



‘I think it might be a case of the yips,’ concluded Billy.

‘The what?’ asked Josh, still a little dumb-struck that Billy Slater was giving him advice about football. This might just be the greatest day of his life, but it certainly hadn’t started that way.

When Josh had seen that Billy Slater was there to train the team, he’d been both excited and completely terrified. Those dreaded elephant butterflies rose from

the dead. But this time they were zombie-elephant butterflies.

And that's how Josh ended up spending the first half of training in the change sheds.

‘Um, Josh? Are you in here, mate?’

Josh gulped. ‘Just a second . . .’ he called back, and quickly flushed the toilet. The truth was that his stomach had been fine for twenty minutes. He had been sitting in the cubicle for all that time wondering if he should go outside and face the barrage of Corey’s put-downs about stuffing up an easy pass.

Josh sheepishly emerged, trying to think of an excuse for missing the first half of training.

‘How are you doing?’ asked Billy.

Josh looked at the ground and gave a tiny shrug.

‘That good, huh?’

Josh shrugged again.

‘Steve said you had a tough game on the weekend,’ Billy said with a concerned smile.

‘I guess.’

‘Feel like talking about it?’ asked Billy. He pointed to the narrow wooden bench on the sidelines.

Josh nodded and sat down on the bench. Taking a deep breath, he explained everything that had happened in the game against the Comets. And after that, he explained what had happened at training the week before and when he had blown a certain try in the first game of the season.

‘Not much fun to stuff up when everyone’s watching, is it?’ asked Billy.

‘Not so much.’

Billy nodded. ‘Yep, I know that feeling.’

‘But . . .’

‘But what? You don’t think professional footy players get embarrassed when they make a mistake in front of thousands of fans?’ asked Billy.

‘But you *never* make a mistake. You’re Billy Slater.’

‘Of course I do. Everyone has their bad days. Believe me, I’ve had some shockers,’ said Billy.

‘Not like me. I can’t even catch the ball anymore. Whenever I have to catch a pass I get nervous and my hands don’t work,’ said Josh, clenching his hands into fists.

And that's when Billy suggested that Josh was suffering from the yips. But Josh had no idea what Billy was talking about.

'The yips are when you worry so much about not being able to do something that your body forgets how to do it,' explained Billy. 'It happened to me one season when I dropped a bomb in the very first game. Every time after that, when a bomb went up, I'd think about dropping it. And then I would drop it.'

'So, how'd you fix it?' asked Josh.

'That's the tricky bit. The key is to relax, keep a clear mind and eventually it just goes away.'

'Just goes away? But how?' asked Josh. The yips sounded like a terrible disease, and

he had been hoping Billy would be able to give him an instant cure. This was like being told by the doctor to drink plenty of fluids and get some rest.

‘It just does. You just need one or two good passes to get your confidence back,’ said Billy. ‘Why don’t we chuck around the footy and see if some of the passes stick? It beats hanging out in the change sheds, right?’ Billy said with a grin.

‘Okay.’

Josh and Billy headed over to the corner of the field while Coach Steve ran tackling drills with the rest of the team.

‘So, the trick is to never, ever, ever take your eyes off the ball,’ instructed Billy.

He threw Josh pass after pass. Easy ones

at first, then difficult ones – at Josh’s hands, legs and over his head. Hard ones, fast ones, floating, spiralling passes and even flick passes. Josh didn’t catch them all, but he caught most of them.

As the sun disappeared behind the hills and the sky turned pink, Josh began to feel better. He was having fun, and he knew that he could catch a pass. He could catch a lot of passes, in fact. He just had to remember this during the next game.

*That* was going to be the tricky bit.