

## Football God 51

Chapter 51: Semifinal battle against the Egyptian giants, Al Ahly [2]

(Semifinal first leg results:)

>Enyimba FC 2-2 Al Ahly<

>Date: 12 May, 2023<

...

>Wydad Ac 0-0 Mamelodi Sundowns (Red Card)<

>Date: 13 May, 2023<

...

(Semifinal second leg fixtures:)

>Al Ahly - Enyimba FC<

>Date: 19 May, 2023<

...

>Mamelodi Sundowns – Wydad AC<

>Date: 20 May, 2023<

...

After 2 thrillers on back to back days, the result of the first leg of the CAF Champions league was decided. Mamelodi Sundowns got a red card in their game, only settling for a 0-0 draw against Wydad away from home.

The first game was more exciting though. Despite the fact that Enyimba FC could only settle for a draw, the game was incredibly exciting.

After the first leg, exactly 7 days later, the second leg would be played.

After the game, Sam learned something. 'No matter how much you want it, sometimes, playing good alone is not enough to win a game'.

Sam was dead tired after the game having run himself to the ground.

He chipped in with a goal and an assist but his man of the match award was not due to just that. Sam put his all into that game, determined to help his team win at home but in the end, Al Ahly managed to snatch a draw from them.

Sam was disappointed, but his disappointment only made him more motivated. 'What matters is that I played my best game, and that I must improve before the second leg comes'.

90% of Coach Yemi Daniel's training and tactical set-ups in the next few days were targeted at the second leg game, trivializing the league match.

Enyimba FC ended up losing the league match but no one really paid attention to it, all their sights were on the CAF champions league return leg game.

Diligently, 2 midfielders trained during this time, refusing to give in to fatigue or laziness. Sam truly exceeded his limit in training alongside Austin this time.

If they were to stand a chance at beating Al Ahly away from home, they needed a miracle and this time, both were determined to be the miracle.

Both midfielders motivated each other to train like hell.

And like this, the days moved swiftly like the rolling pages of a book and before they knew it, it was the D-day again.

Traveling to Egypt, visiting the Cairo International Stadium, the Enyimba FC players were subjected to the true horror of a hostile stadium.

The 75,000 capacity stadium was filled to the brim with passionate Al Ahly fans, and at this moment, they roared their team on, suppressing Enyimba FC.

A sight that warmed Sam's heart in this hostile stadium though was the sight of the Enyimba FC fans in the away stands.

Austin was emotional. "This is the first time I'm seeing our fans travel internationally to watch our football game. Sam, we must win!"

Sam nodded seriously. "We will".

After the players arranged themselves across the pitch, the game started.

FWEEEE!

Immediately, Al Ahly exerted their authority as the superior team.

Within the first 5 minutes of the game, they already created 2 chances as they easily breached the Enyimba FC defense and tested Ojo twice but the Enyimba FC goalkeeper was somehow on top of his game despite the palpable tension.

By keeping his team in the game, he gave his outfield players the time to settle and once they did, 2 players exerted their authority in this game.

In this hostile stadium, literally all the Enyimba FC players seemed to have disappeared, except Austin and Sam.

Together in the middle of the pitch, these 2 midfielders felt like warriors stuck in enemy territory but with their back against each other's, with full trust in each other's support, they fought valiantly.

Their valiant fight could only take them so far though.

In the 21st minute of the game, Al Ahly stung like a bee as after a well-executed corner routine helped by some poor defending from the Enyimba FC backline, the ball ended up in the back of the Enyimba FC net.

"F\*ck!" Sam screamed and slammed his fists against the pitch as he watched the Al Ahly players whirl off away in celebration.

The captain, Austin was just as furious as him. "What the hell guys!" Austin roared at his teammates. "How can you switch off in a game like this?!"

"We're playing Al Ahly for God's sake!"

"This is the CAF champions league semi-final, we can't afford to switch off in a game like this!" He clapped his palms aggressively. "Come on guys!"

"Come on, believe! We can do it!"

FWEEEE!

Once the game restarted, Al Ahly won back possession and reasserted their authority but Enyimba FC held their nerves, playing as a team and defending valiantly as a unit.

Al Ahly kept on knocking for 45 minutes but Enyimba FC stayed tight and defensively disciplined, and then, they had their first shot on target of the game.

Al Ahly almost doubled their lead only for the ball to rattle off the crossbar.

Pouncing on the loose ball deep in his half, Sam scanned his surroundings with his spatial awareness before evading a challenge.

Immediately after, he raised his head and saw the Al Ahly goalkeeper slightly off his lines.

"...!" Sam's instincts tingled!

He felt a deep sense of déjà vu, this was it!

He had been in this situation before, not once, not twice, he recognized it.

Sam raised his leg to shoot but an Al Ahly player blocked him. Instead of dribbling, he passed the ball to the right. Austin was there.

The ball barely moved when another pass was made, one-two..., Austin hit the ball right back to Sam.

Having seen the Al Ahly goalkeeper's positioning already, Sam did not even think, hitting the ball first-time with a ferocious shot.

BAM!

The ball rose into the air like a missile, dipped as the Al Ahly goalkeeper retreated, before dipping into an empty net, in the 45th plus 4 minute of the first half, literally the last minute.

"GOALLLL...!" Sam jumped, roaring as he pumped a fist defiantly at the Al Ahly fans that had been trying to get into his head since.

The fiery Al Ahly fans responded with a chorus of boos but Sam didn't care, he already got his first revenge.

The first half ended 1-1.

The game was tight.

Chapter 52: An unforgettable second half

Breathing heavily, with a serious look in his eyes, Sam paid attention to his coach as he addressed his players animatedly.

"Victor, Chijioke, give up on trying to beat their fullbacks one-on-one every time, it's not effective. Those boys are just too good at one-on-one defending".

"Instead, whenever you get the chance, cut the ball back into the middle, into the running paths of either Samuel or Austin".

"I want the ball to get to them more often".

"If you don't know what to do with the ball, pass to either of them. If you're in danger of losing possession, pass to them".

"If you're in the box and you're not confident of scoring, pass to them".

Coach Yemi Daniel didn't join his players on the field, but at this moment, he was sweating even more than they did as he addressed them.

He focused on his center forward. "Emeka, continue putting all your effort into the physical battle against their defenders. Keep on dragging them out of position, be the decoy for your teammates to shine".

"I know you don't like this role, I'm sorry, but for the team, do it".

"To win this game, we need to make sacrifices".

"Yes coach".

Coach Yemi finally paid attention to his 2 star midfielders. "As you can tell, they're targeting both of you already. Getting a few fouls from them is good, but don't overdo it, I don't want any of you 2 getting injured, that will be disastrous".

"Most importantly of all, enjoy yourselves out there".

"Yes coach".

FWEEEEEE!

When the second half started, Cairo International Stadium was louder than ever. The Al Ahly fans were bullish, they were dissatisfied with the current situation on the pitch, they wanted their team to win and to do it fast.

Buoyed by the unrelenting loud noise being made by their fans, the Al Ahly players upped their game, running all over the pitch and this was when Sam discovered a shocking reality.

One Al Ahly player was tasked with marking him in the 2nd half.

Personally, as the game wore on, to Sam, it became incredibly taxing to function with a player always breathing down his neck but at the same time, this became even more validation and motivation for him.

