

## Champions League Challengers – Day 2

‘What...what...what’s the matter?’ said Hardy, now sounding more concerned than the rest of them. ‘IT’S YOUR FEET! LOOK! THEY’RE CHANGING COLOUR!’\*\*\*\*\*‘Well dey...dey... told me in the hosbital...’, stammered Hardy as they all continued to stare at his feet. ‘They told me about Friday, so I had nothing to do, so I did it...’ ‘Friday? You painted the ends of your feet?’ ‘Yes, dey told be it was Red Toes Day’. Freddy felt the laugh coming a few seconds before it did. It was one of those laughs you just can’t do anything about. But it took a little while to come. Up from his stomach, through his chest, crawling up his throat until it burst forward almost throwing him off his feet. He grabbed his mouth with one hand, grabbed the nearest thing (Clara) with the other hand, and started to fall about. Hardy’s toes, painted a vivid shade of red, seemed to glow brighter as they rolled around, and giggled, and rolled some more. ‘What’s so funny?’ said Hardy miserably, staring down at the mass of writhing bodies on the floor. ‘Red toes...red toes...’, Wil could hardly speak as he pointed at Hardy’s feet. Freddy was the first to compose himself. He spoke slowly. ‘On Friday..., it is Red... NOSE... Day. Red Nose... Not toes...’ he giggled some more, ‘sorry H, but this is just too much!’ Hardy wandered off to collect his thoughts and wash his feet. Luckily he was feeling a little better. He’d get them back somehow. Champions League Challengers 125\*\*\*\*\*Freddy followed Hardy out. ‘Come on H, we’re only having a laugh,’ he said, putting his arm round Hardy’s shoulders. ‘You’re always having a laugh at me. Everyone is. Just because I’m not cool like you, or fast like Wil, or brainy like Jaz. I’m not good at anything’. And right there Hardy, their big strong mate, their loud, laughing lunatic friend, shed a solitary tear onto the sleeve of his jacket. He wiped his eyes with the other sleeve. ‘Oh, come on, we’ll look after you. You’re just a bit fed up with being ill, that’s all’. ‘It’s nothing to do with being ILL!’ Freddy was shocked at the tone of Hardy’s voice, ‘anyway, I’m not ill any MORE. Go Away’. Wil bounced in. Freddy sensed trouble and tried to pull him away. Too late. ‘What’s up with him? Hey everyone, look, Hardy’s crying!’ Hardy turned his face to his damp sleeve, and buried his head in it. ‘Just leave it out. Leave him with me. Just leave...’ said Freddy desperately. Wil just carried on. ‘Hardy’s crying... Hardy’s crying...’, he sang, dancing round the miserable figure hunched in the chair. He went on, ‘A young boy called Hardy whose nose should be red, instead painted his toes He was sick, almost dying But now he’s just crying And he’s soaking right through all his clothes’ What a brother, thought Freddy, how could he be so horrible? Wednesday 14 March 2007 Champions League Challengers 126 Freddy looked pityingly at Wil, who was still laughing at his own limerick. When he wasn’t laughing at poor Hardy. Freddy then looked over at Hardy. A strange thing happened. A little smile. A little smirk. A little wipe of a damp eye. Then a lurch. Then a lunge. A grab, a grope and a grapple. In a flash he was on him, two strong arms pinning Wil’s own arms to his side, as Hardy wrestled him to the ground. ‘You’ll see who’s crying now! I’ll give you a red nose!’ he screamed demonically, as Wil tried to struggle clear. They rolled around on the ground, but Hardy, miraculously restored to full strength, was far too powerful for the diminutive Wil, and flipped him onto his back, then knelt firmly on his two arms, pinning him to the ground. Wil looked up, helpless. ‘I’m sorry, I really am, I didn’t mean it, I didn’t, I didn’t!’ ‘You meant it, and now you’ll pay!’ replied Hardy calmly. He lifted his left knee up and grabbed Wil’s arm with his left arm. With his right hand he leaned across and started to tickle. He knew that this would have the result he wanted. The definition of ticklish had to be re-written where Wil was concerned. ‘No! not that! Please...!’ Hardy went to tickle Wil under the arm. Before he had even touched him, Wil was starting to protest and starting to laugh. Hardy went in for the kill, his fingers poking and prodding at Wil’s helpless armpit. Wil was already out of control, writhing and rolling around, still totally pinned by Hardy’s weight. When Hardy went for a second attack under Wil’s chin, he could take no more. ‘I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I’m so so sorry...’ ‘You will be...’ said Hardy, not letting up. ‘I’m so so so so so sooooo sorry! I won’t do it again. I will never make up another poem, I’ll never tease you, you’re the greatest, I’m sooooo glad you’re feeling better...’ This went on for about five minutes before Hardy finally relented and Wil could get up and slip away. Freddy tried to give him a final slap as he went past as if to say serves you right!. Hardy stood up, smiling, and took off the thick, slightly damp, jacket. ‘Right, Red Nose

Day! What are you going as?’

2