

Football God 61

Chapter 61: Enyimba FC- Winners of the 2022/2023 CAF Champions League Trophy

(CAF Champions League!)

(Final fixtures: First leg game)

>Enyimba FC 4-1 Wydad AC<

>Date: 4th June, 2023<

...

(Final fixtures: Second leg game)

>Wydad AC 2-1 Enyimba FC<

>Aggregate: 3-5<

>Date: 11th June, 2023<

...

(Winners of the 2022/2023 CAF Champions League Trophy: Enyimba FC!)

Immediately after the final whistle was blown, the sculptors went to work, engraving the name of Enyimba FC on the prestigious trophy.

While this happened backstage, on the pitch, emotion flowed.

Most of the Wydad AC players collapsed on the pitch, exhausted and tired even as others directly burst into tears. Making it to the final of the CAF champions league was an incredible achievement, but they all wanted to win.

After overcoming so many challenges, including Mamelodi Sundowns just to get here and lose to Enyimba FC, it was heartbreaking.

While most of the players broke down in tears, others lying on the pitch, the captain of the Wydad AC team walked towards his teammates, consoling them while telling them that they needed to acknowledge their supporters.

In the end, they listened, standing up and following their captain as they walked up towards the tens of thousands of supporters that came out for them today. They may have lost, but they still needed to appreciate the fans.

Unlike what they expected though, the fans didn't show any negative reaction, rather loud applause and cheers soon filled this stadium.

The fans were proud of their team's performance today.

Enyimba FC may have won in the end but they didn't make it easy for them. Heck, today, they were the winners since they won 2-1 in their home, that was enough consolation for them to briefly forget the pain that they were going through.

While sorrow and consolation were the emotion prevalent among the Wydad AC side, the Enyimba FC side experienced a whole other emotion, euphoria.

Immediately after the final whistle blew, confirming that his team just won the CAF Champions League, an emotional Coach Yemi Daniel removed his face cap before waving it wildly as he ran into the pitch to celebrate with his players.

Seeing their coach run towards them, the Enyimba FC players in blue rushed towards him before carrying him up as they celebrated him, juggling him in the air.

The emotion among them was full of euphoria and joy.

Their champions league campaign this season just felt unreal. First, they didn't even qualify for the trophy, needing the national association to step in just before they had the rights to play in the tournament.

Despite all the controversy surrounding their qualification, and despite all what the pundits and critics said, somehow, against all odds, they did it, going all the way to win the CAF champions league trophy.

It didn't feel like reality at all, rather, it felt like a perfectly written script filled with ups and downs but with the perfect ending.

All the players and their coach felt on top of the world, including the bench players. Afterall, the trophy win would also be recorded in their CV.

After celebrating with their coach, the players also celebrated their victory in their own unique ways. As for Sam, he made a video call right there in the stadium.

(Outgoing video call to Best Mom...)

As soon as she picked the call, before he could speak, he was drowned in a cacophony of noise.

"SAM...!!!" He heard his name being screamed.

"My son! I can't believe it..., you did it!" His mom was actually in tears!

"I'm so proud of you!"

'Damn mom, when did you become this emotional?' Sam was flabbergasted.

His dad hugged his wife in the background, kissing her on the forehead. "I told you, right? I told you, our son is made for the top!"

"Congratulations son, I can't wait for you to come home finally".

"Don't worry, this time, bills are on me," this man patted his chest confidently. "I will throw a party to celebrate this achievement!"

Mr. Moses laughed loudly. "I can't wait for you to don the blue and red of Barcelona boy, next time, it's the UEFA Champions League!"

"Yes dad!" Sam laughed exuberantly.

"Sam, buy me something from Morocco!" Sophia shouted from the background.

The funniest thing to Sam was that his parents and sister were not the only ones at home who watched the final on their TV.

At this moment, his home was filled with neighbors and family friends. Together, they all watched him play in the final of the CAF champions league.

And when the excitement finally died a bit from his immediate family, they congratulated him.

"Congratulations Sam, you just made the whole of Abraka proud!"

"We can't wait for you to come back!"

"Congratulations Sam".

"Congratulations".

When Sam was finally forced to end the video call, he did it with a big smile on his face. He felt on top of the world.

He looked at heaven, kissing the Enyimba FC badge on his jersey. 'God bless the day I kicked a football again'.

And finally, it was the trophy presentation time.

The Wydad AC players who already mostly recovered from their disappointment stepped on the podium first as the tournament organizers gave them their silver medals, congratulating them on their performance.

After them, the Enyimba FC squad finally climbed the podium led by their coach as they collected their gold medals.

After collecting the medals, they were finally presented with the trophy.

Wrapping his hands around this trophy finally, Austin felt on top of the world. This player felt a rollercoaster of different emotions, mostly euphoric in nature flow through him as he kissed the trophy passionately.

Climbing back into the stadium, as the captain, he was the one supposed to lift the trophy as they celebrated but at the last moment, he changed his mind.

"Come, lift it, you deserve it".

Sam was stunned. "Are you sure?"

"Are you kidding me? Come lift it before I change my mind!"

Sam grinned and placed his hands on the trophy. He kissed it before lifting it and in tandem, the Enyimba FC players jumped, celebrating wildly as celebratory ribbons were shot into the sky.

On this day, Enyimba FC claimed its 3rd CAF Champions League trophy, a moment that would be forever engraved in the history of the club.

It didn't end with the trophy lifting. After most of his teammates left the podium, Sam stayed as he received another trophy, an individual one for giving the most assists in this season's CAF champions league.

Incredibly, he also received another individual trophy, sharing the golden boot award with Wydad AC's striker.

And finally, he received his 3rd individual award trophy of the night, claiming the golden ball award for the best player of the season's CAF champions league.

Sam truly felt on top of the world.

After all the celebrations, as the squad went to the airport, intent on returning to Nigeria that night to celebrate with their excited fans, Sam received a flurry of notifications from his system.

He grinned. 'Finally!'

Chapter 62: System notifications

~----~

[You have completed a Season System Quest!]

[Congratulations! You have completed Season Quest 3!]

[You have completed mission 1: Win the CAF Champions League Trophy!]

[You have been rewarded with +100 Skill Points!]

[You have been rewarded with a random bonus reward: Form Boost ×2]

>Form Boost: This is a system boost that randomly boosts 3 of your main attributes by +3 stat points for one game<

[You have been rewarded with a +7 increase to your dribbling attribute!]

[Congratulations! You have met the requirements to level up!]

[Your overall player rating has increased to 75!]

...

Player Attributes:

*Pace: 73

*Shot: 72

*Pass: 76

*Dribbling: 74

*Defending: 35

*Physicality: 63

*Stamina: 80

Overall Rating: 75

...

After 6 months of playing professional football, despite playing week in week out, his attributes didn't improve by much, showing him how hard it was for a football player to improve his skills and abilities.

He could not rush it; it took time to improve.

Across the past 6 months, his pace, shooting, and passing attributes all increased by +2 each while his dribbling attribute increased by only +1. The rest of his attributes stayed stagnant but all of a sudden, he just hit the jackpot.

In one go, his dribbling attribute increased by a whooping +7, taking it all the way from the 60s rank, jumping to the 70s.

