

FOOTBALL MYSTERIES



THE BIG BLING BLITZ



David A. Kelly

illustrated by **Robert Thibeault**

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THE BIG BLING BLITZ

FOOTBALL MYSTERIES



by **David A. Kelly**

illustrated by **Robert Thibeault**

Curveball Books  Boston

To football fans everywhere who know that each season starts with hope!

—D.A.K.

To my parents, Hector and Marie Thibeault.

—R.D.T.

*When asked which of his Super Bowl rings Tom Brady liked the most,
he gave a telling answer: “The next one!”*

—Tom Brady, *Quarterback, #12, New England Patriots (2000–2019)*

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A Magic Touchdown Dance

“Catch!” Kate Hopkins called out to her cousin Mike Walsh. They were walking on a trail behind the New England Patriots football stadium. The trail wound past ponds, a forest, and a real cranberry bog.

Mike caught a small, bright red berry in his right hand. “A cranberry?” he asked. “What’s this got to do with football or the Patriots?”

“It’s the *New England Patriots*,” Kate

said, twirling a loop of her long brown hair around her finger. “Cranberries have grown in New England’s sandy soil for centuries. If you read the sign back there instead of trying to run around in slow motion, you’d know that this cranberry bog was planted in 1929!”

Mike tried to squeeze the cranberry with his fingers, but it was too firm. So he popped it into his mouth.

A moment later, his lips puckered. Mike spat the cranberry onto the grassy trail. “Yuck! I thought it would be sweet, not sour!” His cheeks flushed, making his freckles stand out even more. “It doesn’t taste anything like cranberry sauce!”

Kate laughed. “No, Mike, it doesn’t. Cranberry sauce has lots of sugar because cranberries are so tart!”

Mike wrinkled his nose. “Aren’t cranber-

ries only for Thanksgiving?”

“Not from what I’ve read,” Kate said. She loved to read. Before a trip, Kate always borrowed library books about whatever city she and Mike were visiting. “One book said that the local Wampanoag people have harvested cranberries here for thousands of years. The berries are easily stored for winter, and they can be used for dying fabric.”

Mike and Kate were in Foxborough, Massachusetts, forty-five minutes outside of Boston. They had arrived from their home in Cooperstown, New York, along with Kate’s mom. Mrs. Hopkins was a sports reporter. She was there to cover the big Patriots vs. Indianapolis Colts football game the next day. Mike and Kate had been to lots of baseball games with Mrs. Hopkins. But lately, she had started taking them to football games, too.

“Cranberries can also be used to make edible slime!” Mrs. Hopkins called from behind them. She had just crossed a small wooden bridge next to a field filled with dense cranberry vines. A row of bushes stood in front of the plants.

“Cranberry slime?” Mike smiled. “We’ve *got* to make that sometime. We could squeeze it, stretch it, and even have a slime tug-of-war. Best of all, we could eat it!” Mike bounced on his toes, thinking of all the things he and Kate could do with the slime. Then he suddenly turned serious. “Unless it tastes like that cranberry!”

Mrs. Hopkins shook her head. “Don’t worry, Mike. It’s made from cranberry sauce, so it’s nice and sweet.”

Mrs. Hopkins held out a blue foam football. “We can try making slime when we get

home,” she said. “For now, why don’t you hold on to your football.”

Mike took the football and fist-bumped Mrs. Hopkins. “Perfect timing,” he said. “I need to work on my touchdown celebration in case the Patriots decide to draft me while I’m here!”

Mike turned and ran back in Kate’s direction. “Hey, Kate, watch this,” he called out.

He threw his football in a high arc and ran to get underneath it. The football dropped into his cupped hands, and he zoomed forward across a pretend goal line. Mike spiked the football into the ground.

“Touchdown!” he cried.

The football bounced over Kate’s head and landed behind her on the grass.

Meanwhile, Mike shimmied around in a circle. He stopped every few steps to crouch

down and then jump up high with his arms raised up. When he landed, Mike held out his hands and made big shaking motions, like he was using giant cinnamon-sugar shakers.



After a couple of times around the circle, Mike tired himself out. “What do you think?”

he asked. “If the Patriots see that, they’ll definitely draft me!”

Kate crossed her arms. “I don’t know about that,” she said. “But you’d better thank Elmo Wright for that touchdown dance!”

Mike frowned. “What do you mean? I made it up all on my own. No one’s ever thought of doing a cinnamon toast dance!”

“You’re right,” Kate said. “But from what I read yesterday, you wouldn’t do *any* dance without Elmo Wright. People think he’s the first football player to do an end zone dance. He did it at the University of Houston in 1969. Later on, he played for the Kansas City Chiefs and the New England Patriots.”

Mike picked up the football. “Cool!” He held the ball high up in the air. “To Elmo Wright!” Then he faked a dodge around Kate’s right side and ran to her left instead.

“You need to work on your blocking!” he called as he crossed another pretend goal line. “That’s another touchdown by the Patriots’ Mike Walsh!”

Mike spun around and spiked the football for a second time. It arched high up into the air as he started his cinnamon toast dance again.

Behind him, the ball dropped behind the bushes near the cranberry bog.

“*OUUUUCH!*” came a surprised cry from the other side of the greenery.

Mike stopped dancing. He held his breath and glanced at Kate with big eyes.

Something made a rustling noise behind the bushes. Mike backed away slowly on his tiptoes.

Suddenly, a tall, athletic man with piercing blue eyes and sandy brown hair stepped

out from behind the bushes.

He held out his arm and wagged the football, first at Kate and then at Mike. “I think this is yours,” he said.

Mike stood like a statue. He pointed at the man. “It’s . . . it’s . . . it’s . . .”

“Yes, Mike, it’s Scott Brody,” Kate said. “Patriots number 21. The greatest quarterback in Patriots history!”