

Football God 151

Chapter 151 Holiday [1]

There was only 1 reason why Ian was here in London.

Ian was here because for Sam, it was holiday time.

Sam came to England in January after signing his contract with Fulham, and since then, it was already 5 months.

While to Ian, it was 5 months of eventually pursuing his dream and gaining admission into medical school, to Sam, it was 5 months of also pursuing his dream, playing football in the premier competition of English football.

To Sam, 2022 still felt just like yesterday when his mom still banned him from playing football. From December 2022 till now, it was not even 2 years yet and in that short time, Sam's life already turned around completely.

Not only was he making a lot of money now, money he never dreamt of a few months ago, he was also pursuing his dream of playing football.

Since January, Sam never really got a moment of rest as a professional football player playing for Fulham. Even as he never made the Fulham starting XI back in January yet, he still trained and prepared like all his other teammates.

When he eventually made the starting XI, his workload increased even more, truly pushing him into the busy elite tier of footballers.

After 5 months of grueling football at the top level though, now, finally, Sam got a holiday to rest.

He didn't waste it and having planned with his best friend; he paid the flight fee for Ian to come to England to come meet him.

Not just Ian though, Sophia, his younger sister also came with him.

They had plans.

After such a grueling but successful first season in England, Sam was determined to splurge money to make his first major holiday as a famous professional football player memorable.

Ian drove the car back home, letting Sam rest. It was just months ago since Sam last saw his sister but seeing her again, he was surprised. 'Damn! Is she feeding on fertilizers?'

Sophia already grew so much, looking incredibly beautiful already.

They arrived at the hotel room to see that Sophia already got her stuff ready, including her travelling luggage. "Welcome big bro!" She jumped in his arms excitedly on seeing him.

"Congratulations on your first season!"

'She greeted me first?' Sam was perplexed. 'That's a first, she almost always greets Ian first when we are together'. Sam shrugged, hugging his sister and getting ready to go arrange his luggage when he noticed something.

"Welcome back". Sophia said.

"Are you ready?" Ian asked, leaning in and kissing his sister on the cheek.

"...!" Sam was alarmed.

That was supposed to be a harmless gesture but knowing his best friend and his sister for years, picking up on that sudden incongruity, he had a hunch what it meant immediately as he looked at Ian with big eyes.

"W-what?" Noticing his glare, Ian blushed and stammered.

Sam's gaze alternated between his best friend and his sister, noting both of their faces gradually turn pink, and then he glared at his best friend. "Come on Ian! She's just 16!"

"17 now!" Sophia quickly corrected, defiantly staring at her brother. "My birthday was on March, remember?"

"But still," Sam sighed. "Since when did this start?" Stay connected with empire

Ian coughed, throwing an awkward glance at Sophia. "Umm, just last month". He looked at his best friend. "Don't worry Sam, nothing has happened between us".

"You bastard! How dare you date my sister?"

After a little scuffle between the 2 best friends, Sam finally accepted the reality unwillingly. Despite accepting it, he still glared daggers at Ian.

Not willing to spend a day more in England though, he quickly got ready before finally following his best friend and sister out.

When he was younger, in his prime years of watching anime, Sam once had a childish dream of traveling to Japan on a vacation when he was rich enough.

While matchday 38 of the premier league approached and as he trained rigorously to prepare for it, Sam also planned with his best friend.

After the past 5 months, he deserved a good vacation with family.

Ian already booked the tickets since yesterday. All they had to do was check out of the hotel and drive to the airport, and their journey started.

Sam flew to Japan for a well-deserved vacation.

At the airport, fans recognized him though, taking pictures of him and effectively informing the whole world that he was going on a trip to Japan.

Celebrity life was still something that Sam was yet to fully get used to.

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There were lots of things to do in Japan.

Of course, the first thing that Sam did on arriving was sleep. He needed it after entering the road shortly after the game against Luton Town.

While he slept, Ian and his sister went on a lovers' date.

After waking up, Sam treated himself to some local Japanese food just as he dreamed about long ago, and with that, his vacation officially started.

For the next few days, alongside his best friend and sister, Sam toured Japan, engaging in different memorable activities and one of the most memorable ones for Sam was finally getting to enjoy one of those Japanese hot baths.

Well, he had to say, it was an experience, a cleansing experience.

Sitting in that pool of water, Sam felt all the accumulated stress in his body drifting away with the wind. It was like a form of meditation in itself.

Staring at his sister and Ian who were on the opposite side of the pool, giggling and having a fun time, he felt a bit concerned and also a bit envious.

"Ahh," he sighed, thinking. 'This would have been perfect with a companion'.

For the past few days, Ian never stopped teasing him about his inability to get a girlfriend yet. Sam never really attributed much importance to it till now.

This vacation would have indeed felt much nicer with a companion of the opposite sex who was not his sister.

Thinking of a companion, he could not help but think of a certain girl, Kayla. 'Ah, yes, I took her contact but I never got to hit her up'.

'I hope now is not too late'. Sam did it.

Chapter 152 Holiday [2]

"What?!" Ian stared at his best friend incredulously.

"A girl is coming?" She took another glance at Sam. "To meet you?!"

Sam felt a bit offended. "What do you mean by that reaction? Do you think a girl can't come to meet me?"

"No, no, it's not that," Ian chuckled. "I'm just surprised, you know, you never really seemed like the type that could pull a girl".

"Get lost bastard!" Sam cursed.

Ian laughing, escaping from him.

Well, it did feel incredulous to Sam too. He didn't call Kayla though; all he did was send a WhatsApp chat message to the girl and she answered almost immediately like she had been waiting for it all this while.

Sam never knew that she stayed in Netherlands till then.

Apparently, she was English but her parents moved to Netherlands when she was younger, so she lived most of her life growing up in Netherlands.

To Sam's shock, despite literally being halfway across the world, Kayla Banks agreed to travel all the way to meet him in Japan.

Sam still couldn't believe that he asked her, what came over him? Was his best friend now influencing him? But what shocked him most was her agreement to come.

It was crazy, almost scripted but it was reality. In the end, Sam had no choice but to accept the reality. And heck, he felt excited about it.

The next day, Kayla finally arrived in Japan.

"Ian, Sophia, this is Kayla".

"Kayla, meet Ian and Sophia, my best friend and little sister".

"Nice to meet you Kayla," Ian said with a big smile on his face, walking closer to her. "I am his best friend and she's his little sister, and you are?" He asked in a mischievous tone.

Sam glared daggers at his best friend. Before she could answer, he did. "Kayla is my very good friend".

Kayla smiled. "Yeah, we're friends".

"Wow!" Ian exclaimed exaggeratedly. "A friend that can go halfway around the world for you," he stared with dreamy eyes. "They're rare to come by, I'd know since even my best friend never went halfway around the world for me".

Sam glared at Ian. "T-that's enough, let's go inside".

"Yeah, let's go inside," Ian grinned. "Let's go know ourselves more".

Well, it was safe to say that this vacation just became spicier.

Sam didn't just rent a hotel room in Japan this time though, rather, he rented a small villa here in the city of Tokyo, Japan.