His overall rating also increased all the way to 75.

The fact that his stash of skill points just increased by a whooping +100 also excited him, but he was more fascinated by the form boost.

Reading it's description by the system, he already had an idea of what this boost could do to him on a football pitch and he could not help but grin.

Getting the system really was the turning point of his life.

Staring at the notifications in his system screen, Sam felt his chest swell up in joy but that was not all, there were other notifications.

...

[Congratulations! You have completed mission 2: Win the best player award in the CAF Champions League!]

[You have been rewarded with a random reward!]

[Reward randomizing..., please wait...]

[Randomization complete!]

[Click to open reward card:]

...

Sam was surprised as the notifications disappeared, replaced by a golden card hovering in the middle of his system.

On the surface of the card, there was an image of a familiar footballer playing with a football. It was Ronaldinho Gaucho, the Brazilian winger and legend who also played for FC Barcelona during his prime.

Ronaldinho donned his Barcelona jersey in the picture on the golden card.

Sam was stunned. 'A golden card is my reward? What is it about?'

He could feel his heart beating fast already. He didn't know what the reward was yet, but anything relating to Ronaldinho as a reward was definitely going to be exciting. 'Ah! Yes, it said I should click to open the reward'.

Looking round to confirm that no one was looking at him inside the plane, and since Austin was already asleep, he clicked on the golden card.

Immediately after he clicked on it, the bright light surrounding the golden card became even brighter before it burst into countless golden specks and from the specks came out his reward.

...

[You have been rewarded with a legendary inheritance!]

[You have been rewarded with the intermediate mastery of the Legendary Football Skill: Elastico!]

[NOTE:]

>There are 4 major mastery levels of skills in football, basic, intermediate, advanced, and perfection, but there is a 5th and lesser known mastery level that has only ever been attained by certain legendary footballers, the legendary mastery<

>There are steep requirements to taking a football skill to the legendary mastery level, the requirements being consistency, outstanding excellence, and gaining the status of a football legend<

>Ronaldo Gaúcho is a legend of football and he personalized the football skill, elastico, taking it all the way to the next mastery level after perfection, the legendary mastery level<

>It is virtually impossible to take a football skill to the legendary level, except in special circumstances. But by getting the inheritance of the legendary Brazilian, you just got a clear shot at getting a legendary mastery skill level<

>All you have to do to get there is train and get better, the other requirements have already been fulfilled since it is an inheritance<

~----~

Sam could not believe his eyes, staring at the last notifications of his system with eyes so wide that they almost seemed to burst out of their sockets.

'Is this... real?' He thought, flabbergasted.

'Is this even possible?!' He was losing it, not in a bad way though, he was losing it in sheer euphoria, shock, and ecstasy.

'Damn! This is crazy!'

If he was not flying in an airplane alongside his teammates, he would have jumped for joy already, screaming at the top of his lungs.

Initially at the beginning of the season, after every game that he played, he could feel himself improving no matter how small but after some time, maybe during March, this feeling reduced till it become virtually non-existent.

Sam could tell that he was no longer improving with every game, he met his first bottleneck in his progression as a football player as the schedule racked up.

This was the reason why he paid less and less attention to his system status, focusing on playing and winning games instead as he put all his focus on completing the season system quests.

After these series of notifications, it validated his reason for focusing on the quests. The system truly was his best way to rise to the top.

And now, he was ready to look at his system status again.

~-----~

[Player status!]

Host: Samuel Moses

Current Career Status: NPFL player, CAF champions league reigning champion

Talent Rating: B

Player Position: Attacking Midfield

Player Attributes:

*Pace: 73

*Shot: 72

*Pass: 76

*Dribbling: 74

*Defending: 35

*Physicality: 63

*Stamina: 80

Overall Rating: 75

...

[Owned Football Skills:]

[Basic mastery level: La croqueta; body feint; Cruyff turn; Power shot; step overs, roulette]

[Intermediate mastery level: Elastico]

...

[Legendary Inheritance: Elastico]

...

[System Remark: An aspiring football talent in an inferior league!]

~-----~

Due to his lack of progress in the past few months, none of his football skills managed to breakthrough to the intermediate mastery level yet.

Sam never expected that his first intermediate mastery skill would be a skill that he almost never used, the elastico.

'Life really is unpredictable, huh?'

Chapter 63: Celebration

That night, returning to Nigeria, the Enyimba FC squad were treated to another triumphant welcome, this time from Morocco.

In the airport, hundreds of fans gathered, waiting for them.

Not just Austin and Sam anymore, literally all the Enyimba FC players were forced to take pictures with the excited fans and also sign autographs as they wanted to create a memory from this memorable night for Nigeria football.

In social media, a storm already started as the excited fans flooded all social media pages, promoting Enyimba FC and most especially, their player who won the golden ball award for the season's CAF champions league.

(Trending Posts in Twitter:)

*Dammit! Give Zinedine Sam the golden boy award already! No young player in Europe can lace his boots, fight with your keyboard!

*1 goal and 3 assists, 4 consecutive man of the match awards all the way from the first leg of the semifinals, damn, this mother*cker never miss! Sam is too good, Jesus, give him the balon do'r! The scariest part is he's still only 17, the Super Eagles is about to welcome a monster real soon.

*Destroyed JS Kabylie in the quarter finals, violated the almighty Al Ahly in the semifinals, and totally obliterated Wydad AC in the final, ladies and gentlemen, I present to you, Enyimba FC, the best football club in all of Africa!

*Enyimba FC is currently the best club in Africa and Samuel Moses is its best player! All the haters, you can say all you want but honestly, I think Sam is already at the level of those African stars playing in Europe, I dare say even better than some.

*Which European club is coming for him first? In case you see this, Sam, I asked first! Please join my club, please join Chelsea Football Club, we need you, you're too good to join a wack team like Manchester United, be wise Sam, don't let them deceive you!

*I once heard that Sam is an FC Barcelona fan. If that's true, I can't wait man, I'm so excited! Do you think Barca will go for him? I really hope so man, I just hope they see the potential in him.

*Well, I'm pretty surprised at all the noise being made. Enyimba FC won the CAF Champions league, not Sam. I know the boy, I played football with him here in Abraka, mark my words, Sam is an injury prone player, he's not made for the top.

*Well, haters gonna hate, go suck a d*ck!

There was a storm in social media and an even bigger storm in reality. Since it was already late when they got to Nigeria, the Enyimba FC players lodged a hotel in Abuja, the Nigerian capital city where they spent the night.

The next day, they returned to Abia State where the club already organized another celebratory event to celebrate their achievement yesterday and again, the Enyimba International Stadium was filled with tens of thousands of fans.

That performance yesterday truly shot all the players of the starting 11 into stardom, their social media pages experienced an upsurge of followers.

And of course, the player at the center of it all was still Sam.

Right there amid the celebration, the demanding fans chanted.

"We want Sam!"

"We want Sam!"

"We want Sam!"

Austin was supposed to give the celebratory speech but, in the end, Sam was forced to climb the podium with an awkward smile on his face.