Being man-marked only meant that the opposition team recognized his threat. To Sam, that was close to the greatest validation he could receive on a pitch.

It motivated him to perform even more.

His incredible stamina reared its head like a monster as he dragged his marker left and right all over the pitch, making this player suffer.

Despite his incredible performance still in the midfield battle alongside his captain, Al Ahly remained the dominating team and their dominance finally paid off 15 minutes after the start of the second half.

In the 60th minute of the game, after a dangerous cross into the box, there was some scrambling before a player jumped acrobatically, unleashing an unexpected overhead kick ball as the ball fell into an empty net.

"GOALLLL...!" Mohamed Sheriff, the Al Ahly striker rose to his feet as he celebrated his goal with pure euphoria.

The Enyimba FC players were deflated but not for long. In the second half, they were playing well, just not good enough.

They simply needed to improve.

Standing in the touchline, a sweating Coach Yemi Daniel clapped his hands aggressively as he motivated his players. "Come on, we're still in the game!"

On the pitch, Sam scanned the Al Ahly players, lost in his thoughts. 'I can't afford to lose now, not after coming this far'.

'I can't afford to lose..., I can't afford to lose!'

'I must win!'

To Sam, this was definitely the most difficult game of his life. The quality of their opponents was unlike anything he had seen in the NPFL since he started his professional career, they were a level above.

It was hard, but the harder it was, the more he wanted to win.

His eyes gleamed. 'This is my moment; I must seize it!'

FWEEEEEE!

When the game restarted, Enyimba FC tried their best to get back in the game led by Austin as marked by the Al Ahly player, despite his incredible work rate, Sam struggled to do much on the ball.

Enyimba FC could only try though, the Al Ahly players buoyed by their fans put in just as much work as the Enyimba FC players did, also determined to win.

They kept on dominating this titanic battle in their home ground.

This game no longer felt like a game of football. Rather it felt like a gladiator battle, with the stadium being the coliseum, and the 22 players on the pitch being the gladiators who must fight to the death for glory.

As the game drew closer to the death, the tension increased and with it, fouls became more frequent.

The referee handed out yellow cards left and right.

The physicality of this game increased as the players did everything they could to retain control over the ball, and do something to damage their opponents.

Despite how much Enyimba FC tried, in the end, it was Al Ahly who came closest to scoring again simultaneously in the 83rd and 85th minute of the game.

The longer the game wore on, drawing closer to the death, even as his teammates became agitated and frustrated, in contrast, Sam became calmer with it. It was eerie, almost as if he was a robot that could not feel.

With every touch, Sam's game became more ruthless, more efficient, and more devoid of unnecessary movements.

Having tried everything in his arsenal and not working, Sam already accepted that to win, he must improve.

That was why he was trying to evolve in the dying minutes of this game.

5 months of professional football experience, plus the rewards of his system, plus his own training experience, at this moment, Sam broke his football technique down, remolding everything from the scratch again so he could evolve it.

Every touch of the ball, every pass, every feint, he took everything in with greater clarity till, in the 90th minute, it finally clicked.

Receiving the ball in the halfway line, Sam did a body feint, evaded an Al Ahly player challenge before crossing the ball to the right where Victor ran. It was a pin-point over the top pass as Victor controlled the ball in his strides.

This time, Victor managed to dribble his marker, cutting the ball back just as his coach instructed as Sam trapped this ball just outside the Al Ahly 18-yard box.

"BOOOO...!" The Al Ahly supporters drowned him in boos but Sam didn't hear any of it, having entered the zone state already.

A leg stuck out, and instantaneously, Sam's leg moved, hitting the ball.

He nut-megged the first player that came for him, skipping past his challenge into the 18-yard box. As more players came, with an effortless body feint, he evaded both players, letting them collide against each other in their own box.

It was pure chaos.

Whoosh!

A sliding tackle came but with a la croqueta, Sam penetrated deeper into the opposition box, somehow still remaining on his feet even as his marker subtly tugged at his shirt from behind. Sam refused to fall to the pitch.

As another player charged in, he used a roulette skill to spin again to the right and just before the ball could roll out for a goal kick, he trapped it with the heel of his foot before using his back heel to kick it back into the box.

Sam didn't kick this ball randomly though. With his spatial awareness, despite all the players in this box at this moment, he was still able to pinpoint the player with which he had the most chemistry, Austin.

As the ball rolled back, most of the Al Ahly players caught off-guard, Austin tried to shoot the ball on his first touch as the Al Ahly goalkeeper dived.

It was a feint though, Austin passed to his unmarked center forward.

Isolated at the left corner of the 6-yard box, despite the pass being unexpected even for him, Emeka's reflex helped him tap the ball into the empty net in the 90th minute of the game, a perfect poacher's goal.

At the last minute, Enyimba FC equalized!

"GOALLLL...!" Emeka screamed at the top of his lungs.

2-2..., the game was tied again!

The fulltime whistle came shortly after.

Extra time came as both coaches made a few changes, bringing in fresh legs but Sam and Austin remained on the pitch. Sam's legs were now as heavy as lead but sheer willpower kept him going.

Both teams had their moments in extra time but none was able to score again. And after 120 minutes of incredible football, the referee's whistle sounded.

FWEEEE!

The game went to penalties!

Chapter 53: A penalty shoot-out; glory or defeat?!

FWEEEEEE!

The game went to penalties!

Badump! Badump!

Standing in the middle of the pitch, Sam could feel his heart beating rapidly against his chest, both from exhaustion and the tension of this moment.

Unlike in the open game where the players had full control over the proceedings on the pitch, a penalty was more or less a gamble, a toss of a coin that neither teams had full control over.

'Is this it?' Sam thought but he rebuked the thought immediately. 'We're still in the game,' he thought, taking a deep breath.

'Calm down, take a deep breath..., we're still in it'.

'We can still win, believe it!' He pumped himself and before he knew it, his blood was already burning hot again, all distractions abstracted from his mind.

Standing beside the young midfielder, Austin Oladapo wiped the sweat off his face with his hand, also breathing heavily.

This captain's heart was beating even faster than the teenager. Unlike Sam who was most probably uninformed, as an experienced Enyimba FC player, he knew the true gravitas of this moment.

In the whole history of Nigerian football, only Enyimba FC has ever managed to win the CAF Champions league during the prime period of the club between the 2003 and 2004 football seasons.

Enyimba FC claimed the title the first time in 2003, defeating Ismaily SC of Egypt, making them the first and only Nigerian club to win the prestigious African tournament.

A year later, in 2004, they successfully defended the title, winning the title consecutively by defeating Etoile du Sahel of Tunisia.

'Can we do it again this year?' Austin thought, tensed. 'Can we create more history for Enyimba FC as the best club in Nigeria?' He felt hyped for.

'Can we write our name in the book of legends of Enyimba FC?'

This captain gritted his teeth. 'I certainly hope so, I want to be a legend!' He looked in the direction of his coach.

Just like his players, Coach Yemi Daniel was also feeling the tension of this moment even as the noise being made by the Al Ahly fans already reached a crescendo, rising through the roof of this stadium.

The noise was deafening.

And under this noise, Coach Yemi Daniel fidgeted, walking up and down along the touchline as he paid keen attention to the proceedings on the pitch.

