

## **Greatest 24**

### Chapter 24 - First Match In Europe V

The cheers erupted like an auditory volcano in Lerkendal Stadium.

It was all quiet one second and then deafening after Mushaga scored the goal.

Mushaga didn't celebrate alone but ran up to Zachary, pulled him in a bear hug, and said: "That was a hell of a sprint. Thank you."

Before Zachary could reply, the other Rosenborg players came jumping on them and embracing them to celebrate the goal.

Zachary's lips curled into a smile as he tried to suppress his still bubbly emotions. It was all coming back to him at that moment. His crazy run through the midfield had led to an equalizer. He wasn't even sure how he managed to dribble past the four Viking players.

"Zachary, Ole. Come here." Zachary heard Coach Johansen yelling from the sidelines.

Zachary wasn't worried that the coach would query him for previously leaving his position. Scoring and winning games mattered the most to coaches. They would support players who could spot the gaps in between the opponent's formation and exploit them. Zachary had done just that.

And indeed, the coach had called them to receive more instructions on how to win the game. He didn't even reflect on the goal but started giving them new instructions.

"You two will form a triangle with Asen in the midfield. In the remaining seven minutes, I want you to press them hard and get another goal. Understood?"

"Yes, coach," the two boys replied.

"And Zachary. Do not try to dribble through the midfield once again. The Viking players will mark you tightly for the rest of the game. Use short passes instead."

Zachary nodded to indicate his assent. He chugged down some water before returning back to the pitch.

The Rosenborg under-19s were on fire after the game restarted.

Zachary followed Coach Johansen's instructions and used only short passes instead of dribbling.

Together with Ole and Asen, they formed a triangular midfield that dominated the ball possession. Zachary was much more involved in the passing and attacking than in the first half.

His only task was to receive passes from Ole, the defensive midfielder, and supply them to the one striker and the two wingers. The Viking midfielders couldn't keep him in check.

Zachary had managed to deliver several good through passes to the three forwards, but they still failed to score.

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"As you said, the boy has a good game reading," Coach Eggen observed.

"Yes, he does," Mr. Stein replied, smiling. "Do you think we can fix him into the current under-19 squad?" He asked.

"How old is he?"

"His 16th birthday is on the 3rd of December."

"Martin." Mr. Eggen frowned. "He is still too young. We can't bring him into the club yet."

"But..."

"Martin, no buts." Coach Eggen interrupted the scout.

"While you were missing in action, FIFA introduced a new regulation. It prohibits international transfers involving underage players starting this year."

"Do those FIFA rules really matter? Clubs like Barcelona and Atletico Madrid in Spain have already signed young talents from all over the world this year."

"This time, they're serious about enforcing the regulations. If we don't comply and sign a minor, who's a foreigner, we'll be risking a transfer ban that could last a couple of seasons."

"That serious?"

"Yes." Coach Eggen nodded. "We received the first notice about the regulation last year. You were still in the hospital then."

"Then, how do we handle the boy? As you can see, he is very talented. We can't lose him."

"We'll send him to an affiliated academy until he turns eighteen. NF Academy is a good choice. FIFA will have no grounds to question us, as long as he is exclusively an amateur player. He will be on a scholarship, studying in one of the upper secondary schools here in Trondheim."

Coach Eggen smiled and added: "We basically won't have any association with him until he is an adult. We can include him in our roster when he turns 18. That's just a season away."

Mr. Stein sighed. "This regulation will mess up the opportunities of many talents from the developing nations. They will most likely waste away without proper training."

"You should already know about the previous cases of unscrupulous agents and organizations that were exploiting young talents from the developing nations. FIFA intends to reduce the number of children sent away by their families at the risk of being abandoned in Europe by such idiots."

"I already promised him that he would get to join the under-19s if he performed well in the match."

"Don't worry," Coach Eggen said, smiling. "The boy will be in good hands. The period until he turns 18 will allow him to refine his techniques further. This will be good for his development."

"I hope so." Mr. Stein sighed before focusing back on the match.

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The game was still at a stalemate, with two minutes, minus additional time, remaining.

Rosenborg was always on the attack, pressing the Viking under-19s in their half.

Jonas Svensson had just delivered a tricky cross into the box. However, it had been cleared out of play by one of Viking's center-backs.

It was another goal-scoring opportunity from a corner for the Rosenborg under-19s.

Most of Zachary's teammates headed into Viking's box to attack the ball from the corner. Soon, more than 16 players were tangling within the box as they waited anxiously for the corner to be taken. Most were pushing and pulling at the shirts of their opponents.

The referee only managed to keep them in check by giving out yellow cards to two of the Viking players.

Zachary remained back—just a few yards out of the box. He didn't join the fray. He wanted to try out his arrow shot from the edge of the box.

But then he heard Coach Johansen yelling from the sidelines: "Zachary, head into the box and attack the corner. Why are you sleeping outside the box?"

Zachary hesitated, wanting to remain in his position. He could easily take a shot at the goal from there.

"Are your ears filled with lint? Head over into the box right now," Coach Johansen hollered at him, seeming angry.

Zachary sighed and headed into the box after a few seconds of deliberation. He would rather lose the game than antagonize a coach at the start of his career in Europe.

Zachary would have stayed in his position if he was sure that he would score from the edge of the box.

However, the Zinedine-Visual-Juju wasn't 100% perfect. It involved some guessing and deducing the path of the ball based on the observation of the juju-shadows and his game intelligence. If Zachary disobeyed the coach and missed out on scoring, he would be in deep trouble.

When he entered the box, a tall Viking player was instantly on him, shadowing his every step. Zachary ignored him and concentrated on Jonas, the winger, taking the corner at that moment.

Since he was already in the opponent's box, he wanted to try his best to score.

However, the cross from Jonas Svensson was nothing special. The ball came in high and was directly heading into the outstretched arms of the leaping goalkeeper.

The opportunity seemed lost—and players of both sides started relaxing.

But Zachary wasn't among them.

He'd just noticed that the hands of the Viking goalkeeper were in a peculiar position. The keeper was aiming for the contour catch, whereby his hands could cradle the ball, with the thumbs and index fingers forming a "W" behind it. However, the gap between his wrists was slightly wider than the diameter of the ball.

Any other player would have missed the small detail, but not Zachary. Using his Zinedine-Visual-Juju, he'd already deduced that the keeper would drop the ball.

So he moved in for the kill.

He ran away from his marker—towards the Viking goalkeeper.

And his vision didn't disappoint him.

The keeper ended up mishandling the ball, allowing Zachary to pick up the round gift before slotting it into the back of the net to make it 2:1. GOAL!

A terrible mistake by the keeper had led to the goal.

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Kasongo watched his friend score his first goal in Europe.

He was cheering along with the rest of the enthusiastic fans in the stands behind Rosenborg's goal. They pumped their fists into the air as they soared to new heights of emotion.

Zachary's goal had shocked him since it came out of the blue, from a seemingly lost chance.

His achievement made Kasongo want to get on the pitch, to train. If Zachary could do it, so could he. Maybe not at first. But with relentless training and determination, he would succeed.

Kasongo wished to go back and train right away. However, he wanted to see whether his friend could do any more wonders in the game.

He continued watching the game until it ended with the score of 2:1 in favor of Rosenborg.