

Greatest 21

Chapter 21 - First Match In Europe II

At 4:00 PM, the referee blew the whistle, signaling for the match to begin.

Viking Stavanger kicked off the match.

The cheering of Rosenborg fans behind Viking's goal shook the stadium right after. They chanted some of the names of the players entering the stadium, like Ole and Mushaga.

The first few minutes were an affair of a scuffle in the midfield. No team managed to hold the ball long enough to make any notable impact during the first ten minutes.

The Rosenborg boys, in white, struggled to dominate the ball possession with their five midfielders. However, they were always quickly closed down by the Viking players in their dark blue jerseys.

The Viking under-19s were proving to be a tough nut to crack.

They were playing the conventional 4-4-2 formation that afforded them a solid basic structure with defensive depth and attacking numbers. All their players had clearly marked roles.

When the Viking team lost the ball, their four defenders and four midfielders would put eight men in front of the Rosenborg boys, covering the entire width of the field. One of their strikers often returned to help in the midfield.

Their game-play was the typical Mourinho style when he faced the Barcelona of Ronaldinho.

But during the 16th minute, the boy Ole Seln?s started performing like a superstar. He attracted a lot of cheers from the crowd of supporters. His plays were phenomenal, enabling the Rosenborg under-19s to come alive when he touched the ball. The other midfielders would try opening up spaces or making runs aimed at penetrating the opponent's half—awaiting his passes.

His long passes were like sniper shots, always managing to find Mushaga—the center forward of the Rosenborg under-19s. The two created the first good chance of the game in the 20th minute in such a fashion.

After receiving a quick ball from the keeper, Ole unleashed a long ball on an arching path towards Mushaga. The afro-boy had the time and space inside the box after picking up the neat pass and pulled the trigger. But his shot towards the far corner was pushed away by the outstretched fingertips of the Viking goalkeeper.

The Rosenborg Troll Kids won the first corner of the game.

Jonas Svensson, the right-winger, stepped up to take the corner. He whipped a teasing ball into the box, but one of the Viking defenders was alert and averted the threat.

However, it was clear to all the spectators that the Troll Kids of Lerkendal had begun establishing their dominance in the game.

Zachary watched the game on the sidelines from the dugout. He was seated at the furthest end from the team officials with his focus scattered, his mind brimming with nervous anticipation. His toes were itchy to kick the ball after watching the opening minutes of the match.

"Damn it." He heard Coach Johansen curse for the umpteenth time during the first half.

Zachary cast a glance towards him and noticed he was rubbing his bald head in frustration.

He empathized with him.

Jonas Svensson, the short right-winger, had just attempted to find the head of Mushaga with a promising cross into the box. However, one of the defenders of the Viking under-19s outjumped the forward and averted the threat.

Stalemates were the worst nightmare for a coach. Although Rosenborg seemed to be in control—with higher ball possession, the match situation could change at any moment. It would take only one goal for

Viking to flip the tables upon the Troll Kids. Zachary had watched Greece win the Euro of 2004 in such a fashion.

And his predictions came true when the Viking Stavanger coach made two substitutions at the start of the second half. He brought in two players.

One was a right-winger—named Yann-Erik, with quick feet and an uncanny ability to leave his opponents in the dust. The other was a black muscular player who came on for one of the central midfielders. He was called Landu-Landu by his teammates. Zachary noticed that the man's chest muscles were bulging through the blue jersey and his exposed biceps balls of strength. He was a strong man.

When the two entered the game during the 47th minute, they immediately made an impact.

Landu-Landu marked Ole tightly and put a stop to his control of the game. He stuck to him and shadowed his every move, leaving him with no opportunity to receive and pass the ball.

With the control tower of Rosenborg frozen, the Viking under-19s came alive.

Teasing balls started flying in from the wings towards their two strikers. In the right-wing, Yann-Erik—the substitute could cross with either foot or cut in and threaten the goal. It seemed like he'd complete freedom to switch wings as he wished. He played as a winger on both sides of the pitch and a third striker at the same time.

He tortured the Rosenborg right and left-backs immediately after coming on to the pitch.

On the sidelines, Zachary wondered why such a player had remained obscure in his previous life. Yann-Erik had the flair, speed, and vision of a top number-7.

Yann-Erik cemented his influence on the game in the 54th minute. The Rosenborg midfielders were exchanging neat passes and waiting for an opportunity to start an attack but made a mistake and lost possession. Landu-Landu picked up the ensuing misplaced pass in the center circle and sent forth a lofted long pass towards the right-wing.

Like the wind, Yann-Erik ran onto the pass and dribbled past Christoffer Aasbak—the left-back of Rosenborg. His agile footwork was splendid as he accelerated towards the box. A few seconds later, he was bearing down on goal—and rifled a right-footed shot into the corner of the net.

0:1. Viking FK was in the lead.

"Damn! Damn!" Zachary heard Coach Johansen cursing while the Viking under-19s celebrated. Rosenborg had dominated the game but was a goal down with thirty-two minutes to go.

Coach Johansen seemed frustrated. He looked towards the bench at Emil R?kke first and then Zachary Bemba, his eyes portraying his indecisiveness. He seemed to be considering which of the two midfielders he should bring on.

Zachary waited anxiously for the coach's decision. He understood that he would have more chances to perform, only when he entered the game early.

Coach Johansen sighed and said: "Zachary. Go, warm up first. You have only five minutes. Come here for instructions once you finish."

[Finally.] Zachary jubilated inwardly. He released a breath of pent up air before saying: "Yes, coach."

Call him sadistic, but he was even a little bit glad that his team was losing. Otherwise, he might have gotten less than ten minutes of play. He needed a game where he could make an impact. And the one where his team was losing was his best stage to impress the coaches.