After a short break, the referee finally led the players back into the pitch where another toss of a coin was used to decide on which of the 2 goalposts in the stadium will be used to take the penalty shootout.

After the coin toss, the Al Ahly goal post was decided on.

All the players walked towards that post. As they walked, under the deafening sounds made by the home fans, the Enyimba FC players felt like pigs being taken to the slaughter, but they were definitely not obedient pigs.

Heck, they were not just obedient pigs, they were as stubborn as goats, defiant, determined to spoil the night for Al Ahly, their fans, and all of Egypt.

Thud!

With every step that Sam took, the more the tension of the moment left him, replaced by an incredible level of focus and determination.

Enyimba FC was to take the first penalty. Coach Yemi already designated his penalty takers, instructing Austin to take the first penalty but as soon as they got there, Sam walked up to his captain. "I want to take the first penalty".

Austin paused, looking at the teenager. Immediately, he could tell that the look in the boy's face already changed. "Are you sure?"

Sam simply nodded.

"Are you confident?"

Sam grinned.

That was all that Austin needed to see. "Ok". He nodded.

When Sam picked up the ball, walking towards the 6-yard box, on the touchline, Coach Yemi Daniel was losing it. "What are they doing?!"

While the coach was dying in frustration, the Al Ahly fans were dining.

"BOOOOO...!"

"BOOOOO...!"

They drowned Sam in boos but with a subtle smile on his face, Sam ignored it all as he walked up to the penalty spot, placed the ball down and looked at the goal. The goalkeeper was saying a few things but he didn't even hear him.

Sam didn't pay attention to the goalkeeper, only the goal.

FWEEE!

Immediately after the referee's whistle sounded, Sam jogged sideways to the left before closing in on the ball. After closing in, he hit it with the inside of his right boot with all the power that he could muster.

POW!

The shot was thunderous! The Al Ahly goalkeeper dived the right way to the right but the shot was too high and too powerful, he stood no chance as the ball tore into the top right corner of the net with incredible power!

The Cairo International Stadium was briefly silenced.

Sam jogged towards the corner of the goal post, staring the Al Ahly fans down who were behind the post. "Come on!" He roared at them.

"BOOOO...!" The fans responded, their boos even more deafening now.

By that provocative action, Sam added fuel to fire, putting the ignition to make this already fiery game even more fiery.

To Enyimba FC though, it set the tempo of confidence. Austin heaved a big sigh of relief as he hugged Sam on his way back. "Good job". He commended, a slight smile now on his face.

The home fans became even louder, the tension increased even more.

The first Al Ahly penalty taker, their striker stepped up before sending Ojo the other way, coolly slotting into the bottom right corner.

1-1

Emeka walked up next for Enyimba FC, unleashing another powerful shot that beat the goalkeeper despite the fact that he dived the right way again.

1-2.

Another Al Ahly player stepped up, he scored again. 5 players stepped up for both teams, including Austin, scoring 5 consecutive times each. The score was tied 5-5, and by now, the tension was at a tipping point.

Every penalty taker that stepped up could feel its palpable weight pressing down on them like a mountain, forcing them mentally to make a mistake.

The players of both teams managed to persevere through the pressure though, riding the momentum of their first penalty takers.

The 6th player of both teams took their penalty, scored, including the 7th, 8th, and eventually the 10th player stepped up.

The score line was 10-10.

The tension in the Cairo International Stadium was suffocating!

Now, it was time for the goalkeepers to step up. Ojo stepped up first, heart beating fast, fingers sweaty from the tension but this goalkeeper managed to do it, sending the Al Ahly keeper the wrong way to score his team's 11th penalty goal.

The noise in this stadium died down again, creating a serene atmosphere for their goalkeeper and unknowing to the fans, the sudden silence affected him even more as this goalkeeper stepped up to take his penalty shot.

FWEEEE!

After the whistle, this goalkeeper took longer than normal to make his run, constantly looking at the post and when he finally jogged and shot, Ojo read him like a book, diving towards the right.

It was a tame shot, weak and lacking technique.

Ojo didn't have to do much, his body parried the ball away, preventing it from going in... and deciding the game!

10-11..., game over!

"YESSSSS...!" Emeka reacted first, roaring as he charged towards his goalkeeper before jumping on his back in celebration.

The other Enyimba FC players were slow to react but once they did, they ran and jumped in sheer euphoria, celebrating wildly.

On the other side, the Al Ahly players collapsed on the pitch, exhausted and defeated. It was a contrasting emotion of defeat and glory, but that was football.

While the Enyimba FC players celebrated, the Al Ahly players agonized in the throes of defeat.

This intense CAF Champions league semifinal eventually ended with Enyimba FC going all the way to the final.

It was an incredible game.

Chapter 54: Becoming a star

"Samuel Moses, what an incredible game you played today!" The female reporter was all smiles, passionate as he addressed the main star of the just concluded game.

"For the second consecutive semi-final game, you showed your quality, outperforming every other player, all more experienced than you to clinch the man of the match award, what do you think of your performance Sam?"

Sam smiled, breathing heavily as he wiped the sweat of his face. "I don't like to think much on my performance, I rather think about the team's performance and personally, I think this is our best performance of the season so far".

"In such a storied stadium, against such a legendary team, and given what was at stake, I'd say the team performed at a truly elite level today. We deserved every inch of what we're enjoying, the victory". He grinned.

"Ah! Before I forget," he smiled mischievously at the camera. "Ojo, thanks for the penalty scored and saved, you saved our asses out there today man. I'll force the captain to buy you something special". He chuckled.

"So, Sam, what do you think about the final? Do you think your team stands a chance of going all the way and beating the final-placed team to win the CAF champions league trophy this year?"

"Definitely, I do". Sam nodded seriously. "No matter who we face in the final, just like we gave our best today, I believe that we'll give our best again, and God willing, we will win the trophy".

"That's a nice sentiment". The female reporter smiled. "What about the Al Ahly fans? I can't help but notice you riling them up multiple times in the game".

Hearing that, Sam scratched his hair awkwardly. "Oh, that," he chuckled. "Honestly, I didn't do it with any bad intentions in mind, it was just in the heat and moment of the game".

He looked at the camera. "I hope you guys are not too offended, I just wanted my team to win by all means".

The reporter smiled. "Well, they'll definitely hear your apology now after you said it. Anyways, Sam thanks for having me again, do have a nice day".

"You too ma'am". And with that, Sam walked off.

A few minutes later, leaving the Cairo International Stadium alongside his teammates, Sam was shocked as they met fans wearing the Enyimba FC home jersey standing outside waiting for them.

"Sam, an autograph please!"

"Sam, I want an autograph please!"

"Sam, please a picture!"

"I came all the way from Delta State to see you!"

"Austin, please, an autograph!"

'Damn!' This was the first thought that Sam had as he subtly inclined his head to look at his captain, looking for directions.

"What?" Austin shrugged. "Don't look at me, this is my first time witnessing something like this too".

"Fans have never asked for my autograph before now too!"

"So, what will I do?" Sam hissed?

Austin chuckled. "Chill out man. Just go meet them, make sure to put a smile on your face, write anything you want on their jersey".

"Ah! Not anything," he smiled. "Write your name on their jersey, just Sam, Sam is good".

