

Rise of a Football God

#Chapter 6: A miracle - Read Rise of a Football God

Chapter 6: A miracle

What else could Sam say in the face of his best friend?

Ian was the person who knew him best in the whole world. Despite the fact that he already abandoned football for 4 years, only his best friend knew that deep inside, he still had that excitement to the mere mention of a football.

Did he still love football?

Honestly, Sam did not know the answer to that, after all, football broke his heart but Ian's words were enough to perform the magic.

He was like a glutton that had been starved for ages.

Besides, his mental resistance was already being worn down since morning, he could not bring himself to reject his best friend. 'Even people who don't watch football normally are going to watch this, what's the harm in watching?'

'Besides, I can't get injured from just watching, right?'

'And who knows? This may be the day..., the day my idol finally shuts up all the critics who use his international career against him in arguments'.

'The day to finally shut up the haters'.

Since 2011, Sam had been a big Lionel Messi fan and despite the fact that he left football, that love for the little Argentinian lingered.

This was enough to make him break his promise to his mom after 4 years.

He felt a bit guilty, but that was it. 'Mom won't even know'. He thought.

In no time, he changed from his top into the Argentina jersey, took permission from his excited boss who granted it easily before he left with his best friend. They were going to watch this game in a place where he once built so many memories, a certain viewing center.

Staring at the signpost, Sam paused for a few seconds.

"What?" Ian asked.

"Nothing," he shook his head. "I just remembered something, that's all".

As they went inside, he said casually. "This viewing center was where I watched my very first full 90 minutes of a football game".

"Wow, really?"

"Yeah".

An awkward moment soon followed though as just taking 3 steps inside the viewing center, Sam's eyes clashed with a familiar face.

He wore dark shades but Sam could still recognize him immediately.

'F*ck! What's dad doing here?!'

Father and son averted their gaze, avoiding each other as Ian led his best friend to a good spot where they could see the screen properly.

Before the game started, the excited viewers supporting both teams were already at each other's throats as they argued on how the national team they supported was superior to the other, even placing bets.

This was when one of the rich-looking boys there, Sam guessed he was an internet fraudster shouted. "10,000 naira for every France-supporting fan for every goal that France scores today".

"Yaayyy...! Odogwu!" They shouted, hailing him.

5 minutes to the game, the atmosphere in the air was already palpable, filled with excitement and anticipation.

For some reason, Sam could feel his blood boiling.

It was almost like he never left football. 'This feeling...', he was scared and excited at the same time.

And finally, the greatest football game on the planet started.

Of course, the voice of the iconic commentator, Peter Drury was the first thing that introduced the excited fans into the world of football.

...

The game started neutrally at first, both national teams being cautious, probing each other till Argentina decided to switch it up.

Of course, France's acclaimed defense stayed firm and unbreakable till a moment of madness from Ousmane Dembele left his team in shambles in just the 23rd minute of the game.

Receiving the ball on the left side of the pitch, Angel Di Maria, the Argentinian winger and no. 7 was up to his usual trickery as with some quick feet and ball shuffles, he left Ousmane Dembele in the dust, charging into the 18-yard box only to be tripped from behind by the French winger.

"He's on the ground!"

"And he's got a penalty!"

The viewing center erupted as the ecstatic Argentina fans celebrated the moment.

Of course, it was the Argentine captain and talisman, Lionel Messi donning the iconic no. 10 jersey who came out to take the penalty.

Lionel Messi was not the best penalty taker in football but he was reasonably skilled. Yet, for some reason, watching Messi walk forward with the ball, Sam could not help his rapidly beating heart.

'He's not going to miss, is he?'

Peter Drury dutifully covered every important moment of the game.

"...A heartbeat, and Messi!"

Messi coolly slotted the ball into the bottom right corner, sending Hugo Illoris of France the other way as the stadium and the viewing center erupted in chaos.

"GOALLLLLLL!"

The Argentina fans celebrated wildly, taunting their opposition fans in the process who could only watch in envy.

The celebrations didn't last too long, the game resumed.

Everyone expected France to finally bounce back into the game but the Argentina defense in that first half proved even more notorious than the French backline, completely snuffing out the star-studded French attack.

Argentina probed and probed till again, it happened. An Argentina moment of magic was all it took to double their lead in the 36th minute of the game.

This time, it was Messi at the center, playing an unreal pass that started the sequence of events leading up to the goal.

After a clearance from Emiliano Martinez, the Argentinian goalkeeper and a short pass, Messi received the ball in the halfway line.

