JOHNNY HAYNES

PORTRAIT OF A FOOTBALL GENIUS

JAMES GARDNER

FOREWORD BY SIR MICHAEL PARKINSON

JOHNNY HAYNES

PORTRAIT OF A FOOTBALL GENIUS

FOREWORD BY SIR MICHAEL PARKINSON

JAMES GARDNER

Contents

Introduction

Edinburgh, 17 October 2005

IT was Johnny Haynes' 71st birthday. There was a winter chill in the air as he rose as usual at 4am with his wife, Avril, to go to her first contract cleaning job of the day. She supervised the six cleaners there and Johnny lent a hand with the general cleaning. At 5.30am they returned home and he went swimming in the pool and exercised in the gym, both attached to the block of flats where they lived, before having breakfast together. Even in his seventies, he liked to stay in shape.

On his birthday, they normally went out for a meal with friends in the evening but this time Johnny wanted to do something different. As his old team, Fulham, were on TV he suggested having a meal in and watching the match. For a treat, he asked Avril, a vegetarian, if she would cook him some lamb chops.

After breakfast, he dropped Avril off at her dry cleaning business and returned home to receive and make phone calls. The longest was from his former

playing partner and close friend, Trevor 'Tosh' Chamberlain. They always spoke on birthdays.

'What are you up to then, John?' Tosh asked.

'Not too much, you know what it's like at our age. I'll pick up Avril later and we'll have some dinner.'

'Avril? Don't you mean the wife!'

'All right, cocky!'

They both had a good laugh. Although he and Avril had been together for over two decades, they had only married the previous year.

One hour later Johnny went to Avril's shop to collect her.

They left in his Renault Megane, ran a few errands and bought the chops.

'So, who are Fulham playing later?' she asked.

'Charlton, away. London derby,' he replied. And those were the last words he ever said.

At approximately 2.55pm on Dalry Road, Johnny's foot suddenly jammed on to the accelerator. The car veered across the street and careered into the back of an empty van parked outside a pharmacy, near the junction with Caledonian Place.

He had suffered a brain haemorrhage. Neither Johnny nor Avril had worn seat belts and the impact sent them flying. Avril remained conscious, seeing a lot of dust in the air. As she hadn't been in a car accident before, she thought it was her cleaning chemicals in the boot of the car.

Fearing the car would explode, she got out as quickly as possible. She knew Johnny was injured and that she wouldn't be able to get him out from her side. Although

hurt, she crawled around to his. As luck would have it, two of her employees were in a pub opposite and saw what was happening. Everyone rushed out to assist. Johnny's heart stopped beating but a passing doctor resuscitated him. He was taken by ambulance to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and put on life support. The press mistakenly reported that he was already dead.

Avril was taken to the hospital by ambulance and placed on a stretcher in a side ward. She had five broken ribs and a punctured lung. Her condition was described as 'stable'. A friend of hers, a surgeon at the hospital, came to see her. She asked him to go and find Johnny and see how he was, to tell her the truth about his condition. He came back and said Johnny was critical, that the prognosis was bleak. The extent of the brain trauma and the massive chest injuries meant no hope of recovery.

The next day, after some of his organs had been donated, including his liver to a young boy, the life support machine was turned off. It was 18 October.

Johnny Haynes, ex-captain of the England football team and one of the most outstanding footballers of his generation, was dead.

Chapter One

The Early Years

JOHN Norman Haynes was born on 17 October 1934 in Kentish Town, north-west London, an area whose previous inhabitants included George Orwell and Karl Marx. He was the only child of Ed and Rose Haynes who lived in a semi-detached house converted into flats in Edmonton, a typical, working class area, within walking distance of White Hart Lane, home to Tottenham Hotspur FC.

His earliest memories were of the Second World War and of his father, a shoe-tree manufacturer, being absent in the army for the last two years in Burma. His mother, Rose, worked in a munitions factory. When the bombs started dropping during the London Blitz in September 1940 she and Johnny were evacuated to a small village in Essex, returning home after only four days.