Austin was already walking ahead towards the fan who demanded from him as with a big smile on his face, he took the girl's pen before scribbling away on her jersey. Watching him do it, Sam was stunned. 'Is this really his first time?'

He felt tensed but he was able to ignore it somehow, maybe it was because he was so exhausted but he walked up to the fans with a smile on his face.

"Hey!" Greeting, he took their jersey and their pen before scribbling, writing Sam in the most stylish way that his creative senses could come up with.

Once he scribbled on the jersey of the first fan, a girl, she shrieked excitedly while hugging her friend. "Yeahhhh!"

Sam felt weird. 'Is this how it feels to become a star?'

'Am I becoming a star?'

They mostly asked for only Austin and Sam and by the time both of them finished signing and taking pictures, almost all their teammates were already inside the bus. They joined their teammates soon after and the bus finally moved.

Right there in the bus, a certain player's family did not allow him to get home and settle down first before the call came.

(Incoming call from Best Mom...)

As soon as Sam picked up the call, he hid his phone closer to his ear and hissed. "Mom, I'm still on the bus!"

They were having none of it though. "CONGRATULATIONS...!" Came the voice, so loud that Sam flinched away from his phone.

Besides him, Austin chuckled. "It's your mom right?" He smiled at him.

"F\*ck!" Sam cursed before putting the phone closer to his ear. "Mom, please, I'm in the bus!"

"Congratulations son, I can't believe you finally did it...!"

"Congratulations Sam, make sure you buy me something from Egypt!"

"Congratulations son, you made it to a major final in your first season as a professional footballer, you truly are made for the top! I'm so proud!"

"Dad, mom, Sophia, listen to me..."

"When are you coming back? I can't wait to see you to celebrate this more personally. Don't worry, I'll make your favorite soup for you, I promise!"

"Mom..."

"Is it Egusi you want? Owho soup and starch? Ogbono? Or is it Banga soup?"

Sam palmed his face. "Mom...!" He complained.

Beside him, Austin just kept on chuckling, Sam glared at him. "But mom...!"

"Congratulations son!" Mr. Moses' voice interjected again. "You just gave me infinite bragging rights in front of my friends!"

"Their father!" Mr. Moses laughed loudly. "Their son no reach!" He spoke pidgin, his voice reeking with excitement and pride.

"My son is a star!" He shouted.

By now, all the Enyimba FC fans in the bus were already looking at Sam weirdly, including Olisema who had a complicated look in his eyes.

Sam felt embarrassed. 'F\*ck, f\*ck, f\*ck...!' He cursed repeatedly in his mind.

In the end, Mrs. Moses only ended the call when the bus was already close to the team's hotel room in Egypt.

And with that, the players came down and went into their hotel rooms.

All of them were exhausted and needed rest after such an intense game. And just like Sam, they also wanted to celebrate their victory with their family and friends too.

Entering his hotel room alongside his captain, no longer embarrassed, Sam finally put a call back to his family. This time, it was a video call.

The night was going to be long.

They spoke for a long time.

Chapter 55: A triumphant return

The next day, the Enyimba FC squad finally went to the Cairo International Airport. It was time to go home.

Every one of the players was in a good mood, including their usually stern coach, Coach Yemi Daniel. It may seem like just any other football game but what they achieved yesterday was legendary.

Making it to the final of the CAF champions league in itself was already legendary, but it was the circumstances surrounding their qualification that made it even more legendary. Enyimba FC were the big underdogs yesterday.

Due to their form in the champions league, they were rated fairly in the semifinal, but their opponent was Al Ahly, the Egyptian footballing giants, a club that had a genuine stake as the best in all of Africa.

Not only were they playing against Al Ahly, but it was the return leg game played in the iconic home stadium of their opponents.

Putting out such an iconic performance in such an iconic stadium was legendary, this was why it meant so much to the players and their coach.

They were not the only ones who shared this sentiment, the Enyimba FC fans shared the same sentiment and it was already sweeping through Nigeria like the unstoppable tide of a flood.

Social media was filled with posts with trending themes all relating to yesterday's performance, the tags mostly being #Enyimba FC, #Samuel Moses, and #Austin Oladapo.

Sam was never really a social media person but during his 4 years away from football, he was introduced into the diverse world of social media by his sister.

He was not too active but he had an account in most social media platforms.

On the way back to Nigeria, Sam was initially frightened as all his social media platforms experienced an upsurge in followers.

To his shock, within this short time, multiple social media fan groups were already created in his favor and they were raking followers at a rapid rate.

He was shocked. 'Was my performance... really that legendary?'

In hindsight, a 17-year-old winning consecutive man of the match awards in the semifinals of the CAF champions league was definitely not normal.

In the biggest stage of club football, the UEFA champions league, the most recent performance closest to his was that of Ngolo Kante, the French midfielder during Chelsea's triumphant 2021/2022 champions league campaign.

When the Enyimba squad finally arrived in Nigeria, they received a hero's welcome at the airport from their excited supporters.

There were literally thousands of fans waiting for them in the international airport in Asaba, Delta State. They all sang songs of victory.

And again, for the second time in 2 days, Sam and others of his teammates were forced to participate in fan service as they signed autographs and took pictures with the fans who demanded them.

They spent a long time in the airport before finally taking a bus to Abia State. The media covered it as everything transpired in the airport.

That was not the only welcome that the triumphant squad received though. Returning to their home stadium, the players were surprised by the presence of tens of thousands of fans filling the stands, waiting for their arrival.

"Don't tell me..., damn!" Austin was losing it. "Something like this has never been done before since I entered the club!" Austin was emotional.

The club organized a celebratory party to mark their legendary triumph over Al Ahly in their backyard in Egypt.

"Sam!" "Sam!" "Sam!"

"Austin!" "Austin!"

The fans sang different songs but the name of their exciting young attacking midfielder and their captain was at the forefront as they sang songs with their names. It was a dizzying experience to Sam.

Under this much scrutiny and appreciation, he felt overwhelmed.

'Damn!' He thought. 'Reversing my decision to play football indeed is the best thing that ever happened to me..., and getting the system too'.

'Hell, that 2022 FIFA World Cup final is the real OG, it changed everything!'

Austin had a speech, thanking the fans for their constant support despite the odds against them, acknowledging the help of the away fans in their triumph.

The fans were not satisfied with that though, they demanded another player to give a speech too.

"We want Sam!" They roared.

Nobody knew who started it but soon enough, it graduated into a chant in this stadium as the fans demanded for him.

In the end, left with no choice, awkwardly, Sam took the mic. "Umm," immediately after they heard his voice, this stadium became deathly silent. Sam cleared his throat. "First, I want to thank all of you for coming today".

After saying the first words, noting the silent respect that the fans gave him, before Sam knew it, his tension already disappeared, replaced by loving confidence.

He smiled. "At the beginning of the season, most people didn't expect us to do much but here we are, in the final of the CAF champions league".

"Not only that," he grinned. "We're also leading the NPFL table!"

"Yeahhhh!!!" The fans cheered excitedly.

Sam's smile widened. "I want to acknowledge your support through it all. Everything that we do on the pitch, we do it for the fans. Without your support, we would have never made it this far".

"For all that, Sam says arigato". He grinned, causing a stir in the stadium with his Japanese as the fans chanted his name some more.

'Damn! I love this feeling'. He thought.