The villa had 5 rooms, more than enough room for all of them.

That morning, Sophia made food. Having voiced her interest in Nigerian homemade foods earlier to him during their conversation in the restaurant back in Fulham some time ago, Kayla agreed that she would partake in the feast.

While they ate, they got to know each other more.

At first it was awkward, but with Ian who was ever ready to spice the conversation up, Kayla soon became comfortable, feeling at home.

Around this girl, Sam felt a bit unlike himself. Today was one of those days when he was truly grateful to his best friend for easing the atmosphere up with his talk, he appreciated it.

As they ate, discussing different topics, he could not help but pay attention to her more.

Due to football and a lot of other things that always took his attention, he never took the time to pay attention to Kayla beyond the superficial till today.

She was a beautiful white girl with silky smooth skin. Her deep black hair was long, falling freely down her back. Her eyes were blue and dreamy, making Sam wonder how on earth he failed to appreciate them since.

"Ahem," Ian cleared his throat, interrupting Sam and throwing a knowing glance at him. "You don't stare that hard the first time".

'What?! Bastard!' Sam blushed, staring daggers at his friend.

Ian only chuckled.

After eating, they took their time to admire the scenery of Japan from the balcony of the villa before Kayla suggested that they go skiing.

Unfortunately, Sam, his best friend, and his sister had zero idea about skiing. Kayla volunteered to teach them though, prompting them to go.

Well, at the end of it all, they had an enjoyable time.

In the evening, due to her presence, Sam insisted to go back for another hot bath. And this time, he was no longer envious.

No one said it explicitly, but Kayla naturally stayed close to him in the water.

Feeling her presence close, Sam felt his body heating up. It was a feeling that he was not exactly used to. 'Damn, this is so embarrassing!'

Noting his unease, Kayla initiated a conversation, making him feel at ease.

And before he knew it, he already forgot about being embarrassed as together, he engaged in conversations with her, getting to know her more.

From one conversation to another, Kayla eventually asked a question. "You don't have a social media handler?" She was genuinely surprised.

"No, is it important?"

"For a popular person like you? Very important". She nodded. "Give me your phone, let's go through your social media handles, how many social media platforms do you have an account in?"

Sam tilted his head and counted. "I think WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram".

"You don't have a tik tok account?"

"Not really," Sam chuckled. "It's been dormant for a long time".

Kayla sighed, shaking her head. "You're really wasting a lot of your fame potential".

Taking his phone, she went online and finally, she accessed what she wanted.

(Instagram – Samuel Moses)

(3M+ followers)

(4 posts)

"3 million followers and just 4 posts?!" Kayla looked at him reproachfully. "Your social media really needs some work".

"By the way, those 4 posts, what did you post?"

Hearing that question, Sam froze. "Umm, please can you not look at it?"

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Kayla looked at him. "Why?"

"Because they're embarrassing childhood pictures I took during 4 dark years of my life when I didn't play football".

Kayla looked at him, suddenly smiling mischievously. "Now I want to see them even more".

"Please..."

Sam couldn't stop her though, Kayla peeped, eliciting rapturous laughter from her. A few minutes later, after checking his Facebook and dormant tik tok accounts, thinking of something, Sam made her check transfermarkt.

Transfermarkt was the official website to know the current value of every professional football player in the transfer market.

Since transferring to Fulham, Sam never really paid attention to his transfer value but now, driven by curiosity, he checked and he got a big surprise.

(Transfermarkt!)

(Name: Samuel Moses)

(England- Premier league)

(Date of birth/Age: August 6th, 2005)

(Citizenship: Nigeria)

(Height: 1,86 m)

(Position: Attacking Midfielder)

(Current International: Nil)

(Market Value: 30 million Euros)

Chapter 153 Holiday [3]

"Wait, your transfer value is now 30 million Euros?!" Ian stared at his best friend incredulously.
"Damn! This calls for celebration!"

But then he deflated. "Damn! Just 1 year and you're already worth 30 million Euros, is my career as a doctor even relevant?"

Sam was tongue-tied, he didn't know what to say.

But trust Ian, he soon glared at his best friend, grinning. "Sam, you can't be so successful in life and your best friend is left wanting".

"Today, you must spend on us! I mean real spending, splurge!"

"Yes, big brother, splurge!"

Sam was flabbergasted. When he eventually looked to his last line of support, Kayla, all his hopes were dashed when Kayla quietly went towards Ian and Sophia's side. "Fine, where do you guys want to go today?"

"Let's go to an amusement park!"

"Let's go to the real locations of Jujutsu Kaisen! Let's go to Shibuya!"

Everyone paused, turning to look at Ian with eyes that said 'are you ok?' Surprisingly, in the end, Ian managed to convince Sophia and Kayla with his smooth tongue and they ended up going to Shibuya.

...

Sam spent 18 days with his best friend, sister, and Kayla in Japan.

After 18 days, finally, on the 7th of June, on a Friday, Sam finally got ready to leave Japan. Their next destination was Nigeria.

Sam stared at Kayla incredulously. "Are you for real? You really want to follow us to Nigeria?"

"Yeah," she smiled mischievously. "Can't I?"

"No, you can," Sam smiled. "It's just, you know, your family, I just thought maybe, you know".

"That they won't approve," she chuckled. "Sam, I'm 18, I'm an adult, I get to do whatever I want so long it's not illegal".

"Oh, right".

And so it was decided, Kayla would be following them back to Nigeria.

Before embarking on the journey back to his alma mater though, there was something even more important that Sam wanted to do.

For most of his life, all Sam remembered was growing up in the outskirts of Abraka. When he was younger, he remembered times when things were really tough and his dad struggled to make ends meet. Discover stories at empire

This was how Sam lived most of his life.

At some point, after securing a better job, Mr. Moses managed to raise the standard of living of his family but it was still that of an average family in Nigeria.

Now though, as a professional football player playing in one of the clubs in the top tier of English football, Sam finally decided to change the fortunes of his family and he wanted it to be a surprise.

This was why he planned it with only his best friend, neither Sophia, nor Kayla, nor even his parents knew about his plan.

That morning, before taking the flight back to Nigeria, Sam concluded a big deal with a legit house agent back in Nigeria.

During December last year after his contract talks with Fulham were finalized, his signing bonus of 2,000,000 Euros was wired to his account.

That money stayed in his account since then till now. Sam never really thought of any investment opportunities yet, nor did he spend it, banking his bills and expenses on his salary from his club, Fulham.

Now though, Sam finally decided to spend a chunk of his money.

After concluding the deal that morning, Sam purchased a big duplex mansion in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, Abuja in one of the most affluent districts for the rich in Maitama.

Sam shelled out \$600,000 which at the current ridiculously inflated dollar rate of 1,400 naira to a dollar was 840 million naira.

Yes, Sam splurged 840 million naira to purchase a mansion in Nigeria.

This was the luxury of living life as a professional football player plying his trade in one of the best leagues in the world.

...

Since Kayla agreed to follow them to Nigeria, another big reason why Sam agreed to go with her was to introduce her to his mom.

He still remembered the embarrassing conversation he had with his mom.

