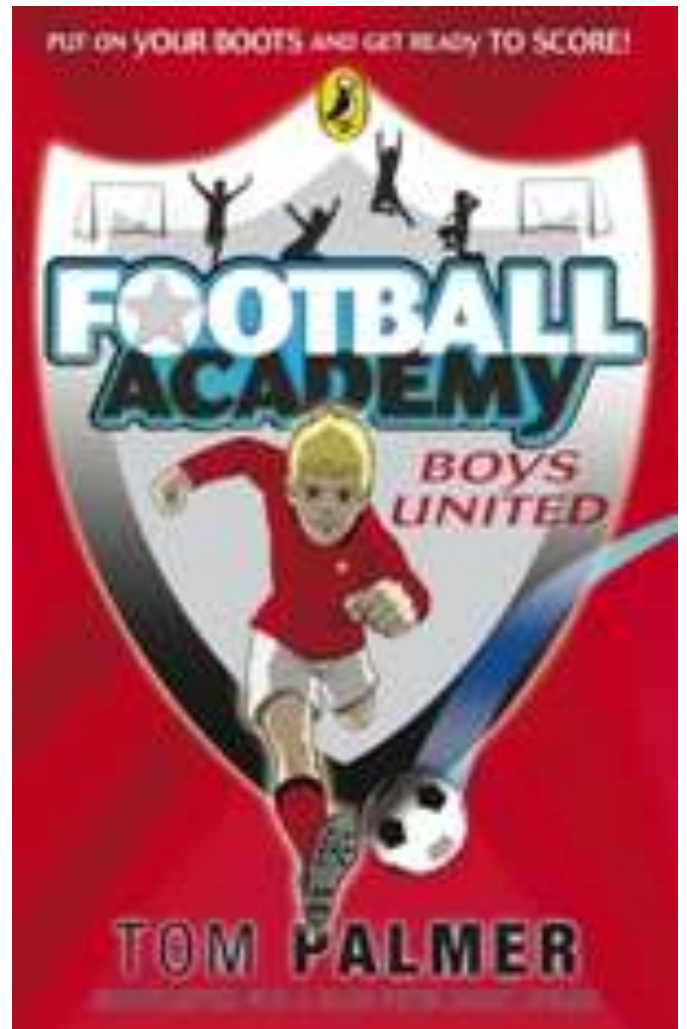


FOOTBALL ACADEMY 1 : *BOYS UNITED* by TOM PALMER

**Put on your boots
and get ready to
score!**



Jake

Ever since he could walk, Jake Oldfield had played football. And ever since he could *remember*, he had dreamed of being a professional footballer. Not because he wanted to be rich and famous like Stephen Gerrard or Wayne Rooney. It wasn't that. He wanted to be a footballer because he *loved* football.

If football could be his *job*, that would be great.

He didn't want to go to a boring office every morning like his mum. Or to a factory like his dad. Both of them indoors all day. Jake wanted to be on football pitches: running, tackling and scoring goals.

Jake collected the ball in midfield and looked up.

There was no-one from his village team ahead of him. Nor at the side of him. Just three defenders from the other team, then the keeper and the goal.

It was down to Jake to win this game.

When the first defender approached, Jake waited for him to come really close, then tapped the ball forward, sprinting past him.

One down, two to go.

The second defender came clattering forwards, lunging into Jake at full speed. But Jake just side-stepped him and the defender ended up on his backside in a muddy puddle.

Two down, one to go.

The third defender was standing perfectly still. Waiting.

Jake had tried to get past him several times already during the match. But this defender was quick and had whipped it off Jake's feet, whether Jake put it to his left or to his right.

So this time . . . Jake chipped him.

For a second the defender didn't know what to do. He just stood there.

And a second was all Jake needed. With the ball in the air, he ran past the last defender and into the penalty area. And as the ball came down, Jake hammered it towards the top left corner of the goal.

The keeper dived. But it was no use. The ball was in the back of the net before he hit the ground and Jake was wheeling away to celebrate his winner.

After the game, the team manager came over.

‘That, Jake, was the best goal you’ve ever scored for us.’

‘Thanks Mr Newbrook,’ Jake said.

‘It’s a shame it might be your last.’

Jake looked down at his feet. He didn’t know what to say.

‘It’s the trial at United this week, isn’t it?’ Mr Newbrook said.

‘In two days,’ Jake said. It was all he’d been able to think about for days. ‘I’m sorry.’

Mr Newbrook laughed. ‘Don’t be sorry, Jake. We’re all *thrilled* for you. If you get a place at United, it’ll be one of the best things that have happened in this village. We’ve never had anyone play for a professional team before – let alone in the Premiership.’

Jake looked at his team mates who had gathered at the side of the pitch. If he *did* get a place at United he wouldn’t be allowed to play for this team any more. Only for United. And that made him sad.

But the idea of being a United player made him happier.

‘Get some practice in with your dad the rest of this week, Jake,’ Mr Newbrook said. ‘Make sure you’re sharp.’

Jake looked over at Dad, who was standing at the side of the pitch. Dad gave him a thumbs up.

‘I will,’ Jake said, turning to Mr Newbrook again.

‘And Jake?’

‘Yeah?’

‘Just remember that it’s what *kind* of player you are that matters. Not whether you’re tall or small.’

Jake smiled. Mr Newbrook had read his mind.

The trial at United wasn’t Jake’s first.

He had tried out at City, Wanderers and Rovers before. But every time he got that far, he was told that he was a very good player . . . but that he was too small to make it.

‘I will, Mr Newbrook,’ Jake said. ‘And thanks.’

‘You’re welcome,’ Mr Newbrook said. ‘Go and make us proud.’

Boys United is the first book in the Football Academy series and left-winger Jake Oldfield is the hero. Jake plays for his village team. He is good enough to play at a much higher level, but, whenever he has a trial at a professional club, they tell him ‘You’re good: but you’re too small.’

But – with his dad’s support – Jake keeps trying. He doesn’t listen to them.

And, one day, he gets offered a trial at Premier League United. And what could be his last chance...

Read on...

Follow Jake’s footballing adventures and live the dream in *Boys United* by Tom Palmer available at bookshops and libraries.

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