With the big smile still on his face, he finally decided to bring his speech to an end. "Just as you've done since the beginning of the season, I want you all to keep the faith in us. We won't let it down". He said seriously.

"Us making it to this stage was not a fluke. Support us and I promise you," he grinned. "We will win the CAF champions league this year!"

"SAM!" "SAM!" "SAM!"

The cheers were deafening.

"And we will also win the league!"

The stadium literally exploded with that as the excited fans let loose, roaring at the top of their voices out of sheer ecstasy.

After a few more dozen minutes of interacting with the fans on the pitch, the players finally left. And this was when Sam got an even bigger shock.

"Mom?" His eyes were wide as saucers. "Dad? Ian?!"

"Congratulations munchkin!" Mr. Moses grinned, pulling his son into an embrace. "You really think we won't come after such a milestone achievement in your football career?"

"I..., I didn't expect it".

In the end, f\*ck expectations, Sam felt on top of the world! There was no greater feeling than celebrating victory with family.

His last shock of the day came an hour after meeting with his parents.

In the hotel where his parents and his best friend lodged, to Sam's shock, Coach Yemi Daniel came to meet them later in the day with documents.

Mr. Moses shook the older man's hands. "To what do we owe this honor, coach?"

Coach Yemi Daniel had a gentle smile on his face. "Good day Mr. Moses".

"Well, your son has exceeded all expectations that were set by the hierarchy of my club so after a lot of consideration, we decided to improve the contract terms and increase his monthly salary".

"Sam will now receive a monthly salary of 500,000 naira per month".

"..."

Chapter 56: CAF champions league finalist

After just 2 games paired with 2 iconic performances, Sam's life changed.

Not only did his monthly club salary double, but he also became a star. The CAF champions league semifinal game shot him straight to stardom.

Qualifying to the final of the CAF champions league did not mean that life stopped for Sam though, instead, life was about to become even more hectic.

The football season was drawing close to its deciding moments.

This was when the clubs that would be relegated and those that would remain in the NPFL would be decided, the fight was on. This was the time when the top four battle was peaking, forming into a crescendo of war.

That evening while Enyimba FC celebrated their victory at home, 2 heavyweights of African football slugged it out in the other semifinal battle to determine the second finalist of the 2022/2023 CAF champions league.

And after a nerve-wracking game, the finalists of this season's CAF champions league was decided.

(CAF Champions League!)

(Semifinal results:)

>Al Ahly 2-2 Enyimba FC<

>Aggregate: 4-4, Enyimba FC wins on penalties<

>Date: 19 May, 2023<

...

>Mamelodi Sundowns 2-2 Wydad AC<

>Aggregate: 2-2, Wydad AC wins on away goals<

>Date: 20 May, 2023<

...

(Final fixtures: First leg)

>Enyimba FC – Wydad AC<

>Date: 4th June, 2023<

After 2 rounds of incredible football in the semifinal of the CAF champions league, against all odds, all 4 teams could only settle for a draw.

Due to the fact that both Enyimba FC and Al Ahly scored 2 goals each in both games, the away goal rule was voided which was why they had to play all the way to extra time and eventually penalties to decide the outcome of the game.

For Mamelodi Sundowns though, they were not so lucky. Despite playing their best football across 2 games against Wydad AC, they were unlucky to fall short due to the away goal rule.

Since they couldn't score in their opponent's home, ending the game 0-0 while they unluckily conceded 2 goals to the opponents in their own home, the away goal rule took effect, knocking them out of the competition.

For the finals, it was Nigeria vs Morocco.

2 footballing giants of 2 well-known African nations were about to slug it out for the ultimate trophy of African football.

Originally, since they didn't make it to the final yet, rivalry still affected who the fans support but since it was the final and it was a Nigerian team against a team from another country, all Nigerians rallied behind Enyimba FC.

Nigerians were renowned for supporting their own and this time again, it was no different. They say the enemy of your enemy is your friend, this was apt for the situation.

Support for Enyimba FC flooded everywhere, mainly social media.

And with all the support which translated to promotion, a name stayed at the forefront of it all, Samuel Moses, the talented young Enyimba FC attacking midfielder. Sam was the star of his club's CAF champions league performances.

Since the group stage, he carried his team all the way to here.

All the publicity brought a lot of scrutiny to the Enyimba FC players, but the experienced Coach Yemi Daniel did not let it get to the head of his players as he kept on drilling them in training till they were exhausted.

"Only a fool would become complacent towards the end of a battle".

"The season is gradually drawing towards its end one game at a time".

"Towards the end of battle, your enemy becomes desperate to win, desperate enough to use dirty means. Against that, becoming complacent is a sure way to death".

"The only way to keep the momentum going is effort, not just effort but the plural, efforts! I want more effort!"

Coach Yemi Daniel was a stern and strong-headed coach and this time, his players really needed it as his personality helped them get their head over their recent fame, putting their all in training again.

They had till June to play the first leg of the final against Wydad AC and till that time, they had to keep their remarkable run in the league.

Enyimba FC didn't disappoint.

In their next 2 league games, led by their 2 leaders on the pitch, Sam and Austin, the team played incredible football, dominating and totally demolishing their opponents by the end of 90 minutes.

It was the perfect work out session for what was to come ahead.

Over the course of the season, the highlight point of Sam's career to Coach Yemi Daniel so far was not his incredible performances every game though the consistency was commendable, to him, what stood out was the boy's tenacity.

Despite playing game after game, week in week out, overworking his young legs, Sam was like an engine that never suffered from wear and tear.

With the elixirs supplied by his system, Sam was always able to fully recover before the next game, enabling him to play at an elite level regularly even as he was still developing as a player.

Considering that the Nigerian FA Cup would also start soon, the schedule would only become more hectic and packed.

Coach Yemi Daniel felt lucky to have a player of Sam's tenacity in his boots.

'I wonder which European club would come knocking first'. He wondered after seeing Sam clinch another man of the match award in the second league game, Emeka clinched the award in the first league game after the semifinal win.

At first, it felt like it would take forever to get to June but time moved fast. Incredibly, it was already June and not just that, it was the D-day.

On June 4th, 2023, Abia State was filled with lots of rich travelers. Not just the tens of thousands of Enyimba FC supporters who came from all around the country to support one of their own, but also the away fans.

On that day, the Enyimba International Stadium stands were filled to the brim. In the iconic biro blue colors of Enyimba FC, the fans dwarfed most corners of this stadium except the tiny corner where the away fans hurdled up in.

The away fan section was also filled to the brim with Wydad AC fans.

After the opening ceremony organized by the CAF champions league organizers, the players of both team finally made their way to the pitch under the loud noise being made by the tens of thousands of fans filling the stadium.

As each player's name was read out, they cheered. Cheers for Enyimba FC players and loud boos for Wydad AC players.

But this sound reached a crescendo when a certain player's name was called.

"Sam!" "Sam!" "Sam!" They roared loudly, stressing their lungs.

From just 'Sam' chants, it transcended, turning into something else. "Zinedine Sam!" They cheered.

"Zinedine Sam!"

They didn't know who started it but chants like this soon filled the stadium.

Under the onslaught of so much support from the fans, Sam felt his blood boil hot like he was in a volcano.

He jumped confidently in response to the flurry of cheers, waved at the camera and thought. 'You came for something special right?'