After a deft touch to control the ball, the Argentine maestro played an unreal pass to the right side of the pitch that opened up the French defense.

A short pass to Mac Allister who played it to Angel Di Maria at the left completely laid the French backline as open as a pirate website, only thing being that pirate websites were no good.

Trust the Argentine winger. Di Maria made no mistakes, calmly poking the ball above Hugo Illoris into the back of the net.

"GOALLLL!"

If the first time, it was a shout, this time, it was a roar. A roar of victory as the Argentine fans celebrated wildly.

Some even started singing celebratory songs immediately. To them, Lionel Messi and Argentina already won the FIFA World Cup final already.

All that remained was to hand over the trophy to them.

Though Sam joined in the celebrations, his was a bit muted compared to the others. Joy and excitement filled his heart but he masked it.

He still felt unnatural in the boisterous atmosphere, he still could not bring himself to be fully free in a football atmosphere.

For the 45 minutes of the first half all the way to the second half and to the 80th minute of the game, Argentina dominated with impunity.

The France attack looked listless and out of ideas. When the double substitutions of Ousmane Dembele and Antoine Griezmann were made, the Argentina fans celebrated.

To everyone who watched, France already lost, but in the 80th minute of the game, after Dembele's blunder in the first half for France, it was Nicolas Otamendi's turn for Argentina as a moment of madness cost his team, conceding a penalty kick.

For a moment, the celebrations became muted but they didn't stop entirely as Kylian Mbappe, the French superstar took the ball to take the penalty kick.

In the 80th minute of the game, in the FIFA World Cup final, the 22-year-old was tasked with taking a penalty kick to try bringing his nation back into the game.

You could literally imagine the amount of pressure on the player.

Yet, Kylian Mbappe showed no signs of pressure as after a quick glance at the goalpost, he made a shot run and then, vroom!

The ball was in the back of the net.

"GOAL!" The fans supporting France in the viewing center who had been silent for over 80 minutes could finally vent their frustrations as they roared.

Their voices were not too loud though, they were still the losing side but for some reason, Sam felt his heart beating faster.

Though he was no longer fully up to date with football, he did not live under a cave, he had heard of the Paris Saint Germain wonderkid, Kylian Mbappe.

That goal for the first time in this game finally pulled at his emotion strings. For some reason, he felt tensed. 'Please God, it's just 10 more minutes'. He prayed but just a minute later, it happened.

Again, it was the young wonder, Kylian Mbappe in the 81st minute.

"Mbappe..., Thuram..., Mbappe!"

That was all it took!

A header, a pass, and a shot..., the ball was in the back of the net, and a viewing center descended into chaos.

There were 2 factions, the radical celebrants, and the shellshocked fans.

"GOALLLLL!!!"

The French fans roared, ran, and jumped everywhere, celebrating wildly as the previously boisterous Argentina fans were silenced.

"F*ck!" Sam muttered a curse, clenching his fists tightly as for the first time this game, he lost his cool.

He looked at his best friend with intensity. "I almost said it, hold that boy, hold that fool, hold Kylian Mbappe!"

"God! Why did they have to give him so much space?!"

Ian was surprised at his best friend's reaction and ended up being the one to calm him down, Sam was already emotional.

The game restarted and, oh boy, it was fair to say that the world cup final became the battleground for World War 3.

Messi, Mbappe...

Mbappe..., Messi...

These 2 terrorized with the younger one being the greater menace for the final few minutes of the game as both national teams pushed to score and in the 90th plus 2 minutes, well, it was safe to say that Sam's soul left his body for a moment.

"Kolo Muaniiii...!"

That moment was almost like a scene straight out of his worst nightmare as one-on-one with the Argentine goalkeeper, the young French forward shot at goal only for it to be blocked by Dibu Martinez.

"F*ck!" Curses rained from both sets of fans in the viewing center.

A few minutes later, finally, the full-time whistle was blown.

In extra time, the war continued as both teams teased each other but again, it was Argentina who showed up when it mattered most.

In the 108th minute of the game, the ball was with Lautaro Martinez.

Jumping to his feet, Sam roared. "Pass! Pass the ball! Pass the f*cking ball!"

Lautaro Martinez took a shot, it hit the goalkeeper, Sam was already cursing the goalkeeper when Lionel Messi poked the rebound in.

Jules Kounde, the French fullback did a goal line clearance but goal-line technology judged the ball to have crossed the line.

"GOALLLLL...!!!"

Unbounded, no longer caring about how he looked, Sam pulled off his Argentina jersey, leaving only his white singlet as he waved the jersey wildly while running to the front of this viewing center.