Once he spoke into the microphone, the noisy stadium instantly quietened down. The fans already saw him as some sort of god sent to rescue their club, the respect he commanded among them now was truly ridiculous.

Noting their silence, Sam became more confident and with a big smile on his face, he spoke. "We would have never made it all the way to the end without your support, and for that, I appreciate all of you".

"Personally, I'd like to appreciate a few people".

"First, Coach," Sam looked down at his coach. "Thank you for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to play professionally when others didn't, I will never forget your impact in my life and my career".

"Secondly, and most importantly," he grinned. "I want to thank my family".

"That you dad, for believing in me, thank you for helping me convince mom". He chuckled. "Thank you for everything," tears welled in his eyes. "Without you, I won't be standing where I am today".

"And mom, thank you too," he revealed a witty grin. "Thank you for your fiery support, for agreeing," he chuckled. "I hope by now, you already learned how to pronounce Enyimba FC correctly".

The fans laughed.

"And Sophia too, thank you for all those times you didn't rat me out when I snuck out of the house to go play football, I love you".

"Hehe," he laughed. "Don't worry, I'll treat you lavishly the next time that I meet you".

"And lastly, the fans". He looked up at the stadium stands where tens of thousands of fans focused on him. "Thank you for believing, in me, in the club, in the squad, everything, we are grateful".

"Thank you for the unrelenting support".

"We would have never done it without your support".

"And right now, I want to make this promise to you," his eyes gleamed. "We're not done yet".

"We just won the CAF champions league, but the season is not over yet".

"The Super 6 playoffs of the league is starting this month to determine the league winners," he grinned. "Rest assured, we will give our all to win it".

"We will also give our all in the FA Cup".

"And lastly, we have the Club World Cup to play since we are the reigning champions of Africa".

"I can't promise that we will win, but we will give our all".

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

The fans chanted loudly.

He raised a clenched fist up and with a grin, he yelled. "Up Enyimba!"

The fans responded. "Up Enyimba!"

The players finally retreated from the celebrations, they still had to prepare for upcoming games. To the fans though, it was just starting as they continued their celebrations, savoring the moment till satisfaction.

While all that happened, the fixtures for the Super 6 playoffs to determine the NPFL champion was finally scheduled.

Chapter 64: Abridged format- Super 6 playoffs

The 2022/2023 season for the Nigerian Professional Football League was already drawing to an end after just 6 months of football.

Originally, this was not supposed to be the case but due to the unique circumstances surrounding this season, a few changes were made.

Due to the delayed start to the season, instead of following the normal format of a regular 38-matchday structure like in previous seasons, the 2022/2023 NPFL season followed an abridged format.

Instead of the regular 38-matchday structure, the league was divided into two groups, Group A and Group B, and each group had 10 teams.

This abridged format contributed to the reason why Enyimba FC dominated the top of the league table, this was because there were only 10 teams in their group and their strongest rivals were in the other group.

The season was already drawing to an end though, which also meant an end to the group stage football as the top 3 teams of both groups advanced to the NPFL Super 6 playoffs.

The Super 6 playoffs which determined the overall champion of the 2022/2023 season was supposed to take place from June 3rd to June 11th but due to Enyimba FC's deep run in the CAF champions league, it was postponed.

After their champions league win though, the national association rescheduled and finally, the schedule was set.

(NPFL Super Six playoffs!)

(Matchday 1:)

>Remo Stars – Bendel Insurance<

>Date: 14th June, 2023<

...

>Enyimba – Rivers United<

>Date: 14th June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars – Lobi Stars<

>Date: 14th June, 2023<

(Matchday 2:)

>Bendel Insurance – Lobi Stars<

>Date: 16th June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars – Rivers United<

>Date: 16th June, 2023<

...

>Enyimba – Remo Stars<

>Date: 16th June, 2023<

(Matchday 3:)

>Rivers United – Bendel Insurance<

>Date: 18th June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars – Remo Stars<

>Date: 18th June, 2023<

...

>Enyimba – Lobi Stars<

>Date: 18th June, 2023<

(Matchday 4:)

>Remo Stars – Rivers United<

>Date: 20th June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars – Enyimba<

>Date: 20th June, 2023<

...

>Bendel Insurance – Lobi Stars<

>Date: 20th June, 2023<

(Matchday 5:)

>Rivers United – Lobi Stars<

>Date: 22nd June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars – Bendel Insurance<

>Date: 22nd June, 2023<

...

>Enyimba – Remo Stars<

>Date: 22nd June, 2023<

9 games in 5 days...

To Enyimba FC, it was a very hectic schedule considering that they were all going to play in neutral ground at the Mobolaji Johnson Arena in Lagos.

When you factor in the fact that Enyimba FC also had an FA cup game before traveling to Lagos, it was understandable why the team withdrew out of their champions league win celebrations early.

After winning the CAF champions league trophy, Sam really wanted to take some time off to stay with his family and his best friend to thoroughly enjoy it but unfortunately, he had professional obligations to play for his club.

And as the current best player of the club, Coach Yemi Daniel already put a lot of expectations on his shoulders. Sam could not afford to be out of form.

So, he trained.

For the next few days before 14th when the playoffs finally started, Sam stayed diligent with the help of his system as he trained alongside his teammates at the Mobolaji Johnson Arena in Lagos.

The Enyimba FC squad went to Lagos ahead of time. As for the FA cup game, Coach Yemi Daniel delegated it to his assistant, leaving a team of substitutes for his assistant to approach the game with.

In their first game of the FA cup, Enyimba FC was understandably underwhelming as despite playing at home, the B team were almost knocked out of the competition by their opposition.

A last-minute headed goal managed to keep them in the competition.

And with that hurdle off, they focused on the Super 6 playoffs where Enyimba FC would take on Rivers United in a blockbuster encounter on matchday 1.

Like Sam was already used to, the days moved fast and in no time, it was already the D-day as he lined up alongside his teammates against Rivers United.

After the referee's whistle went off, just like everyone expected, Enyimba FC set the tempo of the game as their midfield dominated, making sure that they hoarded most of the possession.

Rivers United struggled to get into the game and after 30 minutes, the floodgates opened as Chijioke, the Enyimba left winger scored the first goal of the game, making it 1-0 in Enyimba FC's favor.

Just 3 minutes later, Farouk made it 2-0, scoring from a corner after outjumping every other player.

By half-time, Enyimba FC was in cruise control of the game. Even after second half started, they were in cruise control, leading 2-0 comfortably till just 5 minutes away from time, a defensive collapse cost them.

The first one was an unfortunate own goal as Ojo, the Enyimba FC goalkeeper deflected an easy shot into his own net, making the score line 2-1 in the 86th minute of the game.

Just 4 minutes later, a defensive mix-up allowed the Rivers United striker to sneak in a shot past Ojo, making it 2-2 at the death.

The Rivers United fans were loud, roaring at the top of their voices.

In the end, the double defensive collapse cost Enyimba FC as they ended their first game of the playoffs with a draw.

The full results for matchday 1 came soon after.

(Matchday 1:)

>Remo Stars 2-2 Bendel Insurance<

>Date: 14th June, 2023<

...

