

Greatest 22

Chapter 22 - First Match In Europe III

"Your job in this match is simple. I need you to shut down that winger." He said, pointing towards Yann-Erik.

The winger had just picked up another pass and begun dribbling into Rosenborg's half. He crossed the ball into the box from the side of the pitch, close to the touchline.

Luckily, Fredrik Midtsj?, one of the midfielders of Rosenborg, jumped high and blocked his cross. The referee blew his whistle and pointed to the corner flag.

"Tell Ole to adapt to the 4:3:3 formation..." the coach continued after seeing that the corner had been defended." As we did in training, Ole will remain the defensive midfielder, while Gjermund will move a little bit forward and serve the strikers. You'll have free rein along the entire center-line to get a better handle on Yann-Erik."

He gazed at Zachary for a moment with eyes full of skepticism.

"Is that clear to you, or do you need me to get the board?" He asked. The coach seemed to doubt Zachary's abilities to understand his instructions.

Zachary locked eyes with the coach and replied emphatically: "Yes, coach. I understand."

"Hope so," the coach muttered under his breath.

"You were tackling and intercepting passes during our training sessions. Just do the same on the pitch and shut down the damn kid." He slapped Zachary on the back, adding: "Go."

"DING"

No sooner had the coach slapped his back than the system interface popped up before him.

Zachary was a bit surprised and slowed down his pace as he matched towards the fourth official. He cast a glance at the translucent screen and noticed that there was a new mission from the system.

G.O.A.T MISSIONS

#NEW MISSION: Your Coach has given you an important task(s).

*Task 1: Shut down a stubborn player in the game.

*Task 2: Impress and gain your first fans.

'Accept' 'Reject'

*Rewards:

-> 30 juju-points

*Punishment in case the mission is still incomplete at the end of the game. (None if you reject the mission now)

->Minus 40 Juju-Points.

*Remarks: Opportunities don't happen. You create them.

Zachary didn't hesitate to click on the accept button once he had finished perusing through the contents of the mission. It was the first mission with a hefty reward in juju-points. He had a feeling he would need them very soon.

Zachary had resolved to accumulate more points to upgrade the system. From his experience reading web-novels, he knew the system would become more helpful to the host after an upgrade.

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Kristin was watching the game in the emptier section of the Stadium. The match had begun boring her after the Rosenborg under-19s got into a tricky situation.

She hated losses and always felt the compulsion to leave the venue of the game whenever her team was trailing. But then, she noticed that Zachary had started warming up on the sidelines.

A Cheshire cat's grin lit up her face like a tallow candle in a paper lamp. She considered him her first project, the first player she'd discovered at the genesis of her career as a scout. Kristin was looking forward to seeing how he would perform pitted against the Norwegian under-19s. Only then would she cast away all doubts about his talent.

"Is that your boy?" She heard Coach Nils Eggen asking her grandpa.

He was Rosenborg's longest-serving manager, having led the team for 22 seasons in five spurts between 1971 and 2010. He'd won the Tippeligaen in his inaugural season, leading the team for 13 of the club's 23 league-winning seasons. He had just won another league championship the previous year.

Although he was about to retire, Nils Eggen still had a lot of influence on Rosenborg's management. Kristin had once heard some rumors that his standing was comparable to that of the club chairman.

"Yes, that's him," Mr. Stein answered Coach Eggen's question.

"Oh, okay," Mr. Eggen replied before returning his attention to the match.

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Zachary entered the pitch after the ball went out for a throw-in.

He'd come into the pitch as a substitute for another midfielder named Fredrik Midtsj?.

He jogged, resisting the pressure mounting on his chest. His legs felt heavy like he was wading through water. He felt very anxious since it was his first time playing on the European soccer stage.

He immediately ran to Ole and passed him the coach's instructions before moving to the left-midfield closer to the position of Yann-Erik—the winger of the Viking team.

He had resolved to complete the coach's assignment with all his effort. That was the only thought running through his mind at that moment.

In his previous life, he'd blundered when he came on as a substitute during his first professional match at TP Mazembe. He hadn't followed the coach's instructions and was substituted quickly after. He'd made a record of being the first substitute in the Linafoot league to be replaced without an injury.

But with a second chance presented to him, he would follow the coach's instructions to the letter. He wanted to enter the team first and establish his status. That was his target for that match. He would think about the issues concerning his style of play and career only when he successfully signed the contract with Rosenborg.

Gameplay resumed with Viking's throw to the right-wing.

Yann-Erik received the ball and played a one-two with Landu-Landu. They advanced towards the Rosenborg goal, weaving their way past Markus Henriksen, the left-winger, and were soon inside Rosenborg's half. Their short passes were neat and accurate, allowing them to advance towards the Rosenborg goal, unhampered. If the status-quo didn't change, Rosenborg would be in trouble.

However, Zachary had no intention of allowing them to do as they pleased. He'd noticed some shadows of both balls and human silhouettes flashing out of their bodies into different directions. The Zinedine-Visual-Juju was in action once more.

Zachary ran towards the wing while concentrating on Yann-Erik's sprinting figure. The winger had just received the ball and was dashing past Christoffer Aasbak, Rosenborg's left-back, with a flair of sidesteps.

Zachary then saw two human-shaped shadows flash out of the agile winger's form. One headed towards the corner flag after beating Christopher. The other cut the pitch diagonally—dashing towards the Rosenborg goal.

Zachary didn't need to deliberate for long about which route to defend. He had watched Yann-Erik's plays while he was on the bench and was sure that he would decide to cut inside. Moreover, if he got it wrong, he could still push the winger on a path away from the goal.

However, even the one second of deliberation on his part had allowed the agile winger to move past him. Zachary resolved to take the defender out without any delay.

Tunnel vision set in as he gauged the distance between the ball and his feet. Zachary's soccer brain, enhanced by his high A+ spatial awareness, was filled with deductions of the speed at which Yann-Erik was traveling. He was gauging the timing of his tackle.

Zachary increased his pace and caught up to the right-winger before sliding in and thrusting his right leg to meet the ball at the winger's feet.

He used his tackling leg to hook around the front, dispossess the ball, and shove it away from the attacker. The very smooth grass of the pitch made his tackling easier as he sent Yann-Erik tumbling to the ground.

Zachary felt all his anxiety fade as the ball broke away into open space before being collected by Christopher, the left-back. He'd come out as the winner in his first face off against an opponent in Europe.

"Ref... Ref..." Zachary heard Yann-Erik yelling as he rolled around in the grass, seemingly injured. However, the referee ignored him and waved for the game to continue. The tackle wasn't a foul since Zachary had won the ball fair and square before sweeping the winger. Otherwise, the nearby linesman would have waved his flag already.

Zachary grinned at the young winger before moving back into the left midfield. He intended to use all means possible to keep the prolific winger out of the game. Smiling at his defeated opponent after their brief battle was the best way of gloating he could think of that wouldn't attract the wrath of the referee.