

It was a different atmosphere than Harry was used to, before a match against Slytherin. There was hardly a fraction of the animosity against the snake house that there had been when he'd first started at Hogwarts — though there were still enough genuine Death Eater supporters on the team to make the match dangerous.

Harry gave his best attempt at an Oliver-Wood-worthy Captain's speech, Katie giving him a discreet thumbs up at the end of it, and then they were headed out for their first game of the season. It was weird, stepping up to shake hands with Urquhart, not seeing Draco's grey eyes narrowed in challenge amongst the opposing team. Harper was taller and broader than Harry, and Harry quietly thought he would have no trouble at all catching the snitch before the fifth year boy.

The match began, Harry's Firebolt responding quickly under his grasp as he soared into the air, circling the pitch and watching his team spring into action. Despite his worry about Draco, he was feeling confident. They had a great team — certainly better than Slytherin, down two of their main players.

He could have done without Zacharias Smith on commentary, but it was easy enough to tune the Hufflepuff boy out. His chest swelled with pride as his team were on fine form, the chasers easily scoring three early goals, the new beaters wrangling the bludgers competently, and Vicky with honestly very little to do because of it.

Harper's strategy seemed to be an attempt to follow Harry around and harass him as much as possible; but he wasn't nearly as annoying as Draco had been in their youth, and with his superior broom Harry was able to shake him easily.

Slytherin tried their best, but it wasn't good enough — when Gryffindor were already up 80-20, Harry caught a flash of gold out of the corner of his eye, and immediately spun to chase after it. Harper tried to follow, but it was no use; by the time he was on Harry's tail, Harry was halfway to the snitch. His hand closed around the fluttering gold ball and the stadium exploded into cheers.

As Harry steadied his broom and raised the snitch in triumph, Harper scowled at him, glaring hard. Harry just grinned all the wider — and then he lost sight of the Slytherin player as he was bundled in a hug from half a dozen red-and-gold clad players.

"You all did brilliantly!" Harry enthused, clapping the shoulder of anyone he could reach.

"You too, Captain!" Vicky returned, beaming at him. They all lowered themselves to the ground, and Harry ruffled Ginny's hair on the way to the changing rooms.

"Your brothers will be so proud of you," he told her, and she beamed at him. It was a shame, really — due to the political climate outside the castle, Dumbledore wasn't letting any spectators come to the student quidditch matches this year. Harry was sure all the Weasley boys would have come, if they could.

Next year.