>Enyimba 2-2 Rivers Untied<

>Date: 14th June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars 0-1 Lobi Stars<

>Date: 14th June, 2023<

...

Due to the high standards that they already set with recent performances, a draw in their first game of the playoffs was a slow start but Enyimba FC kept believing, training diligently till 2 days later when they played their second game.

This time, they went up against Remo Stars.

When the game started, from the first minute, something became clear, this game was going to be very different from Enyimba FC's first game.

Wary of their opponent's scary form and run in the CAF champions league, unlike Rivers United, Remo Stars didn't approach this game to win at all as they camped in their box, playing ultra-defensive football.

For 80 minutes, the Enyimba FC attack was frustrated time and time again despite Austin and Sam being on top of their game.

Together, the midfield duo created numerous clear-cut chances but their forwards were profligate, failing to convert any one of the chances.

In the end, despite missing 4 chances in this game already, Emeka, the Enyimba FC center forward was the one who won the game for his team after another defense-splitting pass from his captain.

After a frustrating night, Emeka finally came out on top in his duel against the Remo Stars goalkeeper, beating this goalkeeper finally in the 82nd minute to give his team the lead.

"GOALLL...!" Emeka roared in the Remo Stars goalkeeper's face, celebrating his goal exuberantly. He felt relieved after such a frustrating night of football.

The Remo Stars' players were devastated after such a solid defensive performance ended up with them conceding. For the remaining minutes, Enyimba FC kept on probing but the score line remained the same till the final whistle.

Enyimba FC won their second game of the playoffs 1-0.

The results of the other games were concluded sometime later and the results of matchday 2 was out.

(Matchday 2:)

>Bendel Insurance 1-1 Lobi Stars<

>Date: 16th June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars 1-1 Rivers United<

>Date: 16th June, 2023<

...

>Enyimba 1-0 Remo Stars<

>Date: 16th June, 2023<

In 2 days, Enyimba FC would take on Lobi Stars for their 3rd game of the Super 6 playoffs.

Chapter 65: 9 days, 5 games...

5 games in 9 days would take a toll on any footballer, even more so after 6 months of non-stop rushed football already.

All 6 teams competing in the Super 6 playoffs were filled with fatigued players due to the hectic game schedule.

The players couldn't complain though, that was what they were paid for.

For Enyimba FC's third game of the playoffs, Coach Yemi Daniel rested a few players including Farouk, replacing him with Cyril Olisema but he didn't touch 2 players, the untouchable duo of Sam and Austin.

Against Lobi Stars, Sam and Austin played all 90 minutes again.

Just like the game against Remo Stars, they were forced to lay siege to the incredible defensive block set up by their opponents who were unwilling to take the risk of taking the battle to them.

In the end, just like the Remo Stars game, for majority of the game, Enyimba FC dominated possession without breaking through their opponent's block.

The first half ended 0-0.

In the second half though, something unexpected happened.

In the 68th minute of the game, after another prolonged attacking raid by Enyimba FC, Austin lost the ball, an unusual mistake from the Enyimba FC captain.

As soon as the Lobi Star center midfielder stole the ball, without hesitation, he kicked the ball to the left where his speedy left winger lurked.

And immediately, a foot race started!

Kicking the ball long, the swift left winger erupted, eating yards of space rapidly like they were not there as he effortlessly outran the 3 Enyimba FC players that were originally ahead of him.

Ojo charged out of his post to meet the speedy left winger but without panicking, this winger poked the ball high, lobbing the Enyimba FC goalkeeper.

Ojo could do nothing, the winger scored an incredible goal as this winger whirled away towards the corner flag to celebrate.

In the 68th minute, against the run of play, Lobi Stars got the lead through an incredible counter-attacking moment.

FWEEEE!

After the referee's whistle sounded again to restart play, riled up already, Enyimba FC launched even more aggressive attacking raids on their opponent's box.

This time, Austin put even more effort, imposing himself in the game as he played better than every other player on the pitch for a few minutes. In the 75th minute, holding possession again, this center midfielder advanced into the box.

As soon as he entered the box, acknowledging his threat, Lobi Stars' players rapidly closed him down but Austin was in the zone state, skipping past challenges till a high boot smashed against his lap, bringing this player down.

"Arghhhh...!" Grabbing his leg, Austin screamed loudly in pain.

The players surrounding him could tell immediately that it was serious.

The referee stopped the game, handing a straight red card to the Lobi Stars' player who committed the foul and handing Enyimba FC a penalty kick before calling the attention of the medical staff.

After rushing into the pitch, emergency aid was given to the captain but in the end, with tears streaming down his eyes, Austin shook his head.

Enyimba FC was devastated, their captain could not continue.

Austin was stretchered off the pitch injured.

Watching as they stretchered him off even as Austin looked at him with his teary eyes, Sam felt emotional and reluctant. 'No,' he thought. 'It was not supposed to end like this'.

'How long is he out for?' He was distracted from his thoughts by the last words of his captain as he was stretchered off the pitch.

"We need to win". Austin whispered in his direction.

Hearing that, Sam's head finally cooled down, settling back in the game. Those words to him felt like a handing over of the baton.

Austin already did his best, now he was injured, it was up to him to take over.

'We must win!' Thinking, Sam observed the pitch.

He looked at the scoreboard at the time. 'We still have 25 minutes'.

FWEEE!

After the referee's whistle sounded, Emeka took a perfect penalty kick, sending the Lobi Stars goalkeeper the other way to score and level the game.

Emeka didn't celebrate, dedicating the goal to his injured captain instead.

With one man down already, for the remaining minutes of the game, Lobi Stars completely forfeited attack as they fully focused on defending.

Without their captain, it was harder for Enyimba FC to fully dominate possession but with Olisema on the pitch with Sam, playing with 2 attack-minded midfielders, Enyimba FC posed more of a threat.

For 20 minutes, Lobi Stars stayed defiant, defending valiantly but in the end, the game was not destined to end in a draw.

Again, it was another moment of individual brilliance from a familiar name.

Dribbling across the middle of the pitch with the ball, Sam skipped past a few challenges before passing the ball to the left where Chijioke ran.

Receiving the ball, the Enyimba left winger easily beat his marker, ran deeper into the Lobi Stars' half before playing a cut back pass to Sam.

Sam didn't think, hitting the ball first time with the inside of his weaker left foot as the ball rose and curved past the outstretched arms of the Lobi Stars' goalkeeper into the embrace of the net.

In the 85th minute, Enyimba FC finally took the lead.

"GOALLLL...!" Roaring loudly, Sam charged towards the corner flag before sliding on his knees as he pointed in the direction of the Enyimba FC bench.

He also dedicated his goal to his captain.

For the final minutes of the game, Lobi Stars finally abandoned defending as they came out, trying to create a miracle and equalize in the dying minutes of the game but Enyimba FC remained defensively disciplined, not giving them an inch.

After 90 plus 7 minutes, the game finally came to an end.

Enyimba FC won 2-1.

The headline today was not about the victory though, rather, it was about the injury that Austin Oladapo, Enyimba FC's captain suffered that would keep him out for 2 months.

The whole squad was affected by the news.

That same day, at night, the full results of matchday 3 were finally resolved.

