To say I was ecstatic when the final whistle blew to signal the end of the Plate final is an understatement. I had just witnessed, alongside a crowd of enthusiastic spectators, a convincing 3-0 victory for THWFC over Churchill to retain the Plate. The performance of the team was as complete a performance as I have ever seen.
The season began in the same way as the previous two, slow and without a win in the first 3 games. This seems to be the norm with college sports, you lose players and have to replace them and it can therefore take a few matches to get the right balance and for me to know who plays best in what position.

It all fell into place in our 4\textsuperscript{th} match and quite possibly a record breaking 14-1 win over Peterhouse in the league, with Anna Daunt scoring an incredible 7 goals, there was also a hat trick from Ciara Wheeler.

![Team Photo](image)

Having gone out to Fitz in the first round of Cuppers, we went to Caius in the quarter-finals of the Plate a week after our 14-1 win, so confidence was high. We registered a well-deserved 2-1 win against a team which are two divisions above us.

The following week Team Captain Kerry Corley arranged a friendly at home against Catz, a team who are a division higher than us. We won the game 1-0. This game gave me the chance to give others playing time, because this year no less than 23 ladies signed up to play. Gone was the headache of not being sure if we would have enough to make 11, but a new headache arrived, for the first time ever I had the luxury of substitutes in every game (5 in the Plate semi-final and final). Knowing myself how disappointing it can be to be named as a sub and not get to kick the ball, made me aware that I was going to have to disappoint a few. For me this has been the most difficult of any of the decisions I have had to make. I know I was reassured and told that as long as the team does well it doesn’t matter; that helped a little but not a lot.

We were due to play our arch rivals Trinity the week after the Catz game but it was called off due to a water-logged Wychfield pitch. The game was rearranged to be played the weekend after the Christmas vacation, but this time the pitch was covered in snow! The following week some 11 weeks since we last played, we went down to a 2-0 defeat to a strong, combined Selwyn & Robinson team. Although I say strong they were strong I believe they weren’t better than us, they just took their chances and we didn’t. Losing our regular goalkeeper Steph Byrne to illness the morning of the game did not help either. Thanks to Mimi Yagoub who stepped in valiantly having never played in goal before.
So to the Plate semi-final at home to Newnham: we had beaten them 4-1 in last year’s Plate final and put them out of Cuppers the year before that. For the first 10 minutes of this game and for the only time this year, I was concerned. We were playing so nervously we seemed unable to get control of the ball and when we did we gave it back to them. Then suddenly we put a few passes together and it was just as though someone pressed the on button; before we knew it we had a 2-0 lead, which we took up to half-time. I warned the ladies that 2-0 is a dangerous score, the next goal was important and that Newnham would come out all guns blazing. They did and pulled a goal back early in the second half. Was I worried? Not too much, as I had faith that this team would defend like nothing else mattered. There was one moment in the dying second when I thought Newnham had equalised, but the ball flew past the post from a shot outside the box. This was the only place they were going to score from; our defence is very resilient and throughout this season allowed very little past them. So a massive 2-1 win and into the Plate Final for a second year running.

We had two more league matches to go before the final. We beat a combined Sidney Sussex & Magdalene team 5-3 at home; having been 3-0 up at one stage we let them peg us back to 3-3. I realise the reason for this was they had changed their goalkeeper without me noticing and that she had an enormously long kick; they were using route one and getting the ball to their best player. I put Neti (Antoinette Van Haute) to mark her out of the game, this she did to great effect and they didn’t bother us again.

Next up the long-awaited match against Trinity and a triumphant one at that! A Sandy Rushton goal at the beginning of the second half secured the points in a very good game and very pleasing because (i) of who we had beaten (ii) because they ended up as champions of division 3 and (iii) it gave us confidence and momentum to take into the Final the following week.

I must admit I did not sleep well the night before the final. Yes I was a little nervous, but also that headache of team selection loomed, but it had to be done. So there we were with a home venue for the final, the biggest squad I have ever had, and a crowd of 40 plus - it can’t be bad can it? We prepared as we usually did, with a gentle warm up followed with some set-piece practice as well as some penalties just in case. I announced the team some 15 minutes before kick-off and gave the team talk. I can honestly tell you now whilst giving the team talk I felt so confident that the outcome of this game would be a victory; I could see in their eyes the passion, desire and motivation to do well. Not only did they do well they were absolutely outstanding right from the off. Churchill were put on the back foot and the pressure soon paid off when Sandy Rushton opened the scoring. Although I was playing a 4-1-4-1 (a defensive 4-5-1 formation we had used against Caius and kept for the rest of the season) we were soaking up any pressure Churchill put on us and countering with great effect. Anna Daunt and Ciara Wheeler (who really deserved a goal in this game) terrorised their defence, time and time again we broke and came close and could have had several more goals. I put Neti on midway through the first half to mark their number 15 out of the game as she looked the most likely to give the most problems, again Neti did a magnificent job. Just before half time Sandy noticed their goalkeeper was off her line and added her second goal of the game; this was no less than we deserved and we took a 2-0 lead into the break.
I didn’t really have to say much at half time I just reminded them that there was still another 30 minutes to play, to protect what they had and soak up everything that Churchill threw at them and keep countering. Everything went to plan and midway through the second half Anna Daunt scored the all-important third goal. Job done, Plate won! I myself do not remember Churchill having a shot inside our penalty area, let alone on target. As I have already said that performance was so complete, from the goalkeeper right through the defence and midfield to our lone striker, it was so pleasing to watch. It also silenced a few sceptics I believe as someone said to me “you know they really can play football Malcolm”.

The Plate will be presented to the team on Wednesday 24th April at 7pm; any former THWFC members are welcome to join us in the celebrations.

I have a few people I would like to thank, first and foremost thank you THWFC for another fantastic winning season and for keeping the faith with me and as always it is a pleasure and an honour to be your coach.

Thank you Dan Bowen for the time you spent with Steph Byrne coaching her valuable goalkeeping skills that made things so much easier for me and Steph has improved leaps and bounds with your help.

Thank you Kerry Corley and Naomi Wood our captains this year and as our previous captains have done, you both did an exceptional job which helped with the smooth running of THWFC - well done! I am sure Sandy Rushton and Helene Mertens will continue with the tradition as next year’s captains.

Well done everyone you deserve your success let’s hope we can make 2013/14 just as successful as the past two seasons.

Malcolm Pearman, coach THWFC
THWFC Squad 2012-13

Kerry Corley (Capt)
Naomi Wood (Capt)
Elly Aristotelous
Charlotte Attwood
Marika Brewitz
Steph Byrne
Ella Castle
Anna Daunt
Crystal Eisinger
Lily Fritz
Bryony Goodwin
Emma Hobkinson
Helene Mertens
Beth Parker
Steph Polderdijk
Sandy Rushton
Hannah Sharples
Becca Steinke
Rachelle Stretch
Antoinette Van Haute
Connie Vaughan
Ciara Wheeler
Mimi Yagoub