

Ben saw a very expensive chemistry kit in his monthly science magazine. He could save up his pocket money but that could take ages. So he asked his dad instead.

“It’s a lot of money,” said Dad. “What about...I’ll buy it for you, if you kick a goal before the football season finishes.”

“Kick a goal!”

“With a bit of practise it won’t be hard,” said Dad.

Ben sighed. How was he going to kick a goal? He had trouble just trying to get the ball to go straight. Ben had only joined the football team to please Dad.

The next day at football training the coach advised Ben, “Drop the ball onto the tongue area of your boot. Your toe should be pointed where you want the ball to go, and then follow through with your foot.”

After an hour of training, Ben still couldn’t kick the ball straight.

The following day, Ben took his football to school to practise his kicking. Things still didn’t go well. On the way home, he clasped his hand into a fist and punched the ball into the air. The ball hit his knuckles and veered on to the road.

“Great looking football,” said Jessica, a girl from Ben’s class, as she picked up the ball.

“It belongs to my dad from when he used to play.”

“You must like football a lot,” said Jessica.

“Not really, but my dad was once a great footballer.”

“I watch my brother play football when I’m not at ballet,” said Jessica.

“You do ballet?”

“Yes.” Jessica pirouetted. “My mum owns the studio.” She then jumped into the air, splitting her legs, pointing her toes.

“You point your toes a lot,” said Ben.

“It makes my legs go straighter.”

“My coach told me to point my toes when kicking the football. My kicking isn't very good,” he said.

“If you want to improve your kicking, maybe a few lessons in ballet can help you. You could make it your secret weapon.”

“Secret weapon?”

“Why not? We can start tomorrow if you like. We'll go to the studio early before anyone turns up.”

“Are you sure nobody will be there?”

“I usually go in early with Mum to practise. She won't mind if I bring a friend.”

Ben wasn't sure if he wanted to have anything to do with ballet, but if it helped him to kick straighter, a few lessons wouldn't hurt.

Every day for two weeks Ben went with Jessica to the dance studio to practise his leg swinging, toe pointing and many ballet positions.

At football practice Ben's kicking improved.

“Ben's doing ballet!” Naomi, Ben's sister, announced as she burst into the kitchen, a few days later.

Dad gasped.

Ben groaned.

“Amy told me in class today. She saw Ben down at the dance studio dancing around.”

“Is this true Ben?” Dad's face went pale.

“Er...sort of,” said Ben. He couldn't find the words to explain how ballet was connected to football.

“You can't be a great footballer if you're prancing around somewhere else,” Dad said sounding disappointed.

The next day at school Ben told Jessica what had happened.

“Why didn't you tell him why you're doing it?” asked Jessica.

“Dad wouldn't understand about ballet. I'm no good at sport. I'm going to quit the team. Saturday will be my last game.” Ben's shoulders slumped forward.

Jessica smiled. “Yes you are. Nobody can do what you've done over the last few weeks without years of practice. You're a natural.”

Saturday arrived quicker than what Ben wanted it to.

“Ben, in front. This is yours,” the coach called out as Ben went on the field.

Ben ran to get into place as the ball came towards him. It landed in his arms.

The crowd cheered.

“Great mark son! Now kick a goal,” Ben's dad shouted.

It wasn't over. Ben still had to kick the ball. Now was not a good time to get jelly legs.

Ben took in a deep breath; he stepped back, and lined up with the two middle posts. He raised the ball and released it as his foot left the ground. With a pointed toe and perfect straight leg swing, the ball sailed into the air. It shot through the two middle posts. The goal umpire signalled a goal and waved two white flags. The crowd cheered. The players around Ben ran up to him and gave a high-five.

Ben's dad jumped up and down. "Did you see that? My son kicked a goal!"

The siren sounded, ending the game. Ben's team had won the game, by one point.

"Great game guys," said the coach. "Super kick Ben. Not sure what you've been doing to improve your kicking, but keep it up."

Ben took a deep breath. "I've been taking ballet lessons to improve my kicking," he blurted out.

The team roared with laughter.

"Only a sissy does ballet," scoffed one of the players.

"Actually the league players do occasionally try different things to improve their kicking and a few ballet lessons are one of them," said the coach.

"No way. You're kidding."

"No," said the coach. "And in fact I see no reason why you guys can't do a few lessons."

Loud moans rose from the players.

“You can't be serious?”

“Sure I am. Maybe I could even arrange some of the district's players to come along,” the coach suggested and threw some of their names around. He winked at Ben.

Some of the team members nodded their heads.

“Yeah, I don't mind training with them.”

Later on, while walking home, Ben's dad said, “You were great out there today, Ben. Even if you hadn't kicked a goal, I still would've bought you that chemistry kit for trying. We'll order it tomorrow.” He cleared his throat. “And if you really want to do ballet, I'll pay for the lessons.”

“Thanks Dad. Jessica said I was good at it.”