(Matchday 3:)

>Rivers United 0-0 Bendel Insurance<

>Date: 18th June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars 1-1 Remo Stars<

>Date: 18th June, 2023<

...

>Enyimba 2-1 Lobi Stars<

>Date: 18th June, 2023<

With that result, Enyimba FC climbed to the top of the playoff ranking with 6 points in 3 games despite the injury to their captain.

In 2 days, their next game was against Sunshine Stars.

Chapter 66: Taking charge

"Sam, your team won a second straight game in the Super 6 playoffs, but we can't help but focus on the unfortunate incident that happened today".

"According to medical reports, Austin will be out for 2 months, what do you think about that? Do you think Enyimba FC has what it takes to survive without its captain on the pitch?"

Facing the male reporter, Sam took a deep breath. "First, I will like to say that Austin is the beating heart of our team and we will surely feel his absence".

"As for if we will be able to survive without our captain," he scratched his hair. "Honestly, I don't know, I'm no seer but all I can say is that we're determined to make up for his absence and make him proud in the hospital".

"That is what he would want".

"On the pitch, while he was stretchered off, he told me that we needed to win. Well, we won thanks to his blessings".

"We hope to do the same and win in his absence".

"The team is determined to win the league title for him".

"Ok Sam, so who do you think will now take the captain's armband after Austin's injury? Farouk? Or maybe Ojo, they're all old and experienced players".

Sam shook his head. "It's not my place to worry about who will lead the team as the captain, that's the coach's duty. My duty is to play football".

"Ok Sam, thanks for having me, I wish you and your team success in your quest to win the league title again".

"Thanks".

That evening, after they met up in the hotel where they lodged, Coach Yemi Danial gathered his players before making an important announcement.

"After a lot of thinking, I've arrived at a decision".

"As the vice-captain, originally, Farouk is supposed to lead the team next as the captain but I value morale a lot on the pitch".

"I love my captains to lead more by example than being vocal".

"I spoke with Farouk and he already agreed". Coach Yemi Daniel looked round at his players. "For the rest of the season, I've decided to give Sam the captain's armband in Austin's absence".

"But this is just his first season!" Olisema complained immediately. "It's not fair to the other players who've stayed in the team longer".

Coach Yemi Daniel was not having it though. "My decision is final".

In actuality, Olisema was the only player who was truly against it, the other players either didn't care or were in full support of it.

When the news was confirmed to the media, it created a storm, putting the spotlight on Enyimba FC as for some time, they forgot about Austin's injury, focusing on Sam's captainship instead.

Captaining a club as storied as Enyimba FC at just 17 was immense. Sam felt the pressure weighing down on him, but he didn't buckle due to it.

Most importantly, Austin encouraged him from the hospital.

In 2 days' time, Sam already accepted his leadership role fully and when he stepped foot on the pitch again against Sunshine Stars, he took charge.

With Austin injured, it was clear that Sunshine Stars came with ideas, playing bold and attacking football against Enyimba FC and for the first half, they succeeded as they mostly dominated possession.

Despite the combative display from both teams, playing 5 games in 9 days was no easy feat, the players showed clear signs of lethargy and fatigue.

The first half ended in a goalless draw.

In the second half though, while the players of both teams played even more lethargically due to fatigue, one player shone brightly above all the others, Samuel Moses again.

Knowing that the game would be tough and also acknowledging that he was not physically at 100%, this was the reason why he used 1 of the physical conditioning elixirs that he had in his inventory for this game.

In the second half, as the others succumbed to the fatigue, he thrived.

Sam terrorized the Sunshine Stars' defense in the second half, assisting the first goal in the 54th minute and scoring 2 goals in quick succession in the 73rd and 75th minute successively to give Enyimba FC a decisive victory.

Sunshine Stars scored a late goal but by then, it was just a consolation goal.

The game ended 1-3 in Enyimba FC's favor and with the victory, they firmly stood at the top of the playoff rankings with 9 points in 4 games.

And considering that it was the highest-scoring game of the playoffs so far, the critics who took jabs at Enyimba FC, predicting their fall with Austin Oladapo's absence and the rash decision to make Sam captain all grew silent.

Sam convinced, leading by example in his first game as captain.

The full matchday 4 results were soon ready.

(Matchday 4:)

>Remo Stars 1-0 Rivers United<

>Date: 20th June, 2023<

...

>Sunshine Stars 1-3 Enyimba<

>Date: 20th June, 2023<

...

>Bendel Insurance 0-0 Lobi Stars<

>Date: 20th June, 2023<

Considering that the nearest club to them in the rankings were Lobi Stars and Remo Stars with 5 points each, with 9 points, Enyimba FC already won the league title but the 5th game of the playoffs still had to be played.

In their hotel, the players already celebrated their league victory as they made a video call, making sure that their captain, Austin joined in from the hospital.

After that, they resumed preparations for their last game of the Super 6 playoffs that would take place in 2 days against Remo Stars.

That night, very late before sleeping, Sam called his mom.

Having watched the game today alongside the rest of her family, Mrs. Moses was concerned to see her son's call that late when usually, he was supposed to be long asleep already to wake up fresh for the new day.

"Hey Sam, are you ok?"

His mom was fiery but there were times when she was sensitive too, and this night was one of those times. Hearing her calm voice, Sam took a deep breath.

"I'm good, I just feel very exhausted". He sighed.

"It's so exhausting to live like this. It's almost like I don't have a life of my own, every day, it's just football, media, and fans, nothing else".

"I'm beginning to feel suffocated".

"I feel like I'm in a moving train and I can't afford to stop. You know, if I stop, I lose grasp of my dreams. I want to hold on but it's proving so hard".

Mrs. Moses sat up on her bed. "Son, listen to me. I'm very proud of everything you've achieved so far, but in the end, your happiness comes first".

"If you feel you can't continue, I'm here for you, just say the word and I'll be in Abia State tomorrow morning".

"Don't be scared of that coach of yours, he's a few years too young to stop me from helping my son!"

"If he's overworking you, tell me, I'll call him now!"

Hearing her voice start to rise, Sam was not irked, rather, he smiled. 'Typical mom,' he thought.

He chuckled. "Mom, it's fine, just promise that you'll always support me no matter what happens".

"You know I will".

"Promise". He insisted.

"I promise".

"Thank you, mom, I love you".

"I love you too".

That night, Sam slept feeling like a huge burden just left his chest.

He was ready to face his career again.

Chapter 67: Winning the double- NPFL league champions

Sleep, wake up, complete daily system quest, join his teammates and train with their coach, go back to his hotel room, and repeat; for the next 2 days, this was Sam's routine in Lagos like usual.

It was hectic, it was emotionally draining but this was the sacrifice that professional football players had to make to pursue their dreams.

And like the rolling pages of a book, swiftly, the days passed and in no time, it was the D-day again, the last matchday of the Super 6 playoffs.

Rivers United went up against Lobi Stars, Sunshine Stars went up against Bendel Insurance, while Enyimba went up against Remo Stars again in the deciding game of the Super 6 playoffs.

Since losing Austin to injury, Coach Yemi Daniel already tweaked the formation of his team a bit from the normal balanced 4-3-3 formation and for this game against Remo Stars, he tweaked it again.

