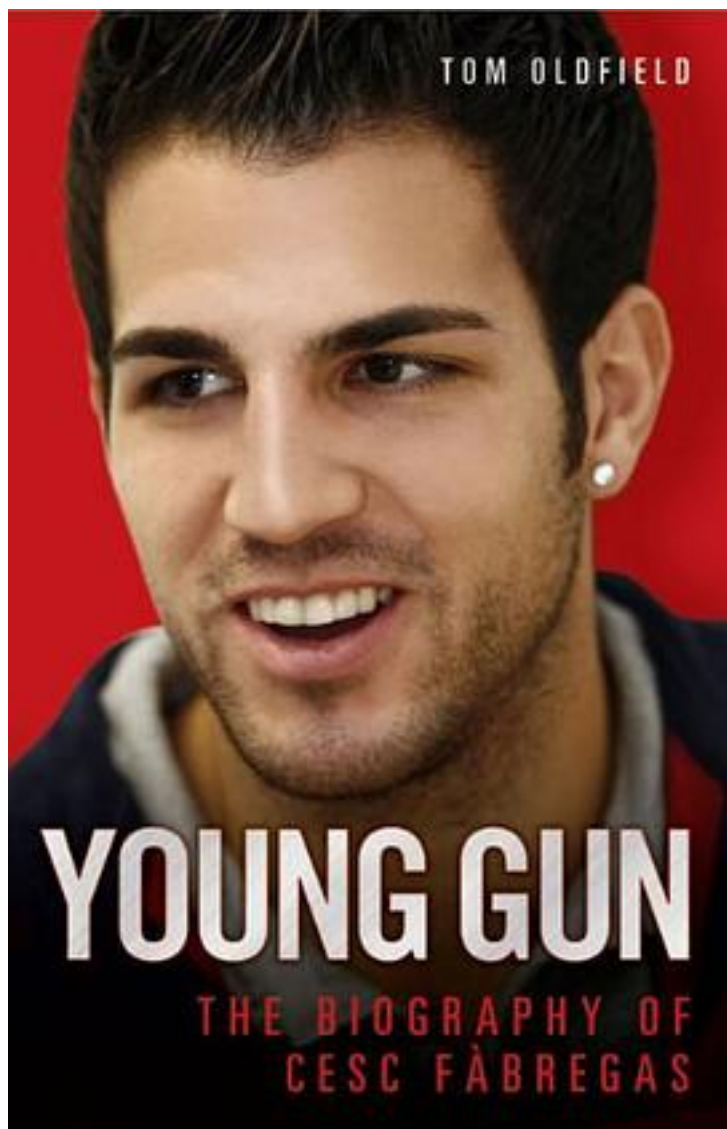


Young Gun



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Francesc Fabregas Soler - known to football fans worldwide as Cesc Fabregas - is one of the most exciting young talents in football today. A gifted playmaker with a maturity beyond his years, he has already established himself as a vital part of the Arsenal first team, bringing skill, vision and incredible creativity to Arsene Wenger's young side. Born in Catalonia, Spain, in 1987, Fabregas began his football career as a trainee at FC Barcelona, where he was a prolific goalscorer for the youth team. Signed by Arsenal at the age of just 16, Fabregas became the youngest player to turn out for the Gunners, at 16 years and 177 days. He went on to break more records, becoming the youngest goalscorer in the history of the club when he found the net in Arsenal's 5-1 League Cup victory against Wolverhampton Wanderers. Arsene Wenger had intended Fabregas to hone his skills in League Cup games but injuries to Patrick Vieira, Edu and Gilberto Silva in 2004 gave him the chance to break into the first team and prove himself at the highest level. After becoming the second youngest player ever to score a Champions League goal, he rounded off the 2004/5 season by winning his first honours with Arsenal, starting for the club in the FA Cup final where they beat Manchester United on penalties. When Patrick Vieira signed for Juventus in 2005, Fabregas began to feature more regularly in the Arsenal midfield. Although there were concerns that he lacked the power and aggression to replace the fiery Frenchman, he soon developed his own playing style and proved to fans, pundits and opposition players that he was a force to be reckoned with. His obvious flair for the game earned him a place in the Spanish national team, and he became the youngest Spanish player to take part in the World Cup during the 2006 finals. Despite interest from several top clubs, including Real Madrid, Fabregas was determined to stay with Arsenal, and his loyalty was rewarded with an eight-year extension to his contract. Fabregas is now seen as a talisman, revered by fans and lauded by commentators. His amazing story shows how he had matured into a strong, charismatic footballer who many believe can inspire Arsene Wenger's rejuvenated Arsenal team to take their place at the very top of the English game.

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目录:

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