

Greatest 19

Chapter 19 - Pre-match Training Sessions

The next day.

Zachary received his temporary residence permit from the police station and managed to open a bank account. Surprisingly, Mr. Stein banked the 14,000 Norwegian Kroner that was his monthly allowance soon after. He seemed not to mind the fact that Zachary had not yet signed a contract with either the Rosenborg team or the NF Academy. When Zachary queried him about the issue, he just flashed a smile before telling him to perform well during the match on Tuesday.

At noon, Zachary returned to Moholt and ate light lunch before starting his preparations for his first training session later that day.

Since the Rosenborg senior team was using the Lerkendal Stadium that afternoon, the coaches had organized for the under-19 training session to take place at the Death-Valley Fotballbanen. It was a soccer pitch owned by NTNUI—the largest sports club in Norway.

Zachary reached the pitch at around 2:30 PM. He'd no trouble locating the Death-Valley since Mr. Stein's had already brought him there earlier that day. On arrival, he noticed that more than twenty players were already dressed and going through light warm-ups on the sidelines. They were an intimidating bunch. The majority were Caucasians, standing at almost six feet tall, with physiques—seemingly more muscular or comparable to his.

There was only a single African player in their midst with a dark-brown skin tone and hair shaped into a mini-afro. Zachary supposed that he was probably not very famous in his previous life since he couldn't identify him.

Running beside him was the only player Zachary recognized among all the boys on the pitch. He was a tall fellow with neck-length black hair named Ole—something. Zachary recalled Ole playing for the French team Saint-étienne in a match against Lyon during his past life. The midfielder was hard to forget since he shared a name with one of Norway's greatest players.

Zachary didn't bother the group of players and quickly donned his new soccer attire. He'd bought several sets of jerseys and a new pair of Nike boots after receiving his allowance earlier that day.

Soon enough, Zachary, fully dressed in a light-green attire, started warming up alone on the sidelines. He started off by marching on the spot before running from one corner flag to another—along the goal line. He made sure to include some forward and backward sprints in his routine when he pumped his arms up and down in rhythm with his steps.

Salty droplets flowed down his face like soft tropical rain, dripping onto the artificial turf of the pitch. But Zachary didn't stop the routine until he felt that his muscles were active and ready for intensive soccer drills. During the short career of his previous life, he'd come to understand the importance of warming the body before any intensive exercise. It would help increase his flexibility while reducing muscle soreness and lessening the risk of injury.

Zachary concluded his warm-up with some light stretches before returning his attention to the other players. He wanted to spy on some of their talents using the system. He was a staunch believer of the 'know your competitor as you know yourself' principle.

Zachary picked up one of the stray balls from the sidelines before clicking on the snooping-tool. He had to be in contact with a ball for the tool to function.

"DING"

Zachary focused on the interface as soon as the familiar system notification sounded. Read latest chapters on [no/v/e/l\(b\)in\(.\)com](http://no/v/e/l(b)in(.)com)

Cross-hairs similar to those of a sniper android game had appeared on the screen. A few words were above and below them.

*SNOOPING TOOL ACTIVATED

->Focus the virtual scope on the subject to assess their talent.

Allowed usage for a single month: 6/6.

Zachary focused the virtual-cross-hairs on Ole—the only midfielder he recognized on the pitch.

"DING"

SUBJECT: Ole Seln?s

AGE: 16 years

TALENT ASSESSMENT: GRADE-A

*USER STATS

->Physical Fitness: A +

->Soccer Technique: A +

->Game Intelligence: B +

->Mental Ability and Mindset: A-

->X-Factors: C +

Zachary was at a loss for words after glancing at the translucent virtual screen. He wondered whether all the players on the team were A-grade talents. The boy Ole was just slightly older than him but with much better stats. The only stat Zachary bested him was the Game-Intelligence that he had luckily elevated due to his acquisition of the Zinedine-Visual-Juju.

What surprised Zachary the most was the boy possessing a C+ grade for the X-Factor stat. To this point, he didn't understand what the attribute represented. On his user-stats interface were the glittering words—No Info Available as of yet. The system had left him with no clue about how to improve his X-Factor.

Zachary was about to continue his spying but noticed that the coaches had arrived. They had just blown the whistle calling everyone to the center circle.

Zachary closed the virtual screen and dashed off towards the coaches. He was eager to begin his first training with the Rosenborg under-19s.

"Is Zachary Bemba here?" One of the two coaches hollered out after making a short address to the players seated in the center circle.

"Here." Zachary, seated at the back of the group, raised his arm as he replied. He'd noticed that the middle-aged bald coach who'd called his name was somewhat too tall for his build—as if he stopped growing only to be stretched on one of those medieval racks a half-foot more. His face was mostly obscured by a scraggly red beard that clung to his skin like ravaged ivy tendrils.