Incredibly, Olisema was not in the starting line-up, starting in the bench.

From the balanced 4-3-3 formation, for this game, Coach Yemi Daniel switched to a 4-2-3-1 formation where Farouk started alongside the back-up defensive midfielder of Enyimba FC in the defensive midfield positions.

Emeka was the sole striker at the front of the formation, while behind him were Chijioke, Sam, and Victor.

It was another balanced formation but one that enabled Coach Yemi to bring out the best in his available players since he no longer had an elite center midfielder like Austin to control and rotate possession in the middle of the park.

FWEEEE!

When the game started, Enyimba FC played their normal football but Remo Stars was extra aggressive today. Enyimba FC may not need the points today anymore, but they needed it.

The playoffs game was not just about the team that would lift the trophy, it was also about the top 3 teams that would compete in next season's continental competition, the CAF champions league.

With this motivation, Remo Stars played with great intensity.

For most of the first half, they ran after the ball as Enyimba FC controlled possession but they wore the Enyimba players out, mostly exhausting them physically with their high press till one of them misplaced a pass.

Pouncing on it in the 43rd minute of the game, the Remo Stars attacking striker unleashed a rocket shot from just outside the box.

Ojo dived but he could not do much as the ball snuck past him into the net.

Against the run of play, Remo Stars led in the last playoff game. The game went to half-time with Enyimba FC losing, but this champion team was not ready to give up so easily despite the fact that they already won the trophy.

In the second half, Coach Yemi made a change, taking out the backup defensive midfielder for Olisema, playing with a 2-man attacking midfield formation. It was radical but it bore fruit.

Just 5 minutes into the second half, Enyimba FC scored.

Who else but the African Zidane?

Receiving a pass from Olisema just outside the box, Sam wriggled past a few challenges. Though he already noticed it since, he could not help but appreciate how easier it was for him to dribble through players now.

The only thing affecting him was fatigue, but he dug through it.

Nutmegging a player and using a la croqueta to skip past the next, he took a glance at goal, raised his leg before hitting the ball with venom.

BAM!

The ball rushed through the green grass, tearing a few apart and into the air as it nestled into the bottom left corner of the post.

The Remo Stars goalkeeper dived but he didn't stand a chance.

For the remaining parts of the second half, Enyimba FC tried yet they could not breakthrough the Remo Stars defense a second time. In the 80th minute of the game, Coach Yemi subbed Sam out as he felt some discomfort.

And with that, Enyimba FC simply watched the game out, maintaining the 1-1 score line to make it 10 points from 5 games.

FWEEEE!

Immediately after the final whistle blew, Sam ran back into the pitch alongside his coach as he hugged his teammates, celebrating wildly.

The 2022/2023 NPFL season finally came to an end and with it, Enyimba FC were crowned champions.

They already won the double, lifting the league title and the CAF champions league trophy. And with the Nigerian FA cup still on the line, they still had the chance to make it a treble, truly capping off a historic season.

Immediately after the game, the players hit the road again as they returned to Abia State where the celebrations truly kicked off.

Due to the hype and circumstances surrounding their CAF champions league victory, a lot of publicity was already around Enyimba FC and their players and after returning to Abia State, they did an open-bus celebration through the city of Aba.

Of course, before then, Sam already communicated with his family through a video call as they celebrated his achievement with him.

Mr. Moses was extremely emotional, the man felt like a warrior who finally achieved his life's mission. "Now, I can finally die in peace". He said.

"Die and leave me a widow?!" His wife snapped. "You must be joking! Come here!"

"Come on, I didn't mean it".

Well, he had a lot of explanation to do.

Sam and his sister laughed at the bickering couple. In the end, after arriving at Abia State, he couldn't keep up the video call as he joined his teammates and their fans in celebrating their incredible victory.

Unfortunately, Austin couldn't join them yet as the hospital was yet to release him. He could only follow the proceedings through a video call.

Leading the fans on this time as they celebrated, Sam told them to chant their captain's name and they obeyed.

"Austin!"

"Austin!"

"Austin!"

The atmosphere was crazy throughout the city of Aba as tens of thousands of fans celebrated their team's victory excitedly.

It was almost as if they didn't even care about the FA cup anymore.

Well, they did had to care though as after hours of celebrating, Coach Yemi Daniel, the ever ready disciplinarian dragged his players off to rest.

"We still have a little football to play".

"After, you can celebrate all you want".

The players groaned but they respected their coach's wishes.

And coincidentally, their next matchup of the Nigerian FA cup was a blockbuster knock-out encounter against their bitter rivals, Plateau United.

Chapter 68: A minor setback after a major victory

Since the Nigerian FA cup was a straight knock-out tournament, Coach Yemi Daniel fielded his strongest available starting line-up for the next game.

And since they played their opponents at home, they had an advantage.

FWEEEE!

From the first whistle, it became clear that one of the Enyimba FC players didn't let up yet and was still in the form of his life, the player in question being Samuel Moses as he dominated the first half.

In this game, Sam played at his best again, terrorizing the Plateau United backline as the fans kept on chanting his name.

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

In the first half alone, he created 8 clear-cut chances but his teammates were unable to capitalize and score to give Enyimba FC the lead.

He tried going for it alone a few times but considering that a player was assigned to man-mark him, he did not have the chance to enter dangerous positions, forced to settle with creating chances for his teammates instead.

At the last minute of additional time of the first half though, something horrible happened as with the ball, holding possession, Sam tried to play another defense-splitting pass when a Plateau United player charged in with his boots high to intercept the pass.

Sam saw the danger, he tried to dodge at the last moment but it was already too late as this player's boot hit him square on his knee, pushing it back.

Sam jerked before collapsing on the pitch.

Thud!

As soon as he collapsed on the pitch, he felt his world go dark as he was overwhelmed by a wave of pain like a tide.

Sam was in so much pain that he couldn't even scream.

He heard thudding sounds as his teammates charged towards him, he heard them shout, angrily clashing with the Plateau United players and he noticed some of them run to his position, checking on him before calling for the medical staff.

"Sam! Are you ok? Can you hear me?"

"Hey! Sam, are you ok?" Their voice was distorted.

Enyimba International Stadium was silenced as the home fans, horrified, could only place their hands on their heads, praying and hoping against the worst.

Sam was unresponsive though. The medical staff soon stretchered him off the pitch in a hurry even as the packed stadium stayed silent.

And with it, the referee finally responded, handing the Plateau United who flew on the tackle a straight red card. The player didn't complain, knowing the severity of what he did as he walked out of the pitch.

The referee signaled for the Enyimba FC coach to make his changes.

On the touchline, Coach Yemi Daniel had his hands on his head, watching as his best player was stretchered off the pitch.

This coach's head was spinning in circles. 'Why?' He thought.

'Why?!'

'F*ck! Why?!'

"Coach, we need to make a change". His assistant reminded.

"Oh, yes, we need to make a change," he looked at his assistant before glancing at where his player was stretchered towards away from the pitch. "You do it, put Emmanuel on the pitch".

"I'm leaving everything to you".