'Well, get your popcorns ready, I'm about to give you something iconic!'

~----~

[You have ingested energy elixir!]

[NOTE: The effects of the energy elixir will last for approximately 12 hours.]

~----~

FWEEEEEE!

The referee's whistle went off.

The game started.

Chapter 57: Final- Enyimba FC vs Wydad AC [1]

The final of the CAF champions league.

The grandest competitive stage that African football could offer any of its clubs and their players.

A tournament that the Ultimate Football System had to bend the rules for just to make sure that it's host participated in it.

To Sam, today was the culmination of his first season in professional football.

Today would likely determine if his first season as a professional footballer was below bar, average, or an overwhelming success.

All the football that he had been playing since January, it was all for this moment and he was definitely not going to miss his chance to seize it.

Sam was ready to lose himself in the energy of this incredible game.

FWEEEEEE!

Immediately after the referee's whistle sounded, Enyimba FC started kick-off and from the first minute, they stamped their authority on the game.

Wydad AC was another footballing giant of Africa seen on the same pedestal as the likes of Al Ahly, they were a tough team to play against but in the Enyimba International Stadium, this iconic team with loads of footballing history was forced to dance to the tune of the home team.

They were forced to accept the reality that today, they were the underdogs as Enyimba FC dominated possession.

Amid this domination, 2 names shone brightest, Sam and Austin.

The duo seemed like the perfect combination on the pitch as both feeling in the mood, they played total football, dictating the game.

It didn't take too long for them to make their stamp on the game. In the 21st minute of the game, receiving the ball in the halfway line, Sam started a mazy run from midfield, weaving through multiple opposition players, exchanging one-two passes with Austin as he penetrated into the box.

Their chemistry on the pitch was now almost telepathic.

Inside the box, he passed to Emeka who passed back to him and just as the angle opened to shoot and as Wydad AC players swarmed him, he pushed the ball right with the outside of his boot towards empty space where a certain midfielder's marauding run led to.

Austin was unmarked in the box!

A technical mistake, and Wydad AC regretted their mistake dearly as the Enyimba captain didn't make a mistake, rifling the ball into the net from point-blank range with his powerful right foot. The Wydad AC goalkeeper stood no chance.

"GOALLLL...!" Austin screamed at the top of his lungs, celebrating wildly as he run towards the corner flag with his teammates in tow.

Austin was always a good player, the heart of Enyimba FC but he was one of those players who you just get the feeling has a certain cap to their development.

But with Sam's arrival, this player exploded, peaking.

Austin already had highlight moments in his career, but none of them meant as much as this single moment, this was the CAF champions league final!

Scoring in today's game meant the world to him.

Running to the corner flag, the emotional captain slid on his knees, doing the hail Mary celebration before pointing his fingers to heaven in gratitude.

When his teammates arrived, they all hugged him, celebrating excitedly. At the end, Austin kissed Sam on the forehead. "God bless you Sam". He whispered in his ears, patting his head.

"Bless your full generation!" He said emotionally.

FWEEEE!

The game restarted.

That goal seemed to rattle some nerves as after a long time of sleeping, the Wydad AC players finally erupted like a slumbering Dragon that was finally awake.

For the next few minutes, they wrestled with Enyimba FC for ball superiority in their home but what they didn't account for was that this was not the scenario of a Dragon preying on a pig or a horse.

Rather, this was a situation of a Dragon fighting a battle to the death against a mythical Kraken who was in its prime.

Enyimba FC played like a mythical beast.

Wydad AC could only do so much to try wrestling for superiority over this game, and in the end, it was another moment of individual brilliance from one of the 2 Enyimba midfielders on top of their game that cut them open.

In the 42nd minute of the game, receiving the ball at the right side of the pitch, already in the zone state, Sam took one look, saw what he sought before whipping a deadly cross into the box.

Whoosh!

Like a hurricane, Emeka reacted with incredible agility and strength, bursting away from his markers before poking this perfect cross into the net past the despairing arms of the Wydad AC goalkeeper.

"F\*ck!" The Wydad AC goalkeeper cursed, complaining loudly.

Emeka didn't care though, he was already whirling away in celebration even as the stadium was drowned by the cheers of the excited supporters.

"Zinedine Sam!"

"Zinedine Sam!"

"Zinedine Sam!"

Under all this noise, Sam felt on top of the world and it only made his blood boil even hotter. He was not satisfied yet, he wanted to do more.

'I want to do more!'

'Come on! I can do more!'

For the remaining minutes of the first half, led by him and Austin, they tortured the Wydad AC defense and in the 45th plus 2 minutes, Sam came closest as he wiped a lethal shot at goal only for it to bounce off the post for a corner kick.

Austin floated the corner kick in, Farouk rose highest, planting a firm header towards goal but the Wydad AC goalkeeper was at alert, calmly claiming the ball in the air. And immediately, this goalkeeper sprinted before throwing the ball long.

He started a counter-attack for his team!

'...!'

The Enyimba FC players noticed the threat immediately, tracking back.

Receiving the ball on the left wing, the tall Wydad AC player started a run, abusing his dizzying speed to rapidly eat yards of space till he arrived inside the box.

The Enyimba FC defenders closed him down but this winger didn't panic.

Cutting past the first defender to the right, he continued his run, cutting past the second defender to the same right before finally throwing a beautiful curled shot in with his right leg. Ojo went on a full stretch dive but it was not enough.

The ball curled past his reach, nestling into the embrace of the net.

1 counter-attack, 1 goal...

For a moment, Enyimba International Stadium was silenced.

2-1..., in the last minute of the first half.

The Wydad AC winger celebrated his goal passionately.

Less than a minute later, the players returned to the dressing room, the first half ended 2-1 in Eyimba FC's favor.

Chapter 58: Final- Enyimba FC vs Wydad AC [2]

"Good job guys". Coach Yemi Daniel was grinning from ear to ear as soon as his team walked into the dressing room.

"I'm proud of your display this first half".

He was not bluffing. Despite the fact that Wydad AC managed to score an unexpected goal in the last minute of the first half, this kind of performance against a team like Wydad in the first place was unexpected.

His team was playing like a well-oiled machine against the African footballing giant and it left him beaming with immense pride.

"In the second half, no changes, I want you to keep on doing the same thing".

"Dominate, give them little chances on the ball, and most importantly, score. Do not let them score a second goal".

"Look at me," he pointed at his head. "Your head, keep it in the game".

"In this second half, they'll be desperate, they'll want to commit fouls, be physical and get into your head, don't let it".

"Keep on riding the energy of the fans and play your football".

"Now, let's go and finish what we started".

Well, that was all that the Enyimba FC players needed.

FWEEEEEE!

When the second half started, just like Coach Yemi Daniel predicted, Wydad AC wilted like a dead flower, retreating into their box as they defended and when Enyimba FC became dangerous, they resorted to playing dirty.

The Wydad AC players became physical as they bullied the Enyimba FC players, becoming incredibly physical till yellow cards started being handed out.

Despite it all though, the performance of 2 players never faltered, Sam and Austin. With them remaining in tip-top condition, Enyimba FC kept on dominating.

"Zinedine Sam!" The home supporters kept on singing.

Again, Sam was at the heart of it as in the 67th minute, he played an incredible through pass to the right for Victor to run into unmarked.