"So, you're the Zachary," the coach intoned, starting to observe him with a predator's unwavering attention. There was a hardness in his eyes, a kind of coldness married to a seriousness. It was the look of a no-nonsense coach. At that moment, Zachary knew that he was in for some tough time if he didn't manage to impress.

And the coach's ensuing few words proved his conjecture.

"Welcome to the team," he said after observing him for a few seconds. "But keep in mind that you're still in a probationary period. I hope old man Stein filled you in on this!" He looked at Zachary inquisitively.

"Yes, he did," Zachary replied, choosing to ignore the confused expressions of the rest of the players in front of him. Zachary supposed that they weren't aware of his addition to the team.

Mr. Stein had warned him not to antagonize the coach while touching upon some of the conditions he was to fulfill before sealing his move to Norway.

"If your performance is subpar during these two training sessions, I won't bother including you in the line-up for the match on Tuesday. Are we together?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, unfazed by the coach's words.

During his past life, he'd come to understand that coaches loved one thing the most—winning. This occupational hazard made coaches prone to loving players who performed well and lusted for victory. Zachary needed to show the coach that he was such a player starting from his first training with the Rosenborg under-19s.

And he did just that over the next two sessions of pre-match training.

On that Friday, the training session focused on scrutinizing the physical condition of the players that would partake in the match. All the players went through fitness drills that tested their flexibility, agility, and stamina.

Zachary vigorously completed all the required drills, as instructed by Coach Boyd Johansen.

When it was time for running the speed and agility cone exercises, he did double the required number. Zachary understood the importance of physical training and decided to outdo himself with his young body.

He'd heard that Cristiano Ronaldo managed to rise to the top by doing such inhumane fitness conditioning from a young age. Zachary had no way to verify such rumors. However, he wished to emulate such hard work to keep himself fit throughout his career—and above all, improve his agility.

He silently completed the day's training without wasting any time on needless chatter with the others. He had no luxury for such since he was yet to join the team. In the meantime, all he could think about was how to impress the coaches. Zachary would have all the time to bond with the other players after performing well during the match on Tuesday.

The Monday training session focused on drilling the match formations into the players' style of play. The coaches organized several 6-versus-4 team training drills that focused on passing and team play.

Zachary tackled like a soccer maniac, intercepted balls like the future N'Golo Kanté, and continuously performed some crazy off-ball movement when he participated. It was as if he had endless stamina with a nitro engine tied to his butt.

By the time drills were over, most of his new teammates were treating him with respect as a hardworking player who was never fatigued. The training had revealed to them that Zachary was the kind of player anyone hated having as an opponent. He was good at all the dirty jobs like the tackling needed for the team.

However, there were a couple of the under-19 players not convinced or, more likely, too inflamed with jealousy to respect a fifteen-year-old newbie fresh from Africa.

Some even insulted him, making sure that he heard their verbal abuse. They nicknamed him the Mindless-Shrek, either due to his extreme enthusiasm towards training or his outfit. In the two pre-match practice sessions, his default attire had been all green, from the shirt to the boots.

Zachary did not bother with the few simple-minded teenagers.

He'd already learned his lesson during the Lubumbashi trials and wouldn't pick a fight. He was in Europe to play soccer and make some good money. He wouldn't let his anger get in the way of that.

He turned a blind eye to the few boys and completed his cooling down routine while awaiting the line-up from the coaches.

And he didn't have to wait long.

A few minutes later, Coach Johansen blew the whistle and beckoned everyone into the center circle.

"Thank you for attending today's training," he began after all the players were seated on the smooth turf of the Death Valley.

"I have already said all that there is earlier during the training and won't waste your time with any long speeches." He grinned, letting his gaze roam all over the players that were eagerly waiting for the line-ups. He seemed to relish in the tension hanging in the evening air.

The players, including Zachary, didn't make any disgruntled noises to pressure the coach into rushing his address. They silently waited for him to advance at his own pace. Not a single player would blunder in such a way on the eve of a big game.

"Sir. It's almost seven." Coach Johansen's assistant, Bjørn Peters, reminded him.

"Oh," he said, flipping his notebook open.

"The provisional squad for tomorrow's game against the under-19s of Viking FK will be as follows..."

"Goal Keepers; Even Barli, Grant Anderson."

"Defence; Simen Wangberg, Emil Røkke, Christoffer Aasbak, Espen Schmitz, and Ulrik Balstad."

"Midfield; Markus Henriksen, Fredrik Midtsj?, Ole Selnaes, and Zachary Bemba."

"Forwards; Mushaga Bakenga, Jonas Svensson, and Gjermund Asen."

"For those selected, make sure you are at Lerkendal by 3:00 PM tomorrow. We will have a team meeting before the match."

"Those not on the line-up can try harder for the next match. Dismissed." The coach concluded.