Call him a mommy's boy but Sam didn't care, that was how he was raised. Before he would make any decision regarding the love side of his life, at the very least, he wanted his mother to know about it.

When they eventually arrived in Nigeria, like nothing happened, Sam and Ian took the girls to Delta State, Abraka where they crashed in Sam's home.

Well, his parents' home was definitely unbecoming for a footballer of his fame and caliber right now in the premier league.

The fact that Sam was not ashamed of introducing this home to her made Kayla know another aspect of his character; he was not ashamed of his background. In a way, it made her respect him more.

Of course, on his return back to Abraka, once the people got wind of it, Sam got a hero's welcome.

He obliged to most of their wishes, taking pictures with those he could before eventually forcing his way into his home with the help of guards.

Having predicted something like this, Mr. Moses already spent money to hire some professional police officers and bodyguards to protect his son.

Once they were inside, they helped themselves to the delicious native Banga soup and eba that Sam's mom prepared for them.

Seeing her eat her food with so much joy, Mrs. Moses' opinion of the white girl that her son brought back home directly rose to above 50%.

Sam took his first day back in Abraka to rest, catching up with Nigeria alongside his parents, most especially his father.

The next day, Sam took his whole family out alongside Kayla and Ian, taking them to Asaba, the capital city of Delta State where they had a nice time at a restaurant, an amusement park, and eventually a beach.

They stayed 3 days in Asaba at a hotel before finally returning to Abraka.

On the day they returned, Coach James visited. This coach was all smiles. "Sam, I heard you came back in town so I organized a game".

"I know you're a big boy now but please, can you bless us with your skills one more time?"

Sam laughed. "You don't need to beg coach, you're my very first coach, remember?" He stood up. "I'll play".

And so, Sam, Ian, and Mr. Moses left with Coach James.

News that Sam would be playing in the rickety field of the Delta State University, Abraka spread far and wide like wildfire in harmattan.

The university ground was filled with spectators despite the impromptu nature of the game, all here to see Sam play.

And while all that happened, back home, while Sophia pressed her phone in her room, Mrs. Moses had quality alone time with Kayla, the white girl.

Chapter 154 Holiday [4]

"So, Kayla, right?"

"Yes, ma'am". Kayla responded respectfully.

Having did a bit of research online, she knew that African parents were very much like Asian parents and put a lot of emphasis on respect and etiquette. This was why she tried to be in her best behavior around her.

Mrs. Moses was experienced though. She may not have spent a lot of time around white women, but she knew women in general.

She could tell the effort this girl was putting into pleasing her and her husband, and she wasn't put off by it, rather, she was impressed and glad.

Putting this much effort meant either of 2 things, either Kayla was so hell-bent on chasing after her son's money that she would do everything to get it, or she really loved her son and yearned to have something to do with him.

Of course, she was not naïve. If Sam was not playing for Fulham and didn't have so much money, Kayla would have never approached.

She knew this but all she wanted to confirm was the love. So long Kayla truly loved her son, she didn't care too much about the fact that she was attracted by the money. And besides, her son was very good-looking.

'Who doesn't like good things?'

Mrs. Moses looked at her with a big smile on her face. "Tell me, how did you meet Sam for the first time?"

"He's a very awkward boy when it comes to women though he won't accept it, I want to know if he made the first move".

Kayla chuckled. "Well, since you already said it I'll have to agree, he really is awkward around girls".

Mrs. Moses laughed. "Tell me more".

"Can you believe in Japan, when we were together on a hot bath, he reacted so heatedly like he's never been that close to a girl before. Is he a loner?"

Mrs. Moses laughed loudly. "One reason why he's like that is me," she chuckled. "I never really wanted my son around women at a young age, and yeah, I achieved my goal".

Kayla laughed. "You sure did".

"So, what about your parents, can you tell me about them?"

Kayla hesitated slightly.

"It's fine, I won't judge, I just want to get to know you better".

In the end, Kayla spoke. "My dad is a lawyer while my mom owns a beauty cosmetics supermarket, it's one reason I became interested in being a model".

"My dad tells me she was a model once before getting married to him. I want to be like her, but more accomplished, I want to actually build a career as a model and she supports it".

"My mom is my biggest supporter".

Before they knew it, Kayla was already speaking with Sam's mom for over an hour already. When Sophia came from her room to peak at them, she was astonished. 'So mom can actually be this chill?'

'Damn! It's so unfair! Am I even her daughter?'

At some point, she stormed into the living room. "Mom, I want to eat".

Mrs. Moses glared at her. "You rude girl, how old are you? Can't you see we're talking..."

"It's fine," Kayla said, laughing. "Actually, ma'am, I've been studying Nigerian dishes for some time now and I thought of making food this afternoon".

"I'm not perfect but I do have a certificate as a chef, so I think I won't do a bad job at the very least".

Mrs. Moses stared at her. "Kayla, are you sure?"

"Yes ma'am," then she hesitated. "I think".

Mrs. Moses smiled. "Ok then. I'll stay with you; I'll guide you through it".

"Ah," she heaved a sigh of relief. "I'll really appreciate that ma'am".

Mrs. Moses waved a hand dismissively. "It's fine, you can stop calling me ma'am, it has this ring to it". She chuckled. "Just call me mom".

"Ok mom". Kayla smiled, adapting smoothly.

...

Well, it was safe to say that the friendly game that Coach James organized had Sam's prints written all over it.

Most of the players that played in the pitch were once Sam's teammates, but now, all of them saw him as someone that they looked up to.

It was clear on the pitch that most of them avoided tackling him too strongly, but still, Sam's sheer talent and ability made him shine above every other player on this pitch as he dazzled.

Coach James' team won 7-2 with Sam scoring 4 goals and laying 2 assists.

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This was despite not even finishing the game as Coach James subbed him off at the 75th minute to loud cheers and applause.

"Damn, I feel great," Sam laughed as soon as he was subbed off. "It feels nice to play in this familiar field again, to simply enjoy football with no strings attached".

"It really feels nice".

Coach James grinned. "I'm glad you enjoyed it".

After the game, Sam rewarded all the players who participated in the game with 50,000 naira each. At just 18, it felt a bit preposterous for him to be doing all this but Sam just felt like doing it.

After that did he finally go home.

Returning home, they were shocked to learn that Kayla actually made food.

As soon as Sam returned, the first thing he did was confront his mom after leading her to her room. "Mom, did you force her to do it?"

"Me? Of course not, what do you take me for?" She glared at him. "Take your hands off me! She volunteered to cook; you can ask Sophia".

Hearing that, Sam heaved a big sigh of relief. He peeked at his mom. "So? Is she any good at making Nigerian dishes?"

Hearing that question, Mrs. Moses smirked. "Go test for yourself. Sam, good job," she patted him on the shoulder. "You secured yourself a chef".

'Huh?' Sam stared at his mom, confused.

Seeing the confused look on his face, she was exasperated, pushing his head. "Just go and eat you idiot".

While Sam left, his mom whispered towards him. "I approve".

Sam stared at her again, still confused.

Mrs. Moses shook her head. "Just leave, go".

