CHAPTER 1

IT WAS THE THIRD TO LAST game of the footy season and my time was running out.

'It's almost three-quarter time, let's really go for it,' I told Boris, who was playing ruck. 'Just tap it down to me.'

My school footy team St Mary's were playing against St Joseph's and I really wanted to beat my record.

I could get four goals in one game, I *knew* it – but I needed two more.

I could see it in my head: I'd step around a player, take a bounce and then kick to tall, lean Manu at full-forward or Josie at centre half-forward. If someone was about to tackle me, I'd dish it off to Tiago. His mop of shaggy black hair was easy to spot and he was always in the right place at the right time.

Boris flashed me a cheeky smile as I caught my breath, waiting for the bounce. He launched his huge body into the air and tapped the ball straight into my hands. I burst around two of the St Joseph's players, then handballed to Josie. Josie spun around to pass into full-forward but when I yelled that I was in the clear, she looped the footy over to me with a gentle drop punt. I marked it.

I walked back to take my kick. I was about forty metres out from goal. I took a deep breath, dropped the ball onto my foot and booted through it as hard as I could.

It flew long and high, and split the centre of the goals. I jumped up, punching the air. Boris ran over and lifted me off my feet. My other teammates slapped me on the back. Josie high-fived me. 'You're going to smash your record, Patty,' she said.

'Three down, one to go,' I said.

AT THREE-QUARTER TIME I bit into a slice of orange as I sat listening to Coach Clarke give the team instructions. Coach Clarke was the coach of the basketball team, but that day he was filling in for Coach Riley. 'Patty, I'm going to put you in the back pocket this quarter,' he said.

I took the slice of orange from my mouth and looked up at him. 'But I'm not tired. I could run all day!'

'I bet you could, Patty,' Coach Clarke said, 'but I'm going to give Tyson a go in the centre this quarter.'

I couldn't believe it. Tyson always beat me at athletics, but when it came to football, he couldn't touch me. When I'm on the ground I'm in my element – moving like the wind, my hands like magnets for the ball.

Tyson's not even a forward – he's a backline player. I knew Coach Clarke was only letting Tyson play in the centre because he was the star player on the basketball team.

‘Coach Clarke, I’m one goal away from beating my record,’ I pleaded.

‘We’re leading by five goals, Patty. Let’s share it around a bit, hey mate?’

Tyson grinned at me and said, ‘Don’t worry Patty, I’ll boot a goal just for you.’

I didn’t want Tyson to kick a goal for me. And I didn’t want to share my goals around. Scoring goals is what I love doing – it’s what I’m really good at.

I sulked back onto the oval, knowing my chance to break my record was blown. I stood in the back pocket for what seemed like hours watching Boris tap the ball down to Tyson. Like me, Tyson passed the ball to Manu, Tiago or Josie. Our team was so strong against St Joseph’s that

it was like watching kick-to-kick. When Tyson kicked a goal I knew I should have been happy for him, but there was steam coming out of my ears.

It didn’t help when Tiago threw his arm around me after the siren sounded and said, ‘Great game, Patty. Next time we play you should stay on the ball for the whole game.’

Josie understood I was disappointed. She walked over and patted my shoulder just as Tyson jogged past.

‘Pity you were stuck in the back pocket for the last quarter,’ he called.

‘Well, at least you got to touch the ball for once.’

Coach Clarke was congratulating my team-mates as they walked off the oval. ‘Nice work

today, Patty,' he said. Tiago was holding a bin full of footballs on top of his head, carrying them to the change rooms. I took the ball from beneath my arm and threw it. Somehow the ball landed in the bin, startling Tiago.

Coach Clarke took the ball out of the bin, told Tiago to stay standing where he was, threw it to me and said, 'Do that again.'

'Do what?' I asked him.

'Throw the ball into the bin.'

I looked at Coach Clarke as if he was crazy, and threw the ball.

A smile spread across his face when the ball landed in the bin for the second time.

'Nice shooting,' Tiago said with a laugh.

'Patty, have you ever thought about playing basketball?' Coach Clarke asked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

'I'd like you to try out,' he said.

'Would I get to play on the ball for the whole game?' I asked him.

Coach Clarke laughed. 'Everyone plays on the ball in basketball.'

I thought about it as I walked into the change rooms. The basketball team was really strong: Boris, Manu and Tiago were all tall and skillful, and Tyson was a freak. They were expected to win their third grand final in a row.