Despite the nights spent in air raid shelters and days searching the skies in fear Johnny could not remember a time when he was not playing football. He spent all his

spare time playing it, only returning home when hungry. Initially Rose was not keen on the sport which brought her son home ragged and muddy, but soon became a 'terrific enthusiast'. Johnny would practise in the street for hours with a tennis ball until he mastered it. After that, in his own words, 'a football was easy'. Before long he was the star inside-forward of the Houndsfield Road Primary School football team in Edmonton.

In 1942, Johnny was evacuated to family friends in Manchester, an odd place to be evacuated to and just as likely to be bombed as Edmonton. Although he was treated kindly by them there was no chance to play football. While he missed playing, his former team-mates missed him.

Six months later a boy from his primary school team turned up at his mother's house asking for Johnny to return as they hadn't won a match since his departure. Rose wrote to her husband stationed in the army at Oxford and the following weekend he took a 48-hour pass and made the 400-mile journey to collect his evacuee son. The absence had not dulled his skills and on his return, Johnny scored ten goals for his school in his first match.

His return coincided with the new threat of 'doodle-bugs' and flying bombs, 15 of which fell on Edmonton causing devastating damage.

Looking back, Johnny wrote in his autobiography, *It's All in the Game*:

'I had a tremendously happy early life... My mother had to cope with me alone during the war and when he came home my father probably felt he had to make up

somehow for the lost years... I never wanted for good food or clothes or football boots or a ball, and what more did I want except the love that was so freely and warmly given to me?'

It is clear his mother was the more dominant personality. He describes her as 'being quick with her opinions and always game for a good time'. His father, who became a telephone engineer, was quieter. But he was an attentive father, helping Johnny with his paper round every day and as devoted to him as Rose. Ed had also been a useful inside-forward for a local amateur team and Johnny had memories of watching him play. Of the two parents, it was his more reserved dad who he seemed to take after.

Johnny was playing in his school team at the age of seven, even though the average age was ten or eleven, and could do most of the basic things with a ball. Although naturally gifted, he still practised and practised and managed to fit in about three hours a day. Childhood friend Peter Grosch, who grew up with him in the 1930s, remembers him as a very mild-mannered boy who just loved playing football.

'When we were younger his dad drew numbered circles on a brick wall for him to kick a ball at. He always did it after school, and one day my mum chased after him with a broom because she was fed up with the noise!'

Before Johnny was a teenager he also played impromptu games with coats as goalposts in the nearby Jubilee Park which backed on to Hadleigh Road, where he lived:

'There we had scratch matches with me playing against men – well, they seemed like men to me although they were probably only 14 or 15 years old, but I used to muck in with them. I was knocked about plenty and there would often be fights. Not that I was throwing many punches. I took good care to have a friend who had a big brother.'

Phil Jesshope, a friend, remembers that every Sunday afternoon lots of boys would meet in the park to play football. 'Nine times out of ten John would bring the ball. He was a nice little lad but a bit greedy with the ball. He wouldn't pass it to anyone very much and dribbled through everybody! At about 4.30pm John's mother would come out and shout, "Your tea's ready, John." He used to take the ball with him until a girl who lived in his street said she would bring it back to him later...'

By the end of the war Johnny had won a scholarship to Latymer High Grammar School in Edmonton. A classmate of Johnny's, Claudette Micklem (née Blaydon), remembers, 'Johnny and I were both placed in the B form and he sat in the desk behind me. I was always worried that he would put my pigtails in his inkwell which he teased me he would do. I remember between lessons he would put a tennis ball between his feet and jump up and catch it which earnt him the nickname "Froggy" Haynes! I was tall and he was short and not interested in girls. He was a nice little chap with a cheeky grin and was always out playing... Everybody admired him so much.'