Sam left and when he tasted the food, he was tempted to accuse his mom that she made the food and simply pinned the glory on Kayla.

He looked at her. "You really made this?"

"Of course".

"Wow, this is delicious!"

"Thank you".

That evening, Sam spent it memorably by strolling through the familiar streets of Abraka with Kayla, their hands intertwined together.

The next morning, Ian came to his home again fully dressed and that was when, together, hurdling the family up, Sam told them. "I have a big surprise for you guys, just follow me".

"We're going to the airport".

"Huh?" Mrs. Moses voiced out her surprise first. "Where to?"

"We're going to Abuja".

Chapter 155 Holiday [5]

"Surprise surprise!" Sam announced loudly, smiling.

"Dad, mom, Sophia, this is our new home".

"..."

"..."

".....!"

It was safe to say that the family of 3 were mortified.

Standing before them was a grand mansion that they only dared to dream of before now. But this time, it was no dream, it was reality.

Mrs. Moses broke down in tears immediately as she held her son's face, no longer able to control her emotions. "S-Sam," she stammered. "Is this really our," she hesitated, "our new home?"

Sam grinned. "Yes mom, it is".

"It's a state-of-the-art mansion with 13 bedrooms and 3 gigantic living rooms". He smirked proudly. "So, yes, you won't have to worry about where your grandchildren and great grandchildren will run around in".

"All you have to do?" He grinned. "All you have to do is live long enough to meet your grandchildren and great grandchildren".

Mrs. Moses chuckled and then she burst into tears as she held her son's face dearly before hugging him tightly, not wanting to let go.

"Big brother, thank you!" Sophia was also reduced to tears.

Even Mr. Moses was not spared of the emotion of the moment. Staring at his son, all this man felt was pride. [Read exclusive content at empire](#)

He patted him on the shoulder, nodding with his teary eyes. "Son, when I was young, my father once told me something. He said, grow up and become a greater man than I was".

He stared at him with eyes filled with emotion. "Son," his voice quivered. "You're already greater than I ever was, and I lived to see it happen".

"If that is not the best thing ever, then tell me what is".

Father and son hugged excitedly.

Standing at the side, Kayla and Ian gave this family their quality moment, admiring the ambience of cascading emotions between them.

When they eventually entered inside after Mrs. Moses stubbornly insisted on having her pastor come all the way over to pray on and anoint the mansion, this excited Nigerian woman started a party.

She was considerate though. The mansion was so big did not mean she invited her whole family, nor did she invite her friends.

It was just her immediate family, Kayla, and Ian. In her newly upgraded kitchen, Mrs. Moses made the most delicious Nigerian meal you would ever taste with all the love she had in her heart.

She made 3 different tantalizing soups, banga soup, okra soup, and vegetable egusi soup. Accentuating these meals with the best meat you could think of and correct eba, Mrs. Moses showed her specialty to them.

Sam provided the money, while she was the artist.

That day, all of them feasted, celebrating this big achievement in the mansion and later in the evening, Sam finally had some much-needed alone time with his father. This time, he didn't speak to his dad from a father capacity, but as an agent.

Mr. Moses finally brought his son up to speed on his career growth.

Sam's debut half season in the premier league was a blast.

Originally, in football, it was in exceedingly rare occasions where the purchase of a single player could have such a transformative effect on a team.

Ordinarily, a single player's effects on a team was hindered by a lot of limitations. To truly win consistently, clubs needed to sign not one but multiple elite players to change their team, but there are special cases.

The most significant time when the world of football witnessed a special case was when one of the all-time greats laced his boots for Napoli, the great Argentine attacking midfielder, Diego Maradona.

The flawed genius was all Napoli needed to win the Serie A title.

Dragging a mid-table team to become title contenders singlehandedly was not a feat for the weak, but a prime Diego Maradona managed to do it, even helping Napoli to win the Serie A title, Italy's elite league title.

Diego Maradona didn't do it simply due to footballing ability though, the miracle of the city of Naples happened mostly because Maradona's presence in Napoli lifted the spirits and mentality of the club's players.

This shift in mentality enabled them perform above normal with the legendary Argentine leading them, thereby leading to the miracle.

The most recent time the world of football experienced something like that was with Lionel Messi, the little genius from Rosario, Santa Fe.

After a slightly underwhelming spell at Paris Saint Germain in France, Lionel Messi finally left the elite tier of European football after 2 decades, going to America to ply his trade for Inter Miami and then, football saw another miracle.

Within weeks of signing, Lionel Messi managed to lift a bottom feeder team in the MLS all the way to winning its first trophy, in just weeks!

This was similar to what Sam did with Fulham, and this was still a younger and inexperienced version of him with new faces as teammates.

Not only did Sam help Fulham win its first trophy in years, toppling the likes of Liverpool and Chelsea along the way, he led a late Fulham charge to rise from mid-table to 9th position in the premier league table by season end.

Well, it was still too late at this stage to compare Sam to G.O.A.T candidates like Lionel Messi and Diego Maradona, but with an unbiased lens, it was impossible not to see the parallel in his career between that of these greats.

This was why a few clubs decided to take the gamble with him.

More than a dozen clubs in the elite tier of Europe sent Sam contract offers, and among them, there were 2 absolute top-tier teams.

Bayern Munich bid for Sam with a contract of 35 million Euros, beating his official transfer value by 5 million but it was the one from a top tier premier league team that was even more ridiculous, Chelsea.

Chelsea bid a ridiculous amount of 60 million Euros for Sam!

The blue giants of England literally doubled Sam's transfer valuation!

Every other African player in Sam's position would have jumped at the opportunity but yet, Sam didn't budge.

He stared at his father with a calm look on his face. "If it's not FC Barcelona, then I'm going nowhere".

Mr. Moses was an avid FC Barcelona fan, a die-hard fan even but at this moment, this man could not help but advice his son. "Sam, are you sure about this?"

"Yes dad". Sam answered immediately.

He grinned. "Barca or nothing".

Well, that settled it.

Mr. Moses left the contract offers on pending, not sending a reply to the almost 20 clubs that approached his son with tantalizing offers.

Sam's future was in his own hands.

Chapter 156 Holiday [6]

Time moved fast.

While the rest of the world moved on with their lives, Sam continued enjoying his vacation in Nigeria with his family, his best friend, and Kayla.

Since beginning to manage Sam's social media accounts, managing his posts, Sam's followership on social media began to surge with Kayla's management, so much that she finally managed to secure him his very first endorsement deal.

Kayla was a model, her initial journey to Fulham was to fulfill her part to take a modelling photoshoot on a cosmetics endorsement deal.

With her connections, she managed to help Sam secure an endorsement deal with the same cosmetics company.

To complete the deal, Sam, Kayla, and his best friend took another trip to Fulham where he engaged in the photoshoot session.

Unlike with a model though, the money they paid Sam was even more.

Immediately after the photoshoot session, satisfied with what they got, a large sum of money was wired into Sam's domiciliary account.

Beep!

(You have received a wire transfer of 5 million Euros!)

5 million Euros, for just an endorsement deal!

