

# St James Post

## FINAL HEARTBREAK

*Goals, grit and unforgettable moments powered the girls to a hard-fought final, but it wasn't to be for St James.*

The winter break felt like it would never end for the **St James' girls' team**, so when they received an invitation to the annual Millwall Premier League Primary Stars Girls Cup, **Coach Brenta** couldn't say no. Eight schools from across the borough faced off in a round-robin format, with the top four teams progressing to the semi-finals. The eventual winner would go on to represent Millwall in the next phase of the competition.

First up were **St Winifred's**, and you could see it had been a while since the girls had played together. Misplaced passes and a couple of lapses in concentration gave their opponents a few early chances. This proved to be the wake-up call they needed, however, and **St James'** soon began to find their feet. Before long they were flexing their footballing muscles. Goals from **Samantha** and **Estelle** (although **Z'Miyah** will claim most of the hard work) secured a comfortable 2-0 win.

Next came **Childeric**, which proved a much tougher test. The opposition were a very well-organised unit with a couple of standout players. They would have taken the lead early on if not for an outstanding save from **Oumou**. Unfortunately, she wasn't able to keep them out again after their striker was left unmarked in the box and gave them the lead. This was doubled not long after, and when **Samantha** grabbed her second of the day late on, it was nothing more than a consolation as **Childeric** ran out 2-1 winners.

Game three against **St Francis** saw a reaction - and the girls clearly took that defeat personally. One player in particular made sure it wouldn't happen again. **Estelle** bagged four goals in a 5-0 rout, including a bullet of a penalty, fantastic follow-up play after **Z'Miyah** hit the post, a silky run through the defence, and a cool finish after **Scarlett** sent a pinpoint pass up the wing. **Z'Miyah** added one of her own to really rub salt into the wound and put the previous defeat firmly behind them.

Game four versus **Deptford Oaks** was much tighter. A fantastic battle between attack and defence made it almost impossible for **St James'** to find an opening. However, they had discovered a new and incredibly deadly weapon - **Heidi's** long throws. Like arrows, they hurtled towards the opposition goal, and it was from one of these that **Scarlett** was able to slot home and secure a tight but very important victory.

Game five pitted the girls against local rivals **Phoenix**, and once again it was the attacking duo of **Z'Miyah** and **Estelle** who proved too much to handle. Another unstoppable penalty from **Estelle** was followed by **Z'Miyah** zig-zagging past defenders before firing past the keeper. It was during this game that a rival coach approached the team to comment on their ability - even comparing **Oumou** to German legend Manuel Neuer, a goalkeeper renowned for combining incredible shot-stopping with excellent passing.

### Player of the Day

This was a tough decision, with so many standout performances and everyone doing exactly what was asked of them. However, it's hard to argue with seven goals in nine games. Congratulations to **Estelle**, who now has eight goals overall, putting her joint with **Heidi** and **Z'Miyah** in sixth place in the school records.



**All together:** The girls united as Samantha takes her spot kick

With two games to go, the girls knew it was all in their hands. All they had to do was hold their nerve against **Ilderton**, another team fighting at the top of the table. And fight was certainly the right word. Both teams showed their defensive qualities with tight marking and strong tackles throughout. But **Emilia**, who had so diligently often sat as the deepest player on the pitch, picked up the ball and passed it up the wing to **Sharron**, who cut inside and played it to **Estelle**. She bulldozed her way through the defence to grab her seventh goal of the day and secure a massive 1-0 win over a direct rival.

The final league game against **Twin Oaks** was all about defence. In what had been an attacking masterclass it is easy to forget to mention the defence - but the foundation of that attacking freedom lay at the back. **Heidi** and **Emilia** formed an almost impenetrable partnership, combining speed, strength, positioning and teamwork. This, alongside the midfield trio of **Scarlett**, **Samantha** and **Sharron**, who grew in confidence game by game, allowed **St James'** to control matches. The game ended 0-0, but that was enough for **St James'** to top the league phase and progress to the semi-finals.

It was back to the start in the semi-finals, as **St James'** once again faced **St Winifred's**. They struck first, and if not for another top save from **Oumou**, they would have taken the lead. What followed was a tense, end-to-end battle, with neither team able to break the deadlock. In the final minute, a shot from **Scarlett** was blocked by a **St Winifred's** player's hand, earning **St James'** a penalty. Up stepped **Estelle**, who hadn't missed from the spot all day. This time, however, the pressure told and the keeper made the save, sending the game to penalties.

Each team had three takers, with **St Winifred's** going first. They scored and took the early lead. That's when **Estelle** showed nerves of steel. Despite missing moments earlier, she grabbed the ball and said, "I'm going first." She smashed it into the roof of the net to level things at 1-1. From there, the teams were inseparable - if one scored, so did the other; if one missed, so did the other. After five penalties it was still tied. **Coach Brenta** looked to who was yet to step up: **Emilia**, who practises penalties every day on the playground was the natural choice. **Oumou** saved the **St Winifred's** attempt, meaning a goal from **Emilia** would send **St James'** into the final. She calmed her nerves and, with her teammates arm in arm behind her, slotted the ball into the bottom corner to seal victory and send **St James'** to the final.

### The Final

**St James'** only defeat of the day had come against the team they now faced in the final - **Childeric**. Revenge was firmly on their minds, and they pushed for it relentlessly. Every player ran their socks off, giving absolutely everything. There was nothing to separate the sides. Neither team was willing to give up the title without a fight. In the end, it only took a moment - and unfortunately for **St James'**, it was a mistake. An intercepted pass at the back was pounced on by the opposition, and with only the keeper to beat, they scored the only goal of the final to secure the win.

So, it wasn't to be for **St James'**. But with five wins, one draw and only two defeats, it was a day to be incredibly proud of. **Coach Brenta** spoke afterwards, pride clear on his face: "What a day, and what a group of girls. They are an absolute pleasure to work with. I know they'll be disappointed, but to win the league phase and come so close in the final is amazing. It's a day none of us will ever forget."