

## Semi-Finals Week – Day 4

*‘...and then, my friends, you can call yourself Champions, and take your places at the Champions League final on May 23rd!’*

*‘It’ll be Chelsea v Milan’, whispered Michael, ‘I’m sure of it!’*

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It was Sunday morning, the day after the Butterfield game. Tired and emotional, the entire Lancaster Road squad had gathered early at Hardy’s house to have breakfast, and to catch the reply of Match of the Day. The old house smelt of breakfast, and cooking sounds were coming from some far-off corner. In front of the TV the team were arranged almost according to their positions.

Hardy and JoJo were standing behind the big leather sofa where most of the others were arranged.

Freddy and Jaz were sitting on the sofa.

Clara and Wil were perching, one on each arm.

Alex was standing to one side, looking at his watch.

Michael, a bundle of nervous energy, was walking from one side of the room to the other, one moment deep in thought, the next replaying in his head some great move or another, the next moment standing transfixed by the TV.

It was getting towards nine o’clock. The show was coming to an end.

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*‘Well, a good win for West Ham, there, Gents’, said Gary Lineker, turning to the two Alans.*

*‘Absolutely shocking defending by Wigan there, Gary. They’re now in total freefall, aren’t they Alan?’* Alan Hansen turned to Alan Shearer.

*‘Well, yes, West Ham did really well, though. I particularly like the boy Harewood who made a big difference when he came on for Zamora. He’s on fire at the moment’.*

*‘Well thanks gentlemen,’ said Gary smoothly, ‘but before we go, a very special new item where we feature a game from one of the lower divisions. Yesterday, our cameras were at the top-of-the-table clash between Lancaster Road and Butterfield FC in the Springhurst Youth League. We pick up the action mid-way through the first half. The commentator is Jacquie Oatley’.*

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*‘A girl! Commentating! WHAT!’* said Hardy.

Clara didn’t actually have to speak. She stood up and glared back at Hardy, who shrunk back as she looked like she was about to hit him.

*'Sorry, sorry', he said, before quickly adding, 'she's very good really'. Clara sat down, still glaring.*

The picture switched from the JJB stadium and the studio to Springhurst park. Jacquie's voice was describing the action.

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*'Thank you Gary, and welcome to Springhurst Park for the first time. And here is Freddy now, the United captain, moving smoothly out of defence. Look at the boy go...he finds Michael in midfield...characteristic run from him there, very elegant, close control...he finds Jaz who plays a first time ball across the pitch to Alex. Inside to Wil steaming up from deep...his cross finds Clara....no!....just too long once again. Neither team quite finding its range. So far an edgy affair...perhaps not surprising considering what is at stake...*

*This time it is Butterfield on the attack, a long ball forward...oh!....great defensive header from Jaz...returned that attack with interest...but here they come again...that's a good ball into the area...out comes the goalkeeper...OH!....that was a clumsy challenge...he goes down. The goalkeeper Hardy is hardly daring to look at the referee...*

*...but he's waved play on...actually he is having a word with the Butterfield player there...it might be about diving...a lucky escape for someone I think...*

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At half-time, the cameras switched back to the studio.

*'Well, gents, this one is too close to call, isn't it?'*

*'Absolutely shocking defending at the end of the first half there. Butterfield are lucky to go in level, Gary'.*

*'And you Alan?'*

*'Well, yes, Gary. In my Newcastle days we always liked a good Number 9. That's why I've been watching the boy Michael. Got some potential there Gary, good with both feet, speed off the mark, y'know, he could have a bright future'.*

The other Alan piped up.

*'Yes Gary, I can only see this game going one way. A goalkeeping mistake or a piece of inspiration from Michael'.*

*'That's two ways isn't it Alan?'*

The three men roared with laughter at the joke, as the action turned back to the park. Jacquie took up the commentary.

*'Well, we're midway through the second half now, and there's no sign of either side breaking the deadlock. Here come Butterfield on the attack once more...oooh! that was a great save by Hardy in the Kidz goal...kept his side in it there....'*

*....and the referee is looking at his watch now. There can't be more than a few seconds left. Coach Azelea is urging his team forward for one last attack. I can see several parents chewing on their fingernails...they know a draw is no good to anyone here...the ultimate prize awaits the winner...a trip to Athens in three weeks' time.*

*...and the ball's with Michael now on the right wing. This has to be the last cha...*

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Fizz! Phutt! Pzzzzz....buzzzz....phlump.

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The television, which had been working perfectly one nanosecond previously...

...went dead.

The match...

...was lost...

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