The school was divided into houses on the public school model and Johnny was in Keats House. Margaret

Wood (née Bailey), in the same house and year, recalls Johnny asking her to the first-year school dance: 'You had to go with someone or you couldn't go... I think we did a waltz or something! Afterwards he insisted on walking me home even though I lived a long way from him. He was great fun and we used to get on very well although he wasn't really interested in girls.'

Norman Hawkes first met Johnny during the war:

'I was in an adjoining primary school. We didn't have a playing field so we used Houndsfield Road's field for playing. Because of the war, the government had removed all the railings in the park. There was no traffic then so we could play across the road. The police occasionally moved us on. I think our entire life was dedicated to kicking a football or tennis ball around.

'When I was about to go to Latymer I heard on the grapevine that Johnny Haynes would be going there as well. I used to play with him and he had an outstanding ability... My father, like all fathers, would come along to watch. On one occasion, he disappeared to watch another match where John was playing. He said to me, "One day that boy will play for England."

'In one game against another school we scored one or two goals quite quickly. John would go and waltz round the opposition and the rest of us were surplus to requirements. In the back of our net there was a spare ball so there would be three or four of us giving shots to Ken Mitchell, our goalie, as he was getting cold doing nothing. Our PE teacher, George Briscoe, read the riot act to us. This wasn't what gentlemen should do!'

Once Johnny's reputation had spread, parents would gently drift over to where Johnny was playing and form a crowd. Norman also remembers Johnny had a 'minder' at Latymer, Alan Hewitt, who was twice his size! It was an in-joke. 'If someone did something wrong that annoyed his majesty he would threaten to set Hewitt on him. We used to say "No, please, not him John!"'

In their lunch breaks, Norman sometimes went with Johnny to spend their dinner money at a rather seedy snooker hall, about a mile away, where you could get such delicacies as beans on toast. They used to dribble a tennis ball all the way there and back.

Len Bentley, a sixth-former, had the job of organising the Keats House football team:

'The difficulty was we had just two footballers who played for the school first XI and one for the second XI. I had heard about someone in the third form who was special, so I went to watch him. He was very small, and the ball seemed to come up to his knee, but his talent was obvious. So, I picked him to play in our next match against Ashworth, who had seven of the school first team. The game was played mostly in our penalty area, and the goals started to go in. Somehow, we got the ball up to Johnny Haynes, who waltzed through the entire Ashworth defence to stroke the ball into the net. We had scored! Well, he had. I can't remember the final score but it was probably something like 13-1.'

Derek Sweetsur, who had started at Latymer in 1944, was in another house:

'I did have the pleasure of playing against him on the soccer field. The pleasure perhaps was a bit muted

at the time as it was almost impossible to deprive him of the ball! He could dribble, send you the wrong way and take the ball past you easily. At that age, he was a bit reluctant to pass the ball as I guess he thought that might be a useless gesture!'

His school reports indicated he was considered quite intelligent but his concentration wandered on to other things. 'This was entirely wrong,' Johnny rebuffed. 'My mind was only on one thing – football.'

Football, as he later said, was in his blood and from a very young age all he wanted to do was to become a professional, a fact recognised by his parents who encouraged him and quickly understood his obsession. They watched all his matches and did not try to dissuade him from a career, which at that time was short, low-paid and precarious.

At a local level, from an early age, he was soon making a name for himself as an inside-forward. A nearby greengrocer reputedly gave him an orange every time he scored a hat-trick.

In 1946, he was selected for the Edmonton District Boys junior team, a side made up from all the local schools. (He had been turned down at a trial the previous year because of his size.) Although by far the smallest player in it, he was appointed captain. And it was here he learnt a very important lesson from his first proper football manager; a lesson that would define his whole career:

'Mr Sanders showed me the light. He let me see that dribbling was by and large a waste of time and energy. He proved to me that the ball can run faster than the

man, that "send it, don't take it" was a sound football philosophy.'