Right there, Coach Yemi Daniel abandoned everything, his team, the fans, and the Nigerian FA cup and followed the stretcher into the ambulance as Sam was rushed to the hospital.

By the time the ambulance moved, Sam was already unconscious. They didn't know if it was because of the pain or another thing.

Arriving at the nearest hospital, the doctor quickly attended to him and the fears were allayed.

Coach Yemi Daniel was pacing around when the doctor met him.

"You're Yemi Daniel right?"

"Yes, sir, please, how is he?"

The doctor smiled. "He suffered a regular knee injury".

"How long will he take to recover?"

"A month, maybe 2, depending on how resilient his body is but considering that he's just 17, I think it will be 2 months".

"I read the report, playing a 17-year-old in so many games, you really overworked his young legs".

Coach Yemi Daniel scratched his hair awkwardly. "I know doctor, and that's why I feel so guilty. I should have rested him in more games".

"It's fine," the doctor waved his hand dismissively. "He'll recover".

"He's still asleep, you can check up on him when he wakes up".

"Thank you, doctor, I appreciate it".

Coach Yemi Daniel was about to enter the hospital room when he heard a phone ring. It was not his ringing tone though. Looking at it, it was Sam's phone.

(Incoming call from Best Mom...)

Seeing the name on the screen, this middle-aged coach gulped, but then he picked the call only to be exposed to a barrage.

"Sam! Sam, is that you?"

"Where are you?"

"How are you doing?"

"Ma, it's me, your son's coach".

"You evil man!" Mrs. Moses screeched. "What did you do to my son? I said it, you never had good intentions for him from the beginning!"

"What did you do to my son?"

"Ma'am, please calm down..."

"Don't tell me to calm down, where is my son? Where is he?!"

On the phone, she was already crying. "They've done it! All these envious witches and wizards, they won! They've gotten my son!"

"Oh God, what did I do to deserve this?"

"I didn't commit a crime to let my son play football, God why?!" She wailed.

Coach Yemi Daniel forced himself to stay calm. "Ma'am, we're in the Aba General Hospital, your son is fine, he just suffered an injury..."

"Don't tell me that! Don't tell me that after..."

There was some struggling noise, then another scream. "Moses, give me back my phone! How dare you...?" Her voice was cut off.

"Coach Yemi, it's me, Sam's father".

"Oh, good evening sir, how are you doing?"

"I'm fine, please how is my son?"

"He's fine now, the doctor said he suffered a knee injury, he'll take a few months to recover".

"Oh, good, I feared for the worst". Mr. Moses chuckled. "We're on our way to Abia State now, please wait for us".

"Ok, sir".

"About my wife, sorry..."

"Don't worry, I understand, this is not my first time dealing with women". Coach Yemi Daniel chuckled.

"Thank you for understanding".

And with that, Mr. Moses finally cut the call.

Sitting alongside Sam's bed in the hospital room, Coach Yemi Daniel finally opened his phone and paid attention to his team's game.

The game already went to extra-time.

Despite playing Plateau United with a man down, with Sam gone, Enyimba FC became clueless in attack, lacking teeth. The 90 minutes of full-time ended with the game still goalless.

He watched all extra-time on his phone. Despite having the numbers advantage on the pitch, Enyimba FC failed to capitulate on their chances as the game went to penalties.

Coach Yemi Daniel watched agonizingly as his team lost on penalties to Plateau United. It was a valiant Plateau United performance in Enyimba's home.

This coach sighed. "It was not meant to be".

Just after winning the double of the CAF champions league and the NPFL title, Enyimba FC suffered a minor setback right after as they were knocked out of the 2022/2023 season iteration of the Nigerian FA cup.

Chapter 69: Incredible support

In just one evening, Enyimba FC's hopes of a historic treble were dashed in the most agonizing fashion.

Despite losing to their bitter rivals in the FA cup at home, the Enyimba FC fans were not concerned with that though, nor were they concerned about losing the treble, rather, they were more concerned about their star attacking midfielder.

The moment that Sam collapsed on the pitch, the Enyimba International Stadium as a whole seemed to come to a standstill.

The fans were petrified, horrified by thoughts of the worst-case scenario.

Fortunately, and unfortunately for them, Sam did suffer an injury but it was not as serious as they feared. It was a regular knee injury and after a month or 2 of rehabilitation, Sam would be fit again to kick a football, barring complications.

Immediately after the game, while Plateau United celebrated an historic victory in their bitter rival's home stadium, the Enyimba FC fans instead flooded social media with support for their star attacking midfielder.

Not just on social media, a troop of fans also marched to the general hospital where Sam was admitted, showing their support in their own unique ways.

They carried different banners with them.

(Sam, we love you!)

(You'll always be Zinedine Sam to us! Remember that no matter what happens, we the fans are here for you, we love you!)

(Get well soon champ! You're stronger than this!)

(Can't wait to see you on the pitch again, much love man!)

Among the group of supporters was a small girl who carried a banner that was bigger than her. Sitting on her dad's shoulders, she held the banner.

(Sam, thank you for playing for my daddy's club, you made my dad happy and I'm happy too. Please recover fast, I want my dad to be happy!)

When the Moses family finally arrived in Abia State, arriving at the Aba General Hospital, they quickly discovered that they were not the first to come.

Seeing dozens of fans gathered outside the hospital premises with support banners for her son, Mrs. Moses was flabbergasted.

Watching her son collapse on the pitch, this woman almost had a heart attack and immediately, she started blaming her village people and haters. She even broke down in tears, blaming herself for letting him play football.

She agitated for the whole family to go meet her son in the hospital. Mr. Moses had to take permission from his work place before taking his family on his car. On arriving now though, she was left speechless.

She looked at her husband. "Is... this normal?"

Mr. Moses shrugged. "It's not normal here in Nigeria but in Europe and European clubs, fans show their support to their star players when they're injured".

"Wow!" She was amazed.

In the end, they didn't know who recognized them but among the fans, but one of them recognized them. "It's Sam's family, that's her mom!"

Some of the fans approached them, spooking the middle-aged woman.

"Here," a little boy of maybe 5 or 6 years old handed a food flask to her. "I begged my mom to make my favorite food for Sam. Please give it to him, it'll help him recover faster".

Staring this boy in the eye and seeing the look on his face, Mrs. Moses was amazed, she could not bring herself to reject the boy. She took the food flask.

"Promise me you'll give the food to him".

"..."

"Please".

"Ok". She nodded, and smiled, surprisingly. "I'll give it to him".

"Tell him to get well soon!" Happier now, the boy said with a grin.

Mrs. Moses smiled, and then, surprisingly, she addressed the fans. "Don't worry, Sam is fine. The doctor said he suffered a knee injury, my husband told me that it's normal in football, I think". She shrugged.

"Don't worry," her smile widened. "His mother is here now; I'll take care of my son so he'll recover soon enough".

"Thank you, ma'am".

Being the recipient of so much attention and love, Mrs. Moses felt weird. Her son was injured but somehow, she felt on top of the world, it was a strange feeling.

Walking into the hospital alongside her family, her mood already changed, she had a cheeky grin on her face.

Mr. Moses coughed, stealing a glance at his wife. "Are you truly my wife? Are you sure you're not an impostor?"