This right winger managed to penetrate into the box, one-on-one with the goalkeeper but instead of shooting, he cut the ball back for his captain who was on another of his marauding runs.

Austin didn't miss his moment, tapping the ball into an empty net.

"GOALLLLL...!"

Austin charged towards the corner flag, sliding on his knees again as he pumped his fists passionately in celebration.

In the 67th minute, the game was basically put to bed but Wydad AC was not a team to give up as they kept on pushing aggressively.

Through counter-attacks, they had their moments a few times but the Enyimba FC defense remained as disciplined as a tortoise's back, letting nothing get through them and in the 82nd minute of the game, it ended.

And again, it was a familiar name at the forefront, Samuel Moses.

Receiving a pass from Austin close to the Wydad AC box, even as Zinedine Sam cheers blasted through the stadium, with his spatial awareness, Sam noticed the 3 opposition players charging towards him aggressively with apparent ill intent.

A thought told him to pass, but another thought told him another thing.

'Do your thing!'

Well, Sam did his thing.

Sam was charging towards the left but it was a feint. As the 3 players charged in aggressively, he stopped suddenly, dragging the ball back with the heel of his boots before turning and bursting away with incredible agility.

The 3 players collided against each other chaotically, stumbling and falling as gasps and laughter rang through this stadium.

"Zinedine Sam!" The chants rose to a crescendo.

Another player charged towards Sam immediately to intercept the ball as he was yet to recover from evading the 3 opposition players.

But even as he was still stumbling, with his spatial awareness active, it almost felt like he had eyes behind his head. In reality, he already mapped the whole pitch in his head, knowing the position of his teammates and his opponents.

As the player stuck a leg out, even as he was still stumbling, Sam did something rapid, kicking the ball 2 times in quick succession in a fraction of a second. He executed a la croqueta skill!

The defender stood, stunned, not knowing when his opponent dashed past him with the ball. He was in a daze.

"Zinedine Sam!" The cheers rose even higher.

Still with the ball even as he stumbled, before the ball could roll outside the line for a goal kick, Sam raised his head once to look before crossing the ball across the face of the Wydad AC goal.

The Wydad goalkeeper dived but the ball didn't get to his position though. Emeka who was closer to the ball reacted before the goalkeeper as he dove in with his head, hitting the ball with an incredible diving header.

Bam!

There was no stopping it. The goalkeeper was already eliminated from the equation, it was a free goal and Emeka scored it with aplomb.

Instead of charging towards the corner flag to celebrate even as his teammates and the home fans roared, Emeka ran toward Sam instead before kneeling and placing this midfielder's right foot on top his knee.

He dusted Sam's boots with his hands.

Sam laughed, feeling on top of the moon as his other teammates soon came, swarming both of them as they hugged and celebrated their fourth goal of the game. It was now 4-1 to Enyimba FC.

Wydad AC played well, the only factor that stole the X-Factor from them was a name, Zinedine Sam.

Sam was nowhere near the skill level of the iconic French midfielder yet but his performance today was reminiscing of the French legend's exploits in the World Cup, most especially against a prime Brazilian national team.

Sam played like a total midfielder today, torturing the Wydad AC team with his unreal playmaking for his age, spraying passes left and right, and the occasional through pass that cut the team apart like a hot knife through butter.

Today, on the pitch, Sam was head and shoulders above every other player, the closest to him being Austin.

The game ended 4-1 in Enyimba FC's favor with Sam grabbing a hat-trick of assists in the final of the CAF champions league.

It was a unanimous decision; he won the man of the match award for the 3rd consecutive game in the CAF champions league.

Chapter 59: Final; in enemy territory [1]

"Sam, you just won a 3rd straight man of the match award in 3 of the 4 most important games of the CAF champions league, how do you feel?"

"How do I feel?" Breathing hoarsely, Sam laughed. "I feel good man, not just good, I feel great!" He whooped excitedly.

"Every player starting his career like me dreams of creating moments like I just created today in our career. Giving 3 assists in the CAF champions league final, I had high expectations but definitely not this high". He chuckled.

"I definitely exceeded my own expectations today".

And then, he grinned. "All to cap it off now is to get a goal in the return leg, and most of my goals for my first season as a professional football player would be accomplished already".

"And that right there is the mark of a confident player in form". The male reporter grinned. "Sam, I'm betting all my money on you for the next game, you better fulfill your promise and score".

Sam laughed. "Do that at your own risk. It's definitely not a promise that I'd score but I'll try my best".

"That's enough for me". The reporter laughed. "Anyways, Sam, have you been to social media yet?"

"Huh?"

"I mean, after the game".

"Oh, that? No," he shook his head. "As you can see, I've not even left the stadium yet, I don't even know where my phone is now, so".

"Oh, I see," the reporter nodded. "Well, some excited Enyimba FC fans have started a thread on social media, mainly twitter".

The reporter smiled. "Your fans are convinced that you deserve a spot in the balon do'r podium this year".

Hearing that, Sam palmed his face. "That..., that's just..." he was speechless.

The reporter smiled. "Thought so". He chuckled. "Some are more realistic though, they started a thread, advocating for you to win this season's golden boy award. They firmly believe that you deserve it after your performance today, what do you think?"

Sam scratched his hair and chuckled. "First of all, I'm appreciative of their support and how much they believe in me, it means a lot to me".

"I do have a lot of confidence in my ability, but I don't think I'm yet at the level of those freaks dominating football in the top 5 European leagues yet".

"This season, there are incredible youngsters like Alejandro Balde of Barcelona, Jamal Musiala of Bayern who is my personal favorite, Jude Bellingham, and even Gavi still of Barcelona. There are more incredible talents out there too".

"Personally, I think all these players deserve the award far more than I do. Also, though I don't want to admit it, the league I play in matters too". He smiled wryly. "When I play in a better league, then I can compete". He grinned.

"Talking of better leagues, which club would you love to go to?"

Hearing that, Sam grinned. "I love FC Barcelona". He winked.

The reporter smiled. "They're a great club with a lot of history. They'll definitely make do with an attacking midfielder of your profile, taking into fact that you'll only get better with time".

"I do wish you a great career ahead Sam. Thanks for having me, have a great day".

"You too Charles". Sam smiled, shook the reporter's hand before leaving.

He joined his teammates, listened to his coach, left and signed a few autographs and took a few pictures before returning to his apartment in the guest quarters provided by the club.

That evening, Sam had another video call with his family.

The return leg of the CAF champions league would be played in 7 days. There was a league game in between and for this game, Coach Yemi Daniel decided to rest most of his starting 11 players.

Enyimba FC ended up playing 1-1, ending the game with a draw but it was not the only game in between the 7 days.

The Nigerian FA cup finally started, and Enyimba FC was to play.

Coach Yemi Daniel rotated his players again, starting some and resting others, Austin started but Sam stayed in the bench. In the 60th minute though, he was introduced and ended up chipping in with an assist to conclude a convincing 3-1 winning display from Enyimba FC.

And with both games out of the way, the squad could finally focus on the return leg of the CAF champions league final that would be played in Morocco.

A day to the D-day, Coach Yemi Daniel left to Morocco with his players, lodged a hotel before going through their final tactical briefing.

The night went in a jiffy, and in no time, the D-day was here.

