**More Than A Game**

“Who is a better football player – Jamie Johnson or Lionel Messi?’

That was a question that a girl asked me while we were having a q & a session at a recent school visit.

I had to think quite hard about it. The level of questions that pupils come up with can be quite stunning at times.

‘Messi...’ was my answer. ‘But only at the moment...because Jamie Johnson believes he can as god as Messi and, with enough hard work, focus and application, there’s a chance he might be right.’

Of course we weren’t really talking about football. We were talking about the endeavour that lies behind transforming your dreams into reality.

In the same way, the Jamie Johnson series is not ‘just’ about football. It’s about a kid growing up, who has never had it easy but who wants to make something of himself and hopes that the people around of him will be proud of him someday.

The football is the canvas that allows us to draw upon these subjects. It’s the way in.

I don’t believe there is any subject which should not be talked about with the kids. I often refer to never having lived with my dad and how that may or may not have affected my live....It’s also a constant them in the Jamie Johnson books.

Is it an appropriate subject for discussion with young kids? Of course. It happens to so many of us so why wouldn’t we discuss it?

But we need to do it in the right way.

‘How did you feel when your parents got divorced?’ a seven year old boy asked me in private at the end of another one of a session in Northampton. He was just coming to terms with the same thing happening to him. I told him how I felt, how Jamie felt and asked him how he felt. And he opened up. Clearly he wanted to talk about it – hence him asking the question in the first place. I enjoyed the conversation and the boy’s honesty and sensitivity made me feel privileged that he had chosen to share his feelings with me.

Final Whistle is the last book in the Jamie Johnson series – for the time being at least. But I will still continue to make the school visits around the country to talk about the books, football and anything else that the pupils feel like talking about. I enjoy the visits and I learn as much from them as anyone else.

And when, at my next q & a, I am asked (as I surely will be): ‘Are you ever going to write about something other than football?’ I think I’ll nod and say: ‘I already do.’

Dan Freedman is the author of the Jamie Johnson series of football novels. FINAL WHISTLE, the climax to the series, has just been published by Scholastic.

Find out more about Dan at [www.DanFreedman.co.uk](http://www.DanFreedman.co.uk)