

Rise of a Football God

#Chapter 2: An unforgettable night - Read Rise of a Football God Chapter 2: An unforgettable night

28, May, 2011...

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Woof! Woof!

The sound of the dog's barking frightened the little 6-year-old as he instinctively clung closer to his dad.

Feeling the fear of the little boy, the bald-haired middle-aged man smiled. He gently patted his son on the head to alleviate his fears as he stared at the dog.

"Sam, don't be scared of Bingo, he feeds on your fears".

"Next time a dog barks at you, bark back, it'll leave you alone". He chuckled.

The boy nodded timidly as they passed the territory of the dog.

This father and son duo walked through a dirty street with potholes that were filled with mud water.

This was just one of the many streets in these outskirts of Nigeria.

There were buildings here and there, with some shops sprinkled among them. Along the road, a few kids ran carefreely without a care for the bikes moving up and down, playing with a dirty brown football plastered with mud.

"I'm Messi!"

"No, I'm Ronaldo, Ronaldo is better!"

"Goal!" Sam could hear them shout, he looked at the older children with a bit of envy in his eyes, up till they overdid it, hitting a ball too high as it hit the roof of one of the nearby residential buildings.

Silence..., then a window opened in the second floor of this building.

"Paul!" The loud voice of an angry old woman reverberated the next moment, the kids didn't wait to hear her say more as they ran.

Sam watched them as they ran.

He looked up at the big hotel at the other side of the road whose bright lights now illuminated the world.

It was already getting late at night, so the bright lights of the hotel were especially prominent, attracting his attention.

Sam lived here in Abraka, a city in Nigeria with his family.

His family was a small family of 4 comprising his dad, his mom, him, and his younger sister who was just 3 years old.

He rarely left home since his mom always locked him indoors. His ticket for going out today with his dad was a straightforward one, one that left him excited, a ticket that could override his mom's wishes.

Mr. Moses, Sam's father was an avid football fan, a hobby that Sam's mom had tried hard to kill for years to no avail.

The football club that he supported was FC Barcelona and today, 28 May 2011, Barcelona who were already the champions of Spain was to play the UEFA Champions League final against Manchester United, the champions of England.

This was why Sam was so happy this night.

Though he barely understood the nuances of the game at this young age, his father still did enough to ingratiate the love of football in him already. And of course, like his father, he supported FC Barcelona.

Sam was hyped for it, he clenched his fists, thinking. 'I hope we win'.

'Of course we'll win,' he smiled instinctively. 'Father is so confident'.

'And we have Messi, we also have Xavi and Iniesta, of course we'll win'.

A few minutes later, they arrived at the popular viewing center. It was a big caravan building with a few dozen benches and 2 big TVs. A few of his dad's friends who recognized him hailed him from a distance as they spoke.

"Big Moses, you brought your son today? How bold of you, are you not scared of your club losing face in front of your son?"

"Not a chance". Mr. Moses laughed exuberantly. "Today, there's no other outcome, my club is definitely winning".

While the older men engaged in their normal football banter, a curious Sam just clung close to his dad while observing.

At some point in time, his dad sent him on an errand to get him a bottle of coca cola drink. Sam already made a name for himself in his home for how swiftly he executed errands, his stamina was insane at this young age.

And of course, today again, to not miss out on any of the action, Sam ran the whole distance in record time without breaking a sweat before handing the bottle of coca cola to his dad who immediately started sipping away.

He observed all the benches in the popular viewing center that were now occupied by mostly adults. He observed the 2 big TV screens on the wall that were now showing the football pitch.

This year's UEFA Champions League final was to be played in Wembley Stadium in London. Sam knew because his dad always spoke of Wembley.

About a minute later, Sam was finally seated with his dad.

Looking around, he realized that he should be the shortest viewer here. Sam didn't care though; this was because he could feel the excitement in the air.

All the adults were excited and hyped for the game, so naturally, he also became hyped. 'Come on Barca!' He thought excitedly.

And then, the game started.

Just like most of the world expected, from the onset of the game, Barcelona dominated. Under Pep Guardiola, Barca already built a dynasty, becoming the most feared football team in Europe and on this night, it showed.

Besides, this was not just any game, it was also kind of a grudge match between these 2 heavyweights of European football as Manchester United already lost against FC Barcelona on this same stage 2 years ago.

