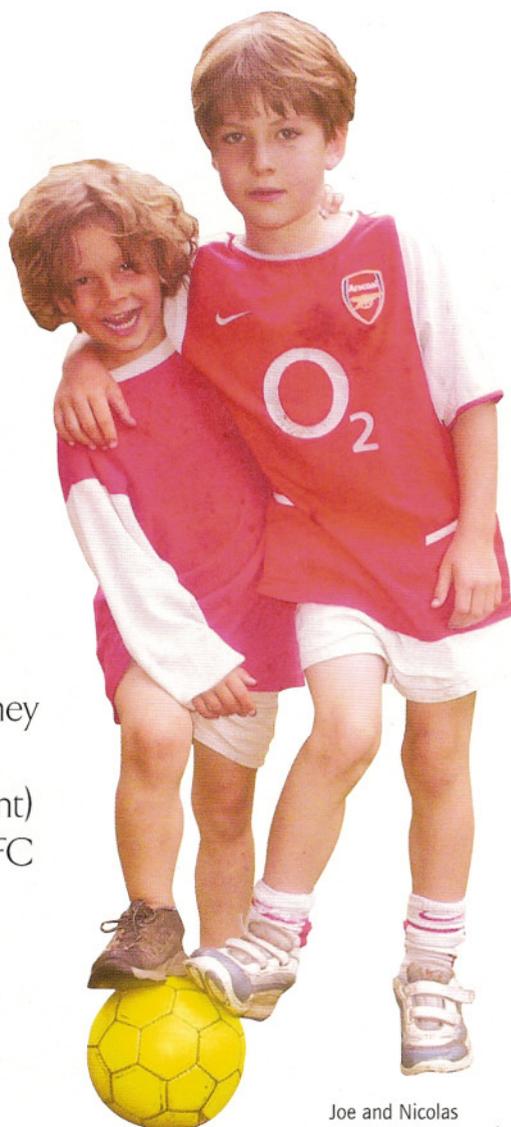


Football *crazy*



Joe and Nicolas

Chiswick Community School. 'Tom and Bosco are brilliant,' says Joe, age seven. 'They teach us loads of skills and are really kind too.' 'Yeah, they're brilliant,' confirms younger brother and echo, Nicolas. 'And I'm brilliant at football too,' he adds modestly.

Tom and Bosco, like all the Brentford coaches, are FA qualified and amazingly enthusiastic. 'It's great to see the development of the kids,' says Tom. 'Not just their football skills, but their personal development. They are mixing with other children, and during the holiday coaching sessions they spend five hours away from their parents. It's a

big step, but they cope well and never want to go home at 3 o'clock.' Plus it's great exercise at a time when the nation's children are turning into lardy TV addicts with a health time bomb ticking away inside them.

Children from five to 14 are welcome at both weekend and holiday sessions, which are split into groups by age and ability. 'In the holiday sessions the kids do skills and drills in the morning – passing, turning, dribbling, shooting,' explains Tom. 'Then there's a tournament in the afternoon.'

That's the bit my boys love. Joe regularly polishes up his two silver medals won at previous sessions and has to be persuaded to take them off at bedtime (he doesn't see potential nocturnal strangulation as a valid objection). But are there tears before full-time for the kids who don't get a medal? 'Each child gets a goodie bag so they all feel they go home with something,' says Tom.

On the Friday afternoon after five days' footballing there are also trophies for

Do you have a young, aspiring Beckham or Rooney desperate to practise their ball skills in your front room? Jane Yettram discovers a life (and ornament) saving youth coaching programme at Brentford FC

Pity me, for I am a mother of two boys. Joe and Nicolas despair because I can't immediately describe Birmingham City's away strip. They quiz me about whether I'd select Patrick Vieira or Zinedine Zidane to play central midfield in my dream team. And they can't understand why I prefer cotton Mini Boden to inflammable nylon football strips.

I admit it. I don't know my Arsene Wenger from my El Tel. But I do know – as another vase crashes from the mantelpiece during a tense penalty shoot-out in the sitting room (a red-card offence in my book but do my boys care?) – that football crazy kids into a small London house and garden don't go. Luckily, I also know the solution! Brentford FC's superb Football In The Community (FITC) coaching programme.

Awarded charter standard by the FA as recognition of both the calibre of coaching and the standard of childcare, Brentford's courses have been running for 15 years and take place in many venues across Ealing and Hounslow. Joe and Nicolas take to the pitch on Saturdays during term-time as well as during the half terms and holidays. And they idolise two of the coaches who put the kids through their paces at our local venue,





Brentford Manager Martin Allen signing autographs after a coaching session

'They are mixing with other children, and during the holiday coaching session they spend five hours away from their parents. It's a big step, but they cope well and never want to go home at 3 o'clock'

the players of the week. But, as Nick Rundell, Brentford FITC's enthusiastic community officer, points out: 'The player of the week trophy can be awarded for fair play as well as soccer skills.'

The sessions at Chiswick Community School attract children from many different backgrounds and, encouragingly, include a number of feisty girls. Delphine says she loves defending – but also charging forward for goals and glory and Molly is a mad-keen Brentford fan who can be seen in her Bees strip hurtling up and down the pitch ('Brentford is the best! It's great training with them). The Brentford coaching team also runs special training sessions which are just for girls, if they are talent-spotted at the mixed sessions. Boys who show good potential are also invited onto an Advanced Training Programme – Matt Somner, who made it all the way through to Brentford's first team and the Welsh U-21 squad, started with the FITC sessions.

So there is hope for my boys yet. At least when the next window is cracked by a flying football I can dream of the time when they are earning me big bucks at Brentford and beyond, and can keep Mummy in the manner to which she would like to become accustomed. ❀

Brentford FC's holiday sessions at Chiswick Community School cost £11 per day and run 10am-3pm – the last session this summer is on Friday 3 September and children can come for single days or a full week. Saturday football sessions last one hour and cost £43 per term. For more details and information about other venues and future courses call 020 8758 9430. Children's football courses are also run by QPR (020 8740 2509).

If you've got the Brentford bug, remember to check out the fascinating exhibition at Gunnersbury Park Museum (020 8992 1612) from 7 September, which celebrates 100 years of the club at Griffin Park.