

Greatest 241

Chapter 241 - A Comeback

"Zachary," Coach Johansen began as soon as he stepped before him. "We need to change our entire approach to this game. Otherwise, we'll lose to Str?msgodset today. To prevent that from happening, we have to switch to a 4-4-2 formation and adjust our tactics to the long ball strategy for the final twenty minutes of the game. That will enable us to put more pressure on the Str?msgodset backline with two forwards."

"I want you to partner up with Nicki upfront as a second forward in the new formation. We'll be able to create more chances to score with you working together with Nicki on striking."

"Moreover," the coach continued uttering instructions at the pace of a world-famous rapper. "We'll destabilize the Str?msgodset formation if those two clowns that have been shadowing you decide to follow you to your new position. Are we together, Zachary?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, chugging down some water. "I understand."

That time around, he wasn't the least bit dissatisfied with the coach's decision to switch him to the striking position. He could tell that Coach Johansen's strategy was the quickest way to get Rosenborg out of its predicament.

If they played their cards right in a 4-4-2 formation and played the long-ball strategy, they would be able to apply tremendous pressure on the Str?msgodset backline. The ensuing lofted passes over the midfield towards the back of the defense would render Str?msgodset's 'park-the-bus' tactic ineffective.

As a plus, Zachary would get rid of his two bodyguards after the switch. That was because they were playing as midfielders in the Str?msgodset squad. They would presumably not want to leave gaps in the midfield by following him upfront.

If the two midfielders stubbornly insisted on escorting him to the new position, Rosenborg would still gain an edge by exploiting the holes they would be leaving in the midfield.

Zachary was determined to do anything necessary to get his team out of its predicament by following the game plan to the letter. It seemed to be the perfect way for Rosenborg to score against their defensive-minded opponents at that juncture.

Of course, he preferred playing in midfield to being a forward. But he understood that if he didn't play up front, his team would lose a vital game against the second-placed on the table.

"That's good," Coach Johansen said, nodding after hearing Zachary's response. "Tell the others our defense will remain the same. Mike Jensen and Jonas Svensson will be the midfielders in the new formation. John Chibuike and Tobias Mikkelsen will continue playing on the flanks. You and Nicki will be our two spearheads on striking to complete the formation. If you understand the whole strategy, go back and relay my instructions to the rest."

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, nodding. He quickly threw the water bottle aside and ran back to his position on the field.

The gameplay had already recommenced since he'd spent more than a minute on the sidelines receiving the coach's instructions. He had to wait for the ball to go out of play before relaying the coach's orders to the rest of the squad.

After receiving the coach's new instructions, the Rosenborg players immediately shaped up into a 4-4-2 attacking shape. Mike Jensen and Jonas Svensson, the two central midfielders in the new formation, began unleashing defense-splitting long-range passes deep into Strømsgodset's half from the get-go.

John Chibuike and Tobias Mikkelsen, the two wingers, also began crossing the ball into the box whenever they got the chance. In a matter of minutes, the Rosenborg squad transitioned seamlessly to the new formation, catching Strømsgodset off-guard. With the sudden change, they managed to send the boys from Drammen into momentary disarray.

The two players that had been marking Zachary's and shadowing his every move were even more confused. To begin with, they weren't defenders. So they proved ineffective in stopping Zachary from penetrating through the Strømsgodset backline. As a result, they only followed him to his new position in Rosenborg's striking line for a few more minutes before giving up and returning to their rightful spots in midfield.

Zachary's hopes soared when his two bodyguards stopped shadowing him. He immediately gained a lot of space to receive and maneuver with the ball. He started connecting with more and more passes and crosses from his teammates as the game progressed into the final eight minutes.

He was like a tireless maniac on the striking line, his feet never coming to a halt as he chased after every long ball released into the Strømsgodset defensive third. His relentless efforts put the Strømsgodset defenders under immense pressure, creating several half-chances for Rosenborg.

The defining moment of his brilliance on the pitch came in the 85th minute.

He reacted almost instantaneously on seeing Mike Jensen, one of the Rosenborg midfielders, unleash another long-range defensive-splitting through-pass towards the Strømsgodset box. He shrugged off Jarl André Størbaek, Strømsgodset's center-back, and then chased after the ball like a whirlwind. Thanks to his long strides, he managed to get to it first, right on the edge of the box.

He immediately turned around and leaped high, bringing the ball under control with his chest. However, he felt a Strømsgodset player colliding into his back just as his feet were touching back onto the ground. He could tell that the player marking him was aggressive and seemed to have no intention of leaving him any time or space to turn and face the Strømsgodset goal.