That evening, the 45,000 capacity Mohamed V Stadium in Casablanca, Wydad Athletic Club's home stadium was filled to the brim with tens of thousands of home supporters here to rattle some Nigerian nerves.

(CAF Champions League!)

(Final fixtures: Second leg)

>Wydad AC – Enyimba FC<

>Aggregate: 1-4<

>Date: 11th June, 2023<

3 goals down already from the first leg, it was bound to be a daunting task for this Moroccan footballing giant club if they had the intentions of mounting an incredible comeback and their fans were clearly ready to help them through it.

They would do their part, ensuring that the players did their part.

When the Enyimba FC players stepped foot into the stadium, they were drowned in a chorus of loud boos and whistles. The home supporters hated their nerves for beating their team 4-1 away from home.

They would make today miserable for them and that was exactly what they did as the referee's whistle finally sounded to commence the game.

FWEEEE!

In the Enyimba International Stadium, Enyimba FC dominated throughout, but today, the reverse was the case as from the first minute of the game, the Wydad AC players seeking vengeance pounced like Lions on the hunt.

Coach Yemi Daniel came here with a specific tactical approach though. He played a balanced formation that could help his team stay compact, transitioning from attack to defense seamlessly.

He didn't play a fully defensive formation, but arranged his team in a shape where they could easily arrange themselves in a formidable defensive block.

The tactic worked, but only for 30 minutes.

In the 33rd minute of this second leg final, Wydad AC struck!

Chapter 60: Final; in enemy territory [2]

BAM!

The sound reverberated through this stadium, briefly silencing the noise made by the fans as the ball flew like a rocket.

It was a powerful shot from the stocky Wydad AC center midfielder.

The ball rose high and accurately towards the top right corner of the Enyimba FC net, but Ojo was on top of his game, rising high into the air on a full stretch dive as he did it, barely pushing the ball into the post as it bounced back on a rebound.

All the players in the box reacted immediately, scrambling for the loose ball but the Wydad center forward got there first as this player shot despite the fact that an Enyimba FC defender tugged on him from behind.

Another defender put his body on the line, blocking the shot but right after was when this player fell on the ground due to the tug on his shirt.

Then, incredibly...

FWEEEE!

The referee blew his whistle for a penalty kick.

The Enyimba FC players swarmed the referee, protesting the decision but the stern bald-haired referee was not having it, his decision was final.

After his whistle blew again, the Wydad AC center forward did a short run, did a small feint before sending Ojo the other way, calmly tucking the ball home into the back of the net.

In the 33rd minute of the game, Wydad AC scored the first goal in their home, making it 1-0 and 2-4 on aggregate.

The game was on.

When the game restarted, Enyimba FC didn't change their approach as they continued playing their conservative football, wrestling with Wydad AC for control so their ball domination would not become too ridiculous.

The Enyimba players executed their coach's orders to near perfection, but in the end, sometimes, conservatism was not enough to curb endless enthusiasm.

In the 42nd minute of the game, just 9 minutes after the first goal, after a chaotic scramble in the Enyimba FC box, the ball snuck into the net. It was an unfortunate own goal from one of the Enyimba FC center backs.

The game was already 2-0, 3-4 on aggregate.

The comeback was on!

That second goal definitely seemed to rattle some Enyimba nerves as the players made more mistakes, losing the ball more soon after.

Wydad AC kept on knocking that first half, trying their best with half chances but in the end, none went in, ending the first half 2-0 in their favor.

When his players entered the dressing room, Coach Yemi Daniel was calm, looking at them. This experienced coach could tell that his team was rattled already.

This was a final, the worst reaction to his team's current mental state was acting agitated, lashing out at their imperfect performance in the first half.

Instead of reacting agitatedly, he decided to stay calm. "Calm down". He said in the calmest voice that he could muster.

"The game is still in our favor; all we need is control".

"We made a few mistakes in this first half and it cost us. In this second half, I'm not asking for perfection, just don't make any more mistakes".

"You can do it; you've done it before".

"You've done it against Al Ahly in their home, Wydad AC is a downgrade. They're just a stumbling block that we will eventually overcome".

"For the second half, I'm making just one change". He looked round at his players. "Victor, you'll be making way for Olisema".

"In the second half, I want you to wrestle more for the ball. With a 4-man midfield, I want you to reduce their midfield domination with the ball".

"Once we have control of the ball, we have control of the game".

"Let's go out and make history boys".

FWEEEE!

When the second half started, Cyril Olisema was introduced as Enyimba FC altered its shape from a balanced 4-3-3 formation to a 4-4-2 formation.

And with this formation, Enyimba's performance finally showed improvement as the ball domination percentage was no longer as lopsided in the second half. Still, Wydad AC dominated.

As the minutes of the second half progressed, drawing to the end, the Wydad players became more desperate and the more desperate they were, the more attacking raids they launched on their opposition half.

Throughout the game, Sam did everything according to the book, defending, passing, and following his coach's instructions to the minute details.

He was having an amazing game. He barely misplaced a pass, having an 89% pass accuracy and mixing some through balls into the fray yet Enyimba FC could not create anything substantial due to their conservative play.

Sam was calm at first but the more and more his box was attacked, the closer Wydad AC came to scoring the third goal, the more riled up he became till in the 75th minute, he snapped.

'I can't afford this risk anymore'.

'Coach can, but I can't..., f\*ck tactics!'

After another inch-perfect sliding tackle from Farouk, the defensive midfielder passed to his captain and Austin passed to Sam.

The ball flowed smoothly between the 3 midfielders.

Immediately after the ball touched his leg, Sam didn't even look around. With his spatial awareness, he kept track of his opponents and alone, he went on a solo run starting all the way from his half.

Sam skipped through the first challenge with his close ball control, lost the second player with a body feint, and as he closed in on the Wydad box like a rampaging bull, he faced a third player.

As the player closed in, Sam raised his right leg over the ball once, then his left, then his right again till the player became dizzy, stumbling.

In that short moment, Sam was already in the zone state as he deleted the opposition player with step overs before cutting the ball to the right, skipping past him. He was still yet to enter the box but from here, Sam saw an angle to shoot.

He didn't hesitate.

With the inside of his right foot, he smashed the ball hard.

BAM!

The ball rose high into the air, above the post as the goalkeeper left it to fly off for a goal kick but all of a sudden, in mid-air, the ball swerved back down.

The Wydad AC goalkeeper was rooted to the spot, he could only watch, stunned, as the ball nestled into the top left corner of his net.

"What a goalllll...!" The commentator roared.

"An incredible solo goal!"

"What a rocket shot!"

"And Sam, the African Zidane does it again!"

Sam ran off to the corner flag, slid on his knees in celebration before pointing at his head, emphasizing his mentality as he nodded at the camera.

The away fan section erupted in loud cheers.

In the 75th minute, Wydad AC's lead was cut by half, 2-1.

The Wydad AC players were disappointed but motivated by their coach, they didn't let an inch after the referee's whistle sounded again as they went in with even more determination to score but this time, Enyimba FC were defensively perfect.

The leg 2 final of the CAF Champions league ended 2-1 in Wydad AC's favor, but on aggregate, Enyimba FC won 3-5.

Sam's overall performance in this game earned him a 4th consecutive man of the match award in the CAF champions league.