The reason why Kayla managed to find such a deal for him was due to certain factors. First and foremost, Sam was a star Fulham player who recently drove the local club to the center of fame and the cosmetics company was also in Fulham.

Another reason was because Kayla was able to convince them that next season, Sam would become even more popular.

Then, even more lucrative endorsement deals would naturally come to him. Getting him now when others were yet to pounce was actually an opportunity.

When you argued your point like this, not even the best deal negotiators of big companies in London could kill your argument.

The day he received the wire transfer was one of the best days of Sam's life.

Before returning to Nigeria, secretly, not letting his best friend know, Sam did something with Kayla. Having been thinking about it for some time already, Sam used his money to work a school transfer for his best friend.

Before Ian knew it, he suddenly received a transfer message transferring him from UNIBEN, his current school in Edo State, Benin City in Nigeria to the esteemed University of London.

It came unexpected, like a breeze; Ian never saw it coming.

And now it was the best friend's turn to well up in tears. "Sam," he stared at his best friend. "D-did you do this for me?"

Sam cringed. "Stop it man, that's embarrassing, men don't cry!"

"You bastard!" Ian punched him before hugging him excitedly.

What was the point of being successful and making a lot of money if he didn't spend it on those he loved? This was Sam's philosophy.

By these actions, he felt even more happy than his friends and family whom he did it for, and then with his mind free, he finally started focusing on preparing for the new premier league season.

Despite his vacation that started since, not one day did Sam ever fail to complete his daily system quest which kept him in shape.

Now though, he ramped up his training and preparation.

Sam didn't just stop with that, to motivate his teammates, he started taking pictures of himself training and sending it to Fulham's WhatsApp group chat for the players with provocative captions.

Afterall, he alone could not do anything, he needed his teammates if he wanted to accomplish his ambitious plans for next season.

(Are you guys still sleeping? Come on! WAKE UP!!! It's time to start grinding for a new premier league season boys!)

(This time, we're going for the league title!)

(You guys better not wimp out on me or I'll kill you myself!)

At first, Sam got no response but after doing it for consecutive days without stopping, some of his teammates had no choice but to respond.

They were used to his ways after spending 5 months with him. They knew how dedicated and how much of a workaholic he was, but this?

They still underestimated Sam's mentality.

The season was not even close to starting but the Fulham squad was already getting fired up by the updates from their star attacking midfielder.

None of them were about to let loose and lose shape due to the vacation.

While all that happened, in another big footballing news of 2024, the Euro 2024 tournament finally started.

Its opening game was scheduled for 14th June 2024, and it was a game between the hosts, Germany and Scotland.

On that day, back in Nigeria already, Sam watched the first game of the Euro 2024 tournament with his family, Kayla, and Ian.

Sam wondered how Kayla's parents let her move around the world so carefreely. 'I guess European parents are really a different breed'.

Just like the whole world expected, on that first game, Germany set a marker to the rest of the elite teams in the tournament.

They thrashed Scotland 5-1 after a scintillating display from their 2 prodigies, Jamal Musiala and Florian Wirtz. It was a typical German attacking masterclass. Explore hidden tales at empire

After that game, all the people who watched the game threw their support behind Germany, including Sam. "Germany are definitely the favorites". He gushed.

"They are literally stacked on every side of the pitch".

"At the back there's Antonio Rudiger and the others, literally imposing defenders. In attack, they have the likes of Leroy Sane and Kai Harvertz".

"They have Manuel Neuer in-between the posts, yet despite all of these players and even legends, their midfield is somehow the most stacked part of their squad, both in the starting XI and bench".

"With the likes of Toni Kroos, Ikay Gundogan, and Thomas Muller, all veterans, they are a fearsome side already but add the exciting duo of Musiala and Wirtz and you have world beaters!"

"I don't see any team stopping them!"

This was what Sam said, till he watched the next day's group stage games. Of the 3 games that were played, the one between Spain and Croatia stole all the attention, announcing another heavyweight in form in this tournament.

Spain put out a statement display, dazzling with their formidable team anchored by the Manchester City stalwart, Rodri.

With the young duo of 16-year-old Lamine Yamal and 21-year old Nico Williams unleashing destruction from the wings, Spain tore a Luca Modric-led Croatia apart with reckless abandon.

"What a game!" Sam gushed.

"I change my mind; Spain are the favorites!"

Chapter 157 Euro 2024 [1]

Watching Spain's game on day 2 of Euro 2024 left Sam feeling heated up.

His reason was because of a young winger that he just watched in action, the 16-year-old Lamine Yamal.

'Damn, that boy is a monster!' He thought, feeling genuinely impressed.

As an avid FC Barcelona fan since 2011, Sam always kept tab on the Spanish club and he knew of Lamine Yamal, the young Spanish winger who made his debut for FC Barcelona last season.

During his debut season, Lamine Yamal was able to showcase his incredible talent to the world despite being just 16.

For a while, Sam had been impressed by Yamal's story and brilliance but after the game between Spain and Croatia, it grew from just impression to motivation.

'Damn! At just 16?!'

He grinned. 'If Yamal can do it at 16, who am I not to do it at 18?'

'I'm literally 2 years older than him!'

For a while in the premier league, most especially in the Fulham team, Sam always saw himself as a prodigy due to how much older his teammates were but after today's game, he was grounded in reality again.

'I'm not special, I need to work harder, much harder!'

'If Yamal can do it, I definitely can!'

That day, Sam was left grinning from ear to ear, baffling Kayla and his best friend. Sam didn't tell the reason though, he showed it with his actions.

That night, Sam hit the gym, focusing on working his way back to full fitness even as the season was still far away.

'This long holiday is a privilege that I won't have always'.

'Others are playing in the Euros; I have the privilege to rest. I will take advantage of it to the fullest to make sure I resume the season in better form than most if not every player in the premier league!'

This became his first marker for the incoming new season.

After the June 15 games, Euro 2024 continued. The outstanding game of the next matchday was between Serbia and England where the most talented group of English players were expected to blow their opponents away.

Having played an incredible debut season with Real Madrid, winning the la liga player of the season award for it, Jude Bellingham was the face of this new England side but the game didn't exactly pan out as people expected.

England did win, but it was a narrow 0-1 win after a towering Jude Bellingham header dragged the English side over the line.

The next matchday on 17th, the outstanding team was a Kylian Mbappe-led France against Austria but once again, it was a narrow 0-1 scoreline in France's favor.

The big teams were yet to show up to the tournament.

The next matchday on 18th, excited Cristiano Ronaldo fans all over the world tuned in as they watched their G.O.A.T lead Portugal out again as the skipper.

Portugal recorded a narrow 2-1 victory over Czechia.

The group stage continued for the next few days and after 26th June when it eventually came to an end, Euro 2024 viewers arrived at a conclusion.

Most of the big national sides were yet to show up to this tournament, and it was increasingly clear that Germany and Spain were the clear favorites to go all the way and win the trophy.

England kept on dazzling to deceive but nobody dared underestimate the 3 Lions; after all, they had a star-studded squad.

In the round of 16, the battle for European glory heated up.