"Who was the one screaming and wailing that her son is dead, how come you're smiling all of a sudden?"

Mrs. Moses glared at her husband.

He coughed again. "I'm just saying".

"Shut up!" She snapped.

Throughout, Sophia never said a word. She was tensed during the journey from Delta State here but after the experience outside the hospital, this girl was now giddy, she could not wait to meet her brother.

Entering the hospital, Mrs. Moses led the way and walked directly past Coach Yemi Daniel without even sparing the coach a glance.

"Hey," the coach ended up dropping his hand awkwardly.

Mr. Moses apologized. "Don't mind my wife, she gets like that sometimes".

"I understand". Coach Yemi chuckled. "It's her son we're talking about after all, women get emotional, she carried him in her womb for 9 months".

Mr. Moses grinned. "Thank you, coach". He said seriously. "You joining him personally to the hospital, it means a lot to me, I appreciate it".

Coach Yemi Daniel scratched his hair. "It's partly my fault that he got injured, so you know, my conscience could not let me leave him alone".

"I'm glad". Mr. Moses smiled, and then, he joined his family inside.

Inside, Sam was already awake, already wolfing down on the food that the little fan outside gave to him.

Mr. Moses was flabbergasted as he glared at his wife. "Sarah! Really?! You really gave him the food?"

"That was a random fan outside, what if the food was poisoned?"

Mrs. Moses waved her hand dismissively, staring at her husband with that 'are you dense' gaze. "You really think that sweet boy will poison our son?" She shook her head. "You really are a man, you think like bulls at times, leave this to the women".

"..." Mr. Moses was left speechless.

He opened and closed his mouth, in the end, he simply walked up to his son. "Hey champ, how are you feeling?"

Sam grinned. "I feel great!"

While they had family time, Coach Yemi Daniel left outside to meet the group of reporters that were waiting for him due to the fan reception outside.

He was going to give an interview.

Chapter 70: An interview

Walking outside the hospital, Coach Yemi Daniel waved to acknowledge the fans before standing with the female reporter and her crew.

"Thank you for having us coach". The reporter smiled. "I'm sorry about the horrifying incident today at your home stadium, how is Sam doing?"

Coach Yemi Daniel smiled. "The boy is fine; he already woke up and is currently spending time with his family".

"Oh, that's good to hear".

"Coach, there are rumors on the internet, do you think Sam sustained this injury because you overplayed him?"

"I didn't overplay him". Coach Yemi shook his head. "I play Sam in games because he is that good, there are older players on the bench but he starts games because he has the ability to".

"Even as he is injured, if you ask him, he'll tell you that he's glad he played all the games that he played this season".

"I do admit I should have managed his minutes better".

"Does that mean you agree that the injury is your fault?"

Now, Coach Yemi was slightly irritated. He stared at the reporter. "If that's what you want, a scapegoat, then yes, I was responsible for the injury".

"The same way I'm also responsible for Austin's injury and every other injury that hit the squad, are you satisfied now?"

The reporter coughed. "It's illuminating to hear your thoughts".

"What of today's game? People are not paying attention to it but we can't help but highlight your reaction to Sam's injury".

"With all due respect sir, you literally abandoned the game, your squad, and the fans, deciding to follow your player to the hospital instead".

"A certain section of people believe this is why Enyimba FC lost the game today. They believe that if you stayed in the stadium, supporting your team through the difficult period, Enyimba FC would have won".

Coach Yemi Daniel stared at the female reporter, then he replied. "If Austin was not injured, we would not have won the league title".

"Pardon?"

"Just stop with this your little games, it irks me".

"Enyimba FC already had a legendary season that is forever etched in our history. Last season, we went trophy less, then I didn't see you asking so many questions. But this season, we managed to win the double, winning the 2 biggest trophies that we're competing for".

"All this was because of Sam's contributions on the pitch".

"Like you said, the fans didn't complain about the loss today because unlike you, they acknowledge his help throughout the season and the role he played in Enyimba FC winning the double".

"Sam didn't suffer a normal injury, my player literally passed out on the pitch and you expect me to stay focused on the game?"

"I know I'm obligated by a contract to prioritize the club first, but I'm also human, my humanity urged me to prioritize my injured player in that moment".

"You may not know but I scouted Sam myself. I met him playing in the suburbs of Abraka, I brought him here to Enyimba FC myself!"

"I promised his father that I would take care of him".

"So yes, I owe him that much".

"If anybody is dissatisfied with my decision, they can take it up with me".

"My team losing today in his absence is another indication of the incredible role that he played throughout the season. I don't care if you see it, I see it".

"Sam had a legendary debut professional season, so yes, he deserves everything, including the fan support that's he's currently receiving. I think the fans would agree with us".

"YES!" The fans outside chorused loudly.

"See?"

"Miss reporter, if you don't have any questions for me, I think it's time I take my leave, I want to check up one last time on my player before leaving".

The female reporter nodded awkwardly. "Thank you for having us coach".

"Don't mention". Coach Yemi Daniel walked out on her.

Returning to the hospital room where his player was kept, Coach Yemi knocked before entering only to meet the family of 4 dining together.

On the bed, Sam was on a video call at this moment.

'That voice,' he recognized it. 'That is his best friend, right?'

Coach Yemi walked up to his player, being careful to avoid his mother's path. "Tough guy," he called, grinning. "For a moment there, you made me really scared you know".

Sam chuckled. "That bastard got me good, I can't believe I fainted".

Coach Yemi laughed. "So, how are you feeling?"

"I feel great, thanks to you, my family, and the fans". He grinned.

"I shouldn't be disturbing you with that right now, you need to rest but I feel as one of the important cogs making the wheel of Enyimba FC move, you deserve to know".

"We lost the game, on penalties".

"I know," Sam's shoulders dropped in dejection. "My father told me".

Coach Yemi laughed. "Don't feel down, it's not your fault".

Sam sighed. "I just really had such high hopes of winning a treble in my first professional season that to lose it at the last moment, it pricks a bit".

"It's normal, you'll get used to it, every football player gets used to the feeling of losing trophies in their career".

"Atletico Madrid of Spain have lost the UEFA Champions League final to their city neighbors; Real Madrid I think 2 or 3 times".

"Just think of that".

Sam grimaced. "That's awful".

Coach Yemi chuckled. "And at least, we're not Arsenal who bottled the league after such a huge lead on Manchester City at some point in the season".

Sam chuckled, feeling better. "You're right".

Coach Yemi looked at his wristwatch. "It's already late, I think I'll take my leave now. I still have a squad of players waiting for me in the stadium, I also need to give them first-hand information on your condition".

"Ok," Sam nodded. "Please help me thank the fans for their support as you leave, tell them that I'm fine".

"I would have gone myself but the doctor forbade me from leaving the bed".

"I understand". Coach Yemi nodded.

Just as the coach was about to leave, there was a beeping sound.

Beep!

(NEW! 1 Unread Message!)

Immediately after taking a look at his phone, without reading the full contents of the message yet, Mr. Moses raised his head and looked straight at Coach Yemi Daniel.

The coach shifted. "What?"

"It's a delegation from Lille".

"..."