

## Football God 39

Chapter 39: A performance for the ages [1]

Clap! Clap!

Coach Yemi Daniel clapped energetically as he faced his players in the locker room. "Do you feel that we cannot win?" He looked round at all of them.

"Come on!" He clapped again. "I know we're in the home stadium of Plateau United, a tough side but we're Enyimba boys!"

"We're Enyimba and we don't give in even in the home of our rivals!"

"In the second half, I want you guys to increase the intensity. Let them feel the pressure, let them make mistakes".

"Home advantage can be a double-edged sword at times when you're playing against a team like Enyimba. We want to win, but theirs, they must win due to their on-watching fans which puts the pressure on them".

"Let's use this to our advantage in the second half. Press for the ball, force them into making mistakes and capitalize!" He clapped. "Counter swiftly!"

He looked at his striker. "Emeka, I know that they have huge center backs but your performance in the first half has been less than satisfactory".

"I want you to put that physicality of yours to good use, give them more trouble. Even if you don't score a goal, stack the pressure on them, you get me?"

"Yes coach". Emeka nodded.

"Austin, you're doing a good job. You too Farouk". And then this coach finally turned his eyes towards Sam's direction.

Feeling his coach's gaze fall on him, Sam gulped. "Sam, your work-rate in the first half was seriously impressive, I give you credits for that but in the second half, I want more than just work-rate".

"I want penetrative balls in behind the defenders for Emeka to capitalize on. Come on, you can do it, just do it".

"And when you get the chance, shoot".

Hearing his coach's instructions, Sam heaved a deep sigh of relief. Unlike what he feared, he was not about to be substituted out of the game.

"Yes coach". He answered immediately.

"Good, now get ready, we'll soon go back to the pitch".

While his teammates did their final preparations to go back into the pitch, alongside them, Sam did something extra; he worked on his mind. 'Plateau United is strong but this is the perfect opportunity for me'.

'Making an impression against strong opposition is the best way to solidify my starting spot, and most importantly, show myself to the world'.

'It's one step at a time'. He took a deep breath. 'I need to score a goal'.

By the time the players re-entered the pitch, Sam already entered a deep level of concentration as a lot of things were abstracted from his mind. He was determined to leave his mark in this game.

FWEEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle went off, Plateau United restarted the game.

From the 45th minute, it was clear immediately that Plateau United also approached this second half to win as they rushed towards the Enyimba FC half with an aggressive intention to score.

A series of tiki-taka passes later, their center midfielder got the ball just outside the box and immediately, this player took his shot.

Whoosh!

Immediately after the shot was taken, a leg slid in, blocking the shot as the ball rebounded back up field.

The player who slid in for the block was Sam.

While the Plateau United players passed between themselves, having determined where the easiest way to shoot and score was, Sam charged towards there ahead of time, reading his opponent's intentions to block the shot.

Immediately, an Enyimba FC counterattack started.

Bringing the ball down with his chest, Emeka deftly kicked this ball to the left side of the pitch as the Enyimba left winger, Chijioke chased after the ball.

Running along the length of the pitch with it, this left winger cut in before curling a shot at goal but the Plateau United goalkeeper was at hand to make an incredible diving save.

The first shots of the second half from both teams were already fired in this intense game. And with it, the intensity increased.

Clearly, Coach Yemi Daniel was not the only one who told his players to increase the tempo as the Plateau United players also played with incredible intensity, running all over the pitch.

Enyimba FC struggled to dominate the midfield battle.

But in these chaotic circumstances was where a certain boy shone. With his incredible stamina, Sam became the driving heart of Enyimba FC for the first 20 minutes of the 2nd half as the score remained 1-1.

This was until a moment of magic happened, not from Enyimba, but Plateau United as they won a free kick right outside the Enyimba FC box.

Standing before the ball after the referee's whistle sounded, the Plateau United center midfielder did a short run before curling a shot into the top left corner of the post. Ojo could only dive to no avail, unable to stop the ball going in.

"GOALLL...!" Jos International Stadium roared to life as the Plateau United fans celebrated wildly.

Running to the corner flag, this player did a back flip celebration, rousing the excited home fans even more.

In the 67th minute of the game, Plateau United went ahead 2-1.

Sam stayed calm. 'This is it,' he thought. 'There's no better time than now to seize my moment before I lose it'.

'I can't afford to lose it'.

'I must not lose it!' He was determined.

FWEEEE!

When the referee's whistle sounded again, like a man possessed, Sam rose heads and shoulders above all his teammates again as he played as the driving engine of the incredible machine called Enyimba FC.

To the bystander, it was clear already that if Enyimba FC was to get anything from this game, it would come through their attacking midfielder who was playing like a man possessed at this moment.

It got to the extent that every time Sam won back possession, the Plateau United fans booed loudly but he didn't care, only focused on playing football.

Even without scoring or assisting a goal, he was already putting on an impressive display but Sam was not satisfied with that.

'I want more,' he thought. 'I need more!'

And finally, his moment came, just 3 minutes after Plateau United scored.

Another Enyimba FC attack was thwarted as Plateau United aimed to kick start their own attack but immediately after the ball was passed from deep, a pair of legs slid through the green grass, blocking the ball.

Sam hated defending before becoming a professional player, but weeks of playing football alongside Austin was already rubbing off him.

These days, he didn't mind getting dirty on the football pitch.

Sam won back possession just outside the Plateau United 18-yard box! Immediately after his leg stopped the ball, he smelled danger, the Plateau United players also saw it.

As soon as he sprang back to his feet, trapping the ball, a Plateau United player charged close to block any shooting angle.

Sam raised his right leg to shoot, but it was a feint.

Effortlessly, he cut the ball to the left, evading the player as another Plateau United player was already charging in.

This player stuck his leg out, and then Sam cut the ball back to his stronger right foot. This time, he didn't hesitate, unleashing a powerful knuckle shot.

Sam almost never used knuckle shots, his shooting was not that advanced to execute it perfectly but in that moment, a knuckle shot was the best way to hit the ball and the adrenaline made him do it.

Guess what? It worked, beautifully.

Bam!

As soon as Sam's right leg hit the ball, the ball rose up high into the sky before curving back down into the top right corner of the Plateau United net.

The Plateau United goalkeeper could not even dive as he didn't expect it, he completely misjudged the shot.

"GOALLLL...!" Sam roared. "Come on!" He screamed at the top of his lungs.

He didn't celebrate though, running all the way to the net to pick the ball before rushing back up field. That goal felt like a shot of glucose to him, filling his veins with flowing adrenaline.

He was not satisfied yet, he wanted more. 'One more goal to win!'

Sam was already putting out an incredible performance.

FWEEEE!

The referee restarted play, Plateau United kicked the ball.