The first big upset came directly from the first day of the round of 16 on June 29th as Italy was eliminated from the tournament after losing 2-0 to Switzerland.

Germany swept Denmark aside with a comfortable 2-0 score line.

On 30th, Georgia faced Spain and were seemingly on the way to creating another upset after scoring an early goal till Rodri, the Spanish talisman evened the score line before halftime. And when second half started, it became a riot.

Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams dazzled again as Spain tore Georgia apart, ending the game with an impressive 4-1 score line.

"Spain are definitely the favorites!" Sam gushed, fully in love. "I can't wait to line up with both Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams soon enough".

"But Williams is not a Barca player right?" Ian asked.

Sam smirked. "Just give it time, our president will sign him".

"But Barca is broke".

Sam glared at his best friend. "Get lost!"

Ian laughed. "But I didn't lie, did I?"

Sam refrained from paying attention to his best friend, giving his time to Kayla instead as he slowly indoctrinated this girl into the love of football.

These days, they were almost always together.

While Spain tore Georgia apart on the 30th, on the same day, England once again recorded another narrow victory over England and this time, they even needed last-minute heroics from Jude Bellingham again.

England was walking a tight rope this tournament. Sam predicted that they won't make it past the quarterfinals playing like this.

On July 1st, France swept a Kevin De Bruyne-led Belgium aside with a 1-0 score line even as Portugal needed penalty heroics to win over Slovenia.

On this day, it was safe to say that Cristiano Ronaldo fans across the world were devastated as not only did their G.O.A.T miss a penalty, he also collapsed in tears on the pitch but none of it did anything to diminish the greatness of the Portuguese legend.

Sam was a Lionel Messi fan but not once did he ever dismiss Ronaldo's greatness. 'At 39, he's done more than enough for football'.

'We shouldn't be sad that it's ending, rather, we should be glad it happened'.

He grinned. 'The suiiii is still an iconic celebration that gives me the jitters!'

On 2nd July, the last of the round of 16 games were played as Netherlands swept Romania aside convincingly with a 3-0 display.

And on the same day, the young Real Madrid prodigy, Arda Guler announced his name to the rest of Europe as he dazzled, leading his nation Turkiye to a 2-1 victory over Austria.

Watching the likes of Arda Guler and Lamine Yamal dazzle, Sam felt wistful. 'I wonder when I'll get to dazzle for my country too'.

Nigeria was yet to give him his first international call up.

Yes, Sam would play for Nigeria. Not once did he even think of playing for another country. 'Nigeria is my nation'.

With the Turkey game, the quarterfinal fixtures were decided as 5 heavyweights in Spain, Germany, Portugal, France, and England made it.

It was originally going to be an exciting battle for European glory, but then 2 specific fixtures spiced it up even more.

(Euro 2024:)

(Spain – Germany)

(Date: 5th July, 2024)

...

(Portugal – France) Find more to read on empire

(Date: 5th July, 2024)

Chapter 158 Euro 2024 [2]

(Euro 2024:)

(Spain – Germany)

(Date: 5th July, 2024)

...

(Portugal – France)

(Date: 5th July, 2024)

It was dubbed the clash of the heavyweights.

Portugal vs France was going to be legendary as it would be a battle between mentor and disciple, the duo being the Portuguese legend, Cristiano Ronaldo and France's talisman, Kylian Mbappe.

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That game was going to be legendary but definitely not as legendary as Spain vs Germany. Afterall, it was a clash of the 2 clearest favorites.

Most people thought it was unfair to pit them against each other this early in the tournament, but this was the brutal nature of tournaments.

Spain and Germany would have to man up and prove their credentials, and oh boy, did both teams turn up.

To Sam, watching Spain vs Germany live felt like Godzilla vs Kong all over again; it was just legendary!

Throughout this game, Sam was on edge, feeling goosebumps.

It was raw display of elite football.

After 90 minutes of incredible football, both teams were tied 1-1, leading to extra time. And in the 118th minute of extra time, Mikel Merino, the Spanish substitute became the decider between the 2 teams, scoring the winner with a towering header past Manuel Neuer to send Spain to the semifinal of the Euros.

The hosts were knocked out in agonizing fashion but they bowed out with their heads held high, they played amazing football.

Portugal vs France was surprisingly bland as both teams played well below their standards, but simply due to the superstars lining the pitch that day, people watched still till the game was decided.

France won after another Portugal penalty shoot-out. Ronaldo scored his penalty this time, but their goalkeeper could not bail them out a second time.

France progressed.

The next day, the last 2 games of the quarterfinals went as people expected. Surprisingly, again, England were pushed to the limits just as Sam predicted but they didn't lose, narrowly winning through penalties.

"Damn! They're just progressing through luck at this point!" Sam complained after the game.
"They're not playing as a team at all".

As for the very last game, Netherlands won 2-1 over Turkey.

And then came the semifinals.

(Euro 2024 semifinal:)

(Spain – France)

(Date: 9th July, 2024)

...

(Netherlands – England)

(Date: 10th July, 2024)

Again, it was a clash of heavyweights but it generally progressed just as most people expected.

Due to his nose injury, Kylian Mbappe was not performing close to his best throughout the tournament and finally after crashing against the towering wall called Spain, they crashed out of the tournament, losing 2-1 to Spain.

This game got more publicity after comments from the French players, most notable from Adrien Rabbiot who talked down Lamine Yamal's threat.

Well, Yamal took those comments personal.

On 9th of July, the whole football world was forced to acknowledge the name Lamine Yamal as after dazzling all game, the boy wonder scored a goal of the tournament contender, turning the same Adrien Rabbiot inside out before scoring an incredible curler past Mike Maignan, the French goalkeeper.

It was the perfect statement performance from the young FC Barcelona winger. And well, in Nigeria, you had to see the reaction to this game on twitter.

With the perfect timing of Portugal having crashed out in the last round of the tournament, now France crashing out, Lionel Messi fans had all the leverage in the world to taunt their Ronaldo counterparts.

The memes on social media were creative and crazily devious.

Lionel Messi fans were having a field day, buoyed by a Lionel Messi-led Argentina side's progress through the 2024 Copa America tournament having made it to the final already.

The England game ended against Sam's predictions again as somehow, England managed to grind out a result against Netherlands, winning 2-1.

"What the heck!" Sam was absolutely flabbergasted. "How on earth do they keep doing this every single time?!"

"Damn! They actually made it to the final". He was stunned.

Euro 2024 final was decided.

(Euro 2024:)

(Spain – England)

(14th July, 2024)

Before the final game of Euro 2024, the Copa America final was played first and trust Sam, despite it being very late in Nigeria time, he stayed awake, watching this pivotal game.

Tragedy struck in this final as Lionel Messi was forced out of the tense game against Colombia with an ankle injury, yet, without their skipper, Argentina did not fumble as they showed their mettle against James Rodriguez's Colombia.

The ex-Real Madrid player seemed to have regained his spark in this year's Copa America, having dazzled with his performances leading to the final.

Without Messi, Argentina struggled but their famous defense held, keeping Colombia's rampant attack at bay till the second half of extra time when Argentina was saved by a Lautaro Martinez strike.