It was the perfect coming of age ceremony for the young and passionate Sam.

On that night, like they promised, the inevitable midfield trio of Xavi, Iniesta, and Sergio Busquets shone as Barca dominated possession.

Playing beautiful tiki-taka football, ping-pong the ball left and right, Xavi dictated the game till all of a sudden, from the right, after a short driving run, Xavi Hernandez threw in a cross into the running path of Pedro who hit it wide.

"Oh!" Moses, Sam's father jumped to his feet as he screamed in frustration. "So close!" He muttered intensely.

Sam stared at his dad, feeling all his overflowing emotions. His father's mood was infectious, it affected Sam and so he rode on it.

He focused back on the game.

Despite the Spanish club's domination, Manchester United were still the best team in all of England. The maverick English team held their nerves, defending like a unit, running all over the pitch as they soaked in the pressure.

Yet, inevitably, it didn't take too long, one team took the lead first at the 27th minute of the game.

Xavi Hernandez threaded a cutting pass to Pedro Rodriguez on the right who after a simple touch to control the ball rifled it into the bottom right corner.

The legendary Manchester United goalkeeper, Edwin Van Der Sarr was left sprawling helplessly on the ground.

As soon as the ball entered, all hell broke loose.

"Goalll!" All the Barcelona fans in the viewing center rose up in celebration, roaring at the top of their voices.

Mr. Moses, Sam's father was one of the front runners of the celebration as instinctively, Sam also jumped, celebrating with his father.

"Up Barca!" They chanted.

With that first goal, the game opened up as Barcelona dominated even further. On that night, Lionel Messi was terrific as he tormented the Manchester United backline with his dizzying agility, touch, and dribbling.

But then, against the run of play, Manchester United stung like a bee out of nowhere at the 34th minute of the game.

Sam could never forget the commentator's voice.

"This is Rooney..."

Wayne Rooney, the Manchester United center forward passed the ball to Ryan Giggs who controlled it with a deft touch before placing it back in the rampaging center forwards' path and Rooney did not miss his chance, he seized his moment with aplomb.

"And Rooney!"

Before Sam knew it, the ball was already in the back of the net and the mute Manchester United fans since finally erupted like an ancient Dragon that had been slumbering for a millennium.

"GOALLLL!"

They celebrated wildly like they already won the game.

That night, Sam felt his passion for football bloom than ever before. To him, it was no longer just FC Barcelona vs Manchester United, rather, it felt more like him, his father, all Barca fans vs the Manchester United fans.

At that young age, Sam had no words to describe what he felt, it was just exhilarating.

The first half ended with the scoreline draw, but the second half started even more explosively than the first as FC Barcelona went on a riot and of course, one figure was at the center of it all, Lionel Messi.

It came from nowhere.

Receiving the ball in the halfway line from Andres Iniesta, the Barca no. 8, Messi drove forward with the ball a bit then all of a sudden, vroom! A powerful driven shot and the ball was in the back of the net.

Messi's powerful left-footed shot was explosive, bursting into the bottom right corner as the stadium erupted in cheers. Edwin Van Der Sarr stood no chance.

Where Sam was, the viewing center also erupted in cheers.

"Messi!" "Messi!" The Barcelona fans started chanting.

Once the celebrations died down, the game continued. Manchester United tried to turn things around to no avail.

Like a tyrant, Barcelona kept a firm grip over the game as they kept on dictating proceedings, dominating possession till the late stages of the game.

Manchester United was run ragged.

Xavi Hernandez and other star Barcelona players had their chances but Edwin Van Der Sarr was on top of his game, keeping his team in the game.

Lionel Messi kept on tormenting the Red Devils' backline and in the 69th minute of the game, the game was finally put to bed.

After another bursting Messi run from the right, causing chaos in the United backline, Busquets got the loose ball and pushed it to David Villa who didn't think twice, curling the ball into the top right corner of the post.

"GOALLLL!"

Sam celebrated with his dad and all other FC Barcelona supporters.

That was enough to seal the game.

For the remaining minutes of the game, it was just Barca dominating, throwing passes left and right, controlling the game.

It was prime Barca football.

And when the final whistle finally blew, Sam ended up creating a memory, a cherished memory of an unforgettable night.

On that night, he became a die-hard FC Barcelona fan.

On that same night, something else blossomed. 'I want to play football!'