

Champions League Challengers – Day 1

‘I said Philips Sport Vereniging!’ said Jaz impatiently, as he explained for the fifth time who would be playing in the quarter-finals. ‘Very niggling?’, said Wil for the fifth time, just to be annoying (for the fifth time). ‘OK, I give up, let’s just call them PSV. They come from Holland, and they’re replaying Liverpool.’ ‘Wil Crouch be playing?’, asked Wil, trying to raise himself up to his full 1.4 metres in imitation of the giant Mr Crouch. ‘I don’t know, it’s not ‘til April anyway. A lot can happen by then’. ‘Well, if Liverpool are in the final, I want to go to the match’, said Wil again. ‘That’s basically up to us, isn’t it? But there’s a long way to go. If Liverpool beat PSV in the first leg, and Man United beat Roma and then they hold on for a draw in the second leg and if Bayern beat Milan on away goals and Chelsea can get past Valencia even if they do have to come from two goals behind like they did against Tottenham, and if we can get past Merry men next Saturday and score at least three like we did against the Hags this week then we stand a chance...’ ‘STOP!’ yelled Freddy as Jaz went on and on and on. ‘Like Mr Andrews said, we need to take each game as it comes, give a hundred percent, and play our socks off. All we should think about is our next game’. ‘But I want to see Liverpool’, said Wil, in a voice which said I’m not going to give this one up. ‘It all depends’, said Jaz, ‘on what we do, and on what they do. But we were great at the weekend!’ ‘We were, weren’t we?’ said Freddy, recalling Saturday’s game against the girls of Hags United.

Illness Strikes 121*****The match had been won comfortably, by three goals to nil, despite the fact that Hardy had still been in hospital, and JoJo once again had had to deputise in goal. The Hags team, and especially their coaching staff, behaved quite well (by their standards) in this return match, after their skulduggery in the first game, when the referee had mysteriously disappeared. The only surprise came midway through the second half. Lancaster Road were two goals up, both of them scored by Freddy from midfield. He had worked out that the diminutive Hags goalkeeper was vulnerable to high shots, and had scored with the only two shots he had hit. Actually, she was vulnerable to anything above waist height, because she really was spectacularly small. So Freddy told his players to shoot on sight. But midway through the second half, the Hags had turned once again to some of their dirty tricks, and Clara was beginning to get agitated. ‘No WAY!’ she cried as she was taken out from behind. At least the referee gave a free kick for that one. ‘No WAY!’ she cried again, as one of the Hags defenders more or less wrapped her up in the loose black cloak-like shirt that the team wore. ‘No way! No WAY! NO WAY!’ Clara looked incredulously at the girl in front of her. Clara had finally got fed up with all the fouling, and picking herself up from the latest challenge, had grabbed at the nearest player in frustration. She had pulled back the player’s black hood to reveal the most amazing sight. Her sister! ‘No WAY! Not YOU!’, Clara was half laughing, and half crying. ‘I’ll get you later!’ Clara said menacingly. Her sister Clara just cackled, equally menacingly, and ran back to her evil teammates. But Clara had had the last laugh by poking home the third goal of the game following a precise through ball from Michael. This time, the little goalkeeper had climbed up the right-hand goalpost, and was swinging from Monday 12 March 2007 Champions League Challengers 122 the crossbar on her rather long arms, so Clara, instead of shooting high, just had to roll the ball across the line before the goalie dropped down. Which she did. It was a fitting end to a potentially tricky game.***** ‘So we’re on track’, said Jaz again, turning to Wil. ‘We just need to keep going the way we are, and we’ll make it to Athens.’***** There was a persistent but slightly feeble knocking at the door. Freddy went over to open it. ‘Hardy! How’re you doing? It’s great to see you!’ The pathetic figure standing on the doorstep smiled weakly. ‘I’m...I’m OK, I subbose...’, he muttered wheezily, before adding, ‘It...It... was...terrible. Disbembered myself in the end. Had to get out of a window’. ‘Disbembered? You mean discharged, don’t you?’ Hardy clutched his brow dramatically as if that explained his confusion. ‘It was terrible’ ‘Oh, I know, don’t worry, you’re out now, we’ll look after you...OH MY GOODNESS!’ Hearing Freddy’s voice, Wil and Clara came running through into the hall, ‘What’s the matter?’, said Clara staring up and down at Hardy. ‘LOOK!’, said Freddy, still transfixed by something. He was pointing down to the ground. ‘Urghh! Get away!’, cried Wil. They all took a step back.