On that night, to Sam, the world stopped.

It was like reliving the 2022 FIFA World Cup final all over again.

"YESSSSS!!!" Sam screamed at the top of his lungs, jumping excitedly as he woke Kayla up with a startle.

She looked at him groggily.

Sam ran up to her, shaking her excitedly. "It's a goal!" He screamed. "We're leading, Messi is about to win another Copa America!"

Well, his words came to pass.

Colombia tried but they could not find the breakthrough, Argentina won 1-0, effectively laying down their argument as one of the best international sides of all time as they matched the glamor of Spain's golden era of the early 2010s with 3 back to back major international trophies won.

After that game, in a jolly mood, Sam approached the Euro 2024 final.

This time, he couldn't predict. 'Who knows? Those undying cockroaches may go and shock the whole world'.

England did threaten, equalizing through a stunning Cole Palmer strike after Spain took the lead earlier but Spain held their nerves through this final, showing that their credentials as favorites were not unfounded.

In this final, Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams dazzled again, and it was the later who nailed the dagger to English fans all over the world.

Nico Williams scored the winning goal, winning the Euros for Spain.

Sam celebrated excitedly. To him, football won.

All in all, to him, it was an exciting closure to an unforgettable holiday and break from football.

Chapter 159 Preparations for the new season

The final of Euro 2024 was played on 14th July.

2 days later, Sam finally left Nigeria, going to Fulham to officially start his preparations for the new 2024/2025 premier league season.

After arriving in Fulham and spending a few days with him, Kayla finally bid farewell to him as she returned to Netherlands to meet her family.

As for him, he threw himself into the joy of football.

Watching Spain's journey through Euro 2024 lit up something akin to a fire in his heart. Watching the young Spanish team anchored by Rodri go all the way, winning the Euros in such exciting fashion, he felt motivated.

Watching Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams' performances lit up a fire in his heart. 'Nothing is impossible'.

From the very beginning of the 2024 Euros, the heavy favorites to win the trophy were England, France, and Germany.

From the beginning, Spain was never really a serious contender.

Afterall, a nation having a 16-year old as it's starting right winger, could such a nation really be considered a true contender to win the trophy?

Well, at the end of the tournament, the result spoke for itself.

Spain didn't lose a single game of Euro 2024. Simply believing in their own strengths, Spain played against every opponent, fearlessly executing their game plan to the finest details and it paid off at the end of the tournament.

'If Spain can do it, I can'.

'If Lamine Yamal can do it, I can'.

In the days that followed after arriving back in England, Sam forgot about everything else in the world, including Kayla, including his little vacation, literally everything as the only thing dominating his head became football.

Jogging through the streets of Fulham, completing daily system quests, and driving to Craven Cottage every day to engage in individual training, Sam already started working hard to prepare for the new season.

And knowing that football was not an individual sport, he did well to take pictures and videos every day, sending to his teammates in their official WhatsApp group chat even as he kept on riling them up with his provocative captions.

(It's a new day, are you guys still sleeping? Unacceptable! A new season is starting in less than a month, let's act like people aspiring to win the league!)

(You think we can't? Well, ask Spain about it.)

(And let me let you in on a secret now. Most of the top players of our biggest competitors in the league all went to Euro 2024. While we had a nice vacation, recovering from last season's schedule, they never had the same luxury.)

(We are well rested than them and do you know what this means? It means that after Euro 2024, while the late vacation of their players would start as they try to catch up on some much-needed rest, we get to start preparing ahead of them for the new season.)

(This is an opportunity to catch them off-guard. They'll never see it coming, let's make a statement performance to the rest of the premier league come 16th of August!)

Sometimes, that was all that was needed to motivate mature grown men who kicked a ball around as a profession and received large sums of money every week as their salary.

Shortly after Sam started sending these provocative messages, the second player of Fulham finally cut his holiday short, returning to Fulham.

The player joined Sam in individual training.

From the second, it quickly jumped to the fifth as Fulham players started preparing for the new season ahead of time while most other clubs were still in a state of stasis, recovering from last season and Euro 2024's stress.

The fixtures for the 2024/2025 premier league season was already decided. Fulham's first game of the season would commence on 16th August and it was against one of the biggest giants of English football, Manchester United.

Playing against Manchester United in the opening game of the season was a test of nerves to see if Fulham's form from last season extended into this season.

But in a way, it was a test that they wanted badly.

Sam motivating them was for a reason, mentality was just as important as physicality and skill in football.

With the right mentality, the expression of skill becomes effortless.

Roberto Baggio was one of the greatest Italian players of all time, but there was a blemish to his name, a legendary World Cup run that became tragic at its end. It was impossible to get to the highest level of the game and stay there without the right mentality.

Roberto Baggio was one of the strongest players in history mentally, but sometimes, even the best mental defenses were put to the sword by the stern atmosphere of some matches.

The atmosphere of a FIFA World Cup final was unmatched in football, and it was even more unforgiving when it was a penalty shootout.

After putting in impressive display after impressive display, dragging Italy all the way to the FIFA World Cup final in a legendary run, Roberto Baggio lost it all when he needed it the most in the high-stake moment as he skied his crucial penalty in the shootout.

On that night, Italy lost and Roberto Baggio was haunted by it for life.

The great Italian was not the only great player whose mentality failed when needed the most though. Even one of the G.O.A.Ts himself, Lionel Messi fell victim to it with his national team twice in 2014 and 2016.

Then, Messi was extremely prosperous with his club side, FC Barcelona but glory with his country always eluded him.

In 2014, Argentina finally went all the way, going to the FIFA World Cup final against Germany which they lost agonizingly to the Germans 1-0.

Messi may have won the golden ball of the world cup, but missing out on the trophy was far more painful, overshadowing whatever joy was attributed to winning the golden ball award.

In that game, Lionel Messi tried his best, playing a good game but it could not be disputed that the aura of the occasion got to him a bit.

Vintage Messi didn't show up in the 2014 FIFA World Cup final.

This was the great hurdle of football, the ability to show skill in the biggest stages; it was hard even for the best players to ever kick a ball.

Again, in 2016, Lionel Messi faced the same hurdle and this time, it was another final, the 2016 Copa America final against Chile.

Despite playing another good game, dragging his team again all the way to the final like in the 2014 FIFA World Cup, when Lionel Messi stepped up to take his penalty, the indomitable Lionel Messi became vulnerable, skying his shot just like Roberto Baggio did decades ago.

Your journey continues at empire

Well, it was safe to say that the outcome of that game haunted the Argentine genius as he even retired from his national team, a decision he later changed his mind on.

In recent years, Messi already won it all with Argentina but before the recent success, even the mercurial Argentine suffered in the big moments.

Sam did not want to suffer in the big moments with his teammates, this was why he pushed them so hard with his mamba mentality.

'There's nothing effort can't do'.

'With enough effort, even the worst of atmospheres can be tamed to play your best game'.

'For the new season, Manchester United is our first hurdle'.

'If we're to honestly stand a chance of doing the impossible and winning the league, we need to start with Manchester United!'

Honestly, Fulham winning the premier league was unrealistic but Sam had something to lean on. 'Nobody expected Leicester to win the league in 2016, but damn expectations, they did it'.

'We can do it too!'

Sam trained like he was possessed; he motivated his teammates like he was the team's captain. It got so much at times it started feeling rude but his teammates were not offended, they were already used to being around their extremely competitive teammate.

And then, news started dropping in Fulham.

Fulham FC's transfer board became active.

On the 1st of July, Tosin Adarabioyo, the Fulham center back became the first in a list of departures as Chelsea snapped up the energetic defender.

On the 6th of July, Bobby De Cordova-Reid also completed a free transfer to Leicester City. And most agonizingly, on the 11th of July, after speculations for months, Joao Palhinha finally completed his dream move to Bayern Munich.

Bayern Munich shelled out 51 million Euros for the defensive midfielder.

Another big name to leave Fulham was Luke Harris on 4th of August.

It was not all departures for Fulham though. On the other end of the transfer market, Fulham also engaged in a bit of activity on the market.

On 26th July, Fulham snapped up Ryan Sessegnon on a free transfer from Tottenham. But the truly big news came on 2nd August when Fulham splurged 31.8 million Euros on a prominent player of the premier league.

After seasons of playing a peripheral role in the title-charging Arsenal side of recent seasons, Emile Smith Rowe, the Arsenal wonderkid finally decided to go for a new challenge and he chose Fulham.

To excited Fulham fans, it was the signing of the season.

To Sam, it was the best gift to bolster his ambitions for the new season.

When Emile Smith Rowe was signed, Sam was one of the very first Fulham players to actively contact the player, trying to make friends with him and make him comfortable in the Fulham squad.

And then, finally, it was time.

It was time for pre-season friendlies and Fulham's first opponent was Benfica in away ground.

(Friendly:)

(Benfica – Fulham)

(Date: 2nd August, 2024)

Chapter 160 Pre-season friendlies

(Friendly:)

(Benfica – Fulham)

(Date: 2nd August, 2024)

Benfica was the first warm-up ahead of the new season for Fulham.

But ahead of the trip to Portugal to visit Benfica at home, while the Fulham squad was yet to be complete, Coach Marco Silva presided over behind closed doors' games against QPR and Watford.

QPR and Watford were not really opponents to gauge the level of his team, but they served as the perfect foils to see the fitness levels of his players.

And it was safe to say that ahead of the trip to Portugal, Marco Silva was highly impressed by the fitness levels of a number of his players, most especially his favorite in recent times, Samuel Moses.

Fulham recorded a 4-0 trashing of QPR before drubbing Watford 6-1.

In both games, Sam impressed in the less than 60 minutes that he played as he chipped in with his fair share of goals and assists.

Sam was not just happy with his performance, he was also glad with the level of his teammates. 'My strategy worked'.

'Most of them are already close to full fitness'.

'The 3 scheduled pre-season games should do it'.

Against Benfica, Coach Marco Silva started with a strong lineup. The Portuguese giants were not scared of the English club though as they played their best football in this friendly game.

For large swaths of the game, it was even as Benfica played amazing football in the presence of their home fans, but they just could not get the end product.

And in what they failed in; Fulham excelled in after second half started.

Sam dominated this game as the stand-out player, torturing the Benfica defense again and again. Despite the departure of big names like Palhinha and De Cordova-Reid, the impact was not being felt.

With Sam in the lineup, it felt like the team never changed.

After trying hard for the first 45 minutes to no avail, in the second half, Sam finally opened Benfica up with a defense-splitting pass for Muniz to run at and poke behind the goalkeeper into the net.

In the 72nd minute, Fulham got the first goal.

And 8 minutes later, in the 80th minute of this game, Sam did it again, this time playing Alex Iwobi in to score the second goal of this game, sealing Benfica's defeat. It was a good warm-up game.

At the end of the game, Sam approached a certain player with a shy look of excitement on his face, asking for his jersey.

He approached the Argentine winger now plying his trade for Benfica, the legendary Angel Di Maria.

Sam felt a bit bad as Di Maria did not recognize him, but his feelings were abated when the Argentine winger obliged to swap jerseys with him. Di Maria also expressed his feelings that he played a great game.

Well, that was enough to bring out Sam's fanboy side.

Afterall, this was a legend of football that he had admired for a long time. The 2022 World Cup final performance alone was enough to turn him into the biggest fanboy, but beyond that, Di Maria was a legend of the game.

Sam's face turned as red as a potato. 'H-h-he complimented me?!'

In the end, Di Maria patted him on the back before leaving.

Sam clutched this jersey tightly. 'Another legendary piece to my collection'.

His eyes gleamed excitedly. 'It's became really big now. Kevin De Bruyne, Cole Palmer, now Angel Di Maria,' he grinned. 'Hehe, now all I need is Messi'.

After Sam's performance against Benfica, excited Fulham fans flooded social media, speculating about the likely midfield partnership that would be struck between Emile Smith Rowe and Sam.

"The premier league is not ready for this partnership yet!" They boasted.

Well, in Fulham's next pre-season game against Sevilla on 5th August, excited Fulham fans finally got to see the partnership that they yearned for.

In this game, the new signing got to showcase his talent as he combined with Sam to perfection, scoring a neat goal from an even neater pass from Sam.

Later in the game, Smith Rowe returned the favor, setting Sam up to score an absolute rocket, finally opening his scoring account in the pre-season friendlies.

The game ended in a 2-2 draw between Fulham and Sevilla.

One thing that became apparent from these 2 games was the level of this squad. For some reason, Fulham seemed even more dangerous than last season, this was despite the long list of sales and departures.

This brought up a question on social media; what could they do this season?

No one could tell until after the season started.

To most neutral and rival fans though, Fulham was just flattering to deceive. To them, their EFL Cup run and eventual win was just a fluke against Liverpool and Chelsea sides that underestimated the opposition.

According to these neutral fans, after knowing their threat now, big teams would know to neutralize them better.

Besides, they labelled Sam a one-season wonder.

Sam did not let all this negative news get to him though. 'Like dad would say, it's normal. Afterall, even Erling Haaland was criticized when he first made the switch to the premier league till he shut them up with his record-breaking goalscoring performances'.

'I'll just shut them up with my performances once the season start'.

In Fulham's last game of pre-season, they took on Hoffenheim on 10th August and this time, they simply blew their inferior opponents out of the window.

Fulham won 3-0 after a totally one-sided performance.

In this game, Sam did not get a goal contribution but his influence was heavily felt in the middle of the pitch as he orchestrated play, playing a part in all 3 goals that downed Hoffenheim.

By now, it was clear that this team was already like a well-oiled machine churning with ruthless efficiency.

Fulham post-Sam era was truly a different beast on the pitch.

But then, after pre-season, the real test was finally about to begin.

All across England and the world, you could feel palpable excitement in the air among the male gender. Afterall, the premier league was starting.

After months of being deprived, matchday 1 was finally here.

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 1:) Your journey continues with empire

(Manchester United – Fulham)

(Date: 16th August, 2024)

The Fulham squad went on a trip to Old Trafford.