By now, he already lost his composure in the emotion of this incredible football game. Sam was on a high where he no longer cared about anybody.

He celebrated like a mad man, not caring how he looked. At some point, he even hugged his dad excitedly without knowing it.

The other Argentina fans also celebrated wildly.

And then, 10 minutes of more tension later, it happened, and again, it was the f*cking boy wonder, Kylian Mbappe.

His relentless pressure and play made Argentina to concede another penalty kick through a handball in the 118th minute of the game.

"F*ck! I hate you!" Sam cried!

Literal tears flowed from his eyes as he watched the boy take the ball again, make his trademark short run only to rifle the ball into the net again.

"F*ck you!" Sam screamed frustratedly.

The FIFA World Cup 2022 final went to penalties.

Sam's emotions were at a crescendo. He was almost too scared to watch the penalty shootout but he cared too much at this point, he was too invested to not watch, he forced himself to watch.

And on the aftermath of that evening, Sam became an Emiliano Martinez superfan.

The penalty shootout was tension packed.

The boy who was on god-mode, Kylian Mbappe took the first penalty. He went the same way but again, the mother*cker took his moment with aplomb, rattling the ball into the back of the net despite Martinez's best efforts.

On this evening, he was like the main character of a novel with plot armor working in his favor as he became only the 2nd football player in history to score a hattrick in a FIFA world cup final.

To Sam, he was a cockroach that just won't die.

"I hate you!" He mumbled to himself anxiously.

When Messi stepped up, again, he was overwhelmed by fear, having flashbacks to Messi's penalty miss in the Copa America final many years ago.

But this time, his worst fears were not realized, Messi coolly slotted his penalty into the back of the net.

Then it was Kingsley Coman, the French winger's turn to take the second penalty. This was the moment that would go down in history as the Emiliano Martinez moment as the Argentina goalkeeper went full villain mode, engaging in some iconic shithousery to mess with and enter his opponent's mind.

It worked.

Coman kicked the ball well but Martinez dove the right way, tipping the ball away from the net.

"Yes!!!!" Sam jumped up to his feet from where he sat as he pumped his fists excitedly. "F*cking yes!" He screamed for joy.

The viewing center was in chaos but it soon calmed down again because, there were more penalties to be taken.

Paulo Dybala went up next, he coolly scored.

And then, Aurelien Tchouameni of France went up next only to be subjected to more of Martinez's shithousery.

The Argentinian goalkeeper was determined to do whatever it took to bring the trophy back home.

Aurelien stood, he looked, then he took his shot, but dragged it wide.

"F*CKING YES!!!" Sam jumped to his feet again for joy, excitement and relief written all over his face. "YES!" He screamed.

The Argentina fans were over the moon again.

Leandro Paredes stepped up for Argentina next, slotting his ball into the net again. It was now 3 to Argentina, 1 to France.

Randal Kolo Muani stepped up next for France, took his shot confidently and scored, cutting the Argentine lead down.

And then, the deciding moment all came down to the 4th Argentine penalty taker, Gonzalo Montiel.

In the viewing center, no fan could sit down anymore, they all stood up.

Some placed their hands akimbo on their hips, tensed, others with hands on their heads, some partially covering their eyes, and all with bated breaths, they watched.

Montiel took a shot run, took his shot, straight into the bottom left corner.

...for a few seconds, Sam's head glitched, he could not keep up with the proceedings but then, "GOALLLLLLL!!!" A revitalized Sam celebrated in euphoria!

"Argentina, champions of the world!" Peter Drury once again was at the ready to bless the moment with his iconic commentary.

"Again..., at last!"

"And the nation will tango all night long!"

"36 years since Maradona and..."

Sam could not hear more because he was already drunk in the euphoria of the moment. The celebrations were radical and wild even as the France supporters stormed out of the viewing center.

Sam had never felt this much joy all his life, not even the 2011 Champions league final made him feel this way.

Exactly how he was feeling..., he could not describe it.

It was just so sweet, so beautiful, so dreamy, so indescribable.

"Sam, we did it!" Ian hugged him excitedly.

In the midst of the celebrations was when it all started coming back to him. 'Football..., I can't leave it, I just can't', I love it too much'.

'Football is me, and I am football, it is what drives me'.

'Without football, I'm just a robot'.

'But my legs..., ' he sighed. 'Only if I could get a miracle'.

Right at that moment, something inexplicable happened.

[Your plea for a miracle has been answered!]

[Congratulations! You have received a reward: Ultimate Football System!]

[Initializing..., please wait...]