Up until then Johnny's entire game had been based on dribbling. The advice led him to being a more intelligent player, a player who could see things on the pitch that few others could. From a very young age he was blessed with what is technically called peripheral vison, knowing exactly where everyone was on the pitch before he received the ball. He could also kick the ball accurately with either foot which he later told Hugh McIlvanney of *The Observer,* 'wasn't something I had to practise. It was always there.'

The Edmonton District Boys teams trained and also played matches at White Hart Lane twice a week and he often turned out for both junior and senior teams. Matches were on Saturday mornings and in the afternoon he played for the Boys' Brigade. The district teams would enter five or six different competitions and played at Football League grounds such as Leicester City and West Ham United, often before big crowds. When Edmonton Boys played Leicester Boys at Filbert Street in 1947, they were watched by a crowd of 22,000. The following year, the local paper, the *Tottenham & Edmonton Weekly Herald* showed a picture of Johnny and his team-mates after they had drawn 2-2 against Walsall Boys at White Hart Lane in the fifth round of the English Shield. His display was described as 'outstanding'. For the replay at Walsall the team was followed by 500 supporters. They eventually got knocked out of the competition by Norwich in a replay at White Hart Lane watched by a crowd of over 12,000. So, from a very

young age he experienced the atmosphere and bustle of professional football.

Because he was regularly selected to play for Edmonton Schoolboys, the PE teacher at Latymer decided he should not be in the school team. It would be unfair to other boys who would be replaced by Johnny when the Edmonton team did not have a match. For this reason, his name is rarely mentioned in school match reports. Despite this, his friend Phil Jesshope contrived to get him into the school team whenever possible. 'He duly joined us for many away fixtures, when I knew the PE teacher would be at school watching the home games!' he confessed.

Ken Mitchell, who played in goal for Edmonton Boys and was a friend of Johnny's at Latymer, believes that 'Johnny's father was the driving force behind him. Johnny did everything to try and get his approval. He wanted Johnny to be a success at football and Johnny was going to be a success. It didn't matter if he didn't do his homework or not. He [Johnny] was terribly determined. Everything was for football although he was a good cricketer.' In Johnny's autobiography, he admitted that if he had no one else to play with, his father and he 'would go into the park at the end of the street, push sticks into the ground and dribble round them or shoot through them'.

Ken often roomed with him on away matches for the district team and for London Boys. 'We were given new holdalls, uniforms etc., and were very well looked after. We didn't understand the privileges we got for playing football.' He remembers how when they won

the 'Star Shield' in 1949, as a reward they were taken to the famous Windmill Theatre in London 'which we didn't really understand' and then had a meal and a presentation at the Waldorf Hotel.

To Ken and Norman, Johnny seemed a natural footballer, who didn't appear to work hard at it and was 'way above everybody else'. They were both early witnesses to his later legendary hands-on-hips look of disgust when things went wrong on the pitch. This even showed itself in other sports.

Norman remembers an occasion when he was just getting his wicketkeeping gloves on when Johnny edged his first ball and it flew into them without Norman knowing anything about it. 'He was very angry at such a fluke and miserable about not making any runs.'

'He just loved', said Ken, 'to win at whatever he did, including organising a choir to win a house competition by getting some good singers with the rest miming!'

At the age of six Johnny's parents took him to see Millwall play but he had cried to go home. By the time he was playing for the district teams he was an Arsenal supporter and the walls of his bedroom were plastered with photographs of their players.

His Uncle Jack had a season ticket and used to take him to Highbury. (During the war the ground had been used as an ack-ack base and Arsenal had played at White Hart Lane.) According to his father, 'he was always raving about them'. His favourite player was Jimmie Logie, who though small in stature, was a dynamic inside-forward like himself. He loved watching Eddie Baily playing for Spurs, who also helped out with the

coaching of the district teams. Another particular hero was the great Wilf Mannion of Middlesbrough. He saw him play at Highbury and White Hart Lane.

'He really was something else,' Johnny said. 'His balance, his work-rate and the inch-perfect passes made a huge impression on me.' He could have been talking about himself.