In an instant, Zachary took in the scene around him, searching for a teammate while holding off his opponent with his physique. However, Nicki Nielsen, the only player in his proximity, was closely guarded by two defenders as well at that moment. On the other hand, the rest of the Rosenborg players were still far from the box. So, he decided to flick the ball from his left foot, back to his right, repeatedly — to draw in the defender. He also began twisting his body from side to side, executing full-body feints to elicit a reaction from the defender.

As expected, the defender couldn't sit still since he thought Zachary was about to break into a full sprint and rush towards the goal. So, he spread out his arms before stretching out a boot to tackle the ball off Zachary's feet.

Zachary smiled, feeling his hopes soar when he noticed that the defender had fallen for his gambit. Without wasting even a moment, he brought the ball to a halt between his legs while still holding off the defender with his physique. The next instant, he lifted his foot and smashed the ball with the back of his heel, unleashing an unexpected shot at goal through the defender's legs. The stadium descended into a momentary silence immediately.

Coach Johansen could feel his heart pounding like a jackhammer within his chest as he followed the proceedings in Strømsgodset's box. He fought down a pang of rising anxiety, half-raising his arms like a crab-man dancing, as he watched the ball burst through the defender's legs, heading towards the goal. "Please go in, please go in," he mumbled, clenching his fists.

"GOAAALLLLL...."

The next moment, he jumped up as he watched the ball streak past the goalkeeper's outstretched arm and nestle itself into the back of the net.

1:1.

Rosenborg had managed to equalize in the 85th minute through Zachary's brilliant efforts. With a glorious back-heel, he'd caught the keeper sleeping, bringing matters back to level in the Marienlyst Stadion.

"Keep on attacking," Coach Johansen yelled from the touchline, right after the Rosenborg players finished celebrating. "Don't let up the pressure. Continue using long balls to Zachary and Nicki. Zachary and Nicki: try to test their keeper more often with long shots..." He wanted his players to push for a second goal before the final whistle.

The Rosenborg players didn't disappoint when the game restarted. They continued attacking with renewed intensity in the closing minutes of the game. By relying on long balls and crosses from the wing, they managed to push almost all the opposing players into the final third.

However, the Strømsgodset players remained steadfast in their defense, dealing with every Rosenborg attack like the professionals they were. They even started double-teaming Zachary again — to prevent him from connecting with the passes and crosses from his teammates in the final third.

However, Zachary showed great determination and created another goal-scoring chance for Rosenborg. He didn't relax in the slightest in the final few minutes of the game. He continued running into spaces

and receiving long-range passes from his teammates to apply tremendous pressure on the Strømsgodset defensive line.

The majority of the Strømsgodset defenders started focusing on him since he was the most active in their box. They seemed to have forgotten about Nicki Nielsen, the other forward in Rosenborg's new 4-4-2 formation.

Nicki, of course, came close to punishing them for their error. In the 89th minute, he got to the end of a teasing cross from Tobias Mikkelsen, the Rosenborg winger. Uncontested, he jumped high to plant a header towards the goal from around the edge of the box.

However, Adam Kwarasey, the Strømsgodset keeper, was alert. He committed himself to a full acrobatic dive, punching the ball away from the goal with an outstretched fist. Coach Johansen felt his mood sink as he watched Rosenborg miss their chance to take the lead. He was on a razor's edge of panic since he understood Rosenborg would find it harder to score as the game progressed into additional time.

But the next moment, his eyes widened in wonderment. He felt his heart start to race again as he watched Zachary rush to meet the rebound from the keeper. Without even trying to control the ball, the boy prodigy met it on the volley with his left boot, unleashing a missile towards goal from twenty yards away.

The keeper couldn't even react as he watched the ball curl around a few defenders with an incredible spin before homing into the back of the net.

1:2.

The cheers of the Rosenborg fans in the Marienlyst Stadion rose to thunderous heights, drowning out every other sound in the stadium right after. Rosenborg had managed to score and take the lead in the 90th minute through Zachary once more.

Coach Johansen was all smiles as he watched his players celebrate in the middle of the field. At long last, he could relax. His team was close to obtaining the vital three points that would extend their lead at the top of the table.

Chapter 242 - Another Hat-Trick

"Okay, he's good," Erik Bailly said to his agent as he watched Zachary celebrate with the rest of the Rosenborg players close to the corner flag. "The first goal with a backheel was incredible, yes. But I like his second better since I know how difficult it is to execute such a curling shot on a first-time volley. His timing and vision to meet that rebound ball were out of this world. What an incredible technique!"

"He must have used the outside of his boot to apply the spin and curve the ball beyond the goalkeeper's reach," Thomas Partey, the newly-signed Rosenborg defensive midfielder, remarked. "But what I'm not sure about is whether that was intentional or simply a rare stroke of luck."

"He must have intended it," Graziano Battistini, Erik Bailly's agent, chipped in, smiling. "For your information, that wasn't his first time scoring a goal like that on a volley. So, he must be very skilled in timing and meeting such rebound balls on a volley."

"Then he's something else," Thomas Partey, the Ghanaian defensive midfielder, commented. "I can't wait to play on the same team as him."

"Me too," Erik Bailly chipped in. "With him on the squad, Rosenborg might be able to surprise many in the Europa League. I'll also be signing the contract as soon as possible."

"Have you finally decided?" His agent asked, giving him a sideways glance.

"Yes," Erik Bailly replied, smiling. "I won't change my mind this time around. You can go ahead and finalize my contract details with Rosenborg as quickly as possible." He was eager to complete his transfer after witnessing Zachary's prowess with his own eyes.

"That's good," Graziano Battistini, his agent, replied, grinning. "I'll finalize everything with Rosenborg tomorrow morning. You should be able to take the medical immediately after."

The Strømsgodset players seemed to have lost all their motivation after conceding the second goal in the 90th minute. They started making amateur mistakes in their defensive third as the game progressed into the additional four minutes of extra time.

Zachary didn't fail to capitalize on the sloppiness of his opponents. He became bolder and started making more runs through the defense with the ball whenever he got the chance. He'd turned into a beast on the striking line, relentlessly keeping the Strømsgodset defense on tenterhooks.

Rosenborg got another chance to score during the 93rd minute. After getting to the end of a low cross from John Chibuike, the Rosenborg left-winger, Zachary slalomed his way into the box, skipping past two sliding tackles in the process. Without wasting a second, he unleashed a carpet-shot towards the inside of the right post.

The ball skimmed over the green like a serpent, flashing past an outstretched boot and then the keeper's despairing dive – before smashing off the right post and homing into the back of the net.

Zachary immediately rushed off to the corner flag to celebrate as the cheers of the Rosenborg fans in the stands of the Marienlyst Stadion rose to a booming crescendo for the third time that Sunday evening.

STRØMSGODSET IF 1 : ROSENBORG BK 3

Kristin felt a momentary surge of delight streaking through her like a comet after taking a glance at the stadium's jumbotron. Her team had finally made a perfect comeback to beat the second on the table in the closing minutes of the game. In only a few seconds, the referee would be blowing the final whistle, and her team would head back to Trondheim with the vital three points in the bag. She could hardly contain her excitement at that moment.

"The Troll Kids have done it again," she heard Kjell Roar, the commentator, yell as soon as the cheering started dying down. "They've managed to come from behind and win the game by a score of three goals

to one through their star player Zachary Bemba. It's yet another incredible night for the young Rosenborg number-33. Even after switching to an unfamiliar striking position, he still managed to score yet another hat-trick, taking his Tippeligaen tally for this season to eighteen goals. He will surely emerge as the top scorer this season at the rate he's going."

"I feel that that's a given," Ragnar Dokken, the pundit for the day, chipped in. "Zachary is ahead of Nicki Nielsen, the second on the list by six goals. He's definitely the favorite to take the golden boot if he manages to maintain his form."

"I also believe he will win the best player of the Tippeligaen accolade at the end of this season," the pundit continued without a pause. "He has more than ten assists and twenty-three goals in all competitions. I don't see any possibility of another player beating him to the award if he can maintain his form."

"You're absolutely right," Kjell Roar, the commentator, said. "With this win, Rosenborg has taken its tally to 47 points. That means the Troll Kids are nine points ahead of Strømsgodset, the second-placed team on the table. They are on track to emerge as champions considering the form they're on and the versatility of their squad. That will only increase Zachary's chances of winning the best player of the season award. If he can put up some good performances in the Europa League, he'll be uncontested for the accolade..."

Kristin smiled as she followed the commentary while also keeping an eye on the proceedings on the playing field. Even though it was the final minute of the game, Rosenborg was still putting the team from Drammen under pressure.

The game eventually ended with a score of 1:3 in favor of Rosenborg.

Zachary was all smiles as he headed back to the dressing room after the post-match interview with Olav Brusveen, the TV2 reporter. The fact that he'd managed to score yet another hat-trick elevated his mood.

"Here comes the man of the match," Mikael Dorsin yelled, opening a champagne bottle and spraying it on him as soon as he stepped into the dressing room.

Since Zachary was unprepared, he could only watch helplessly as the drink splattered down onto his face and drenched the rest of his attire. But since he was in a good mood, he swallowed down his discomfort and then soaked in the victorious atmosphere in the dressing room. He joined his teammates in their celebrations for the next few minutes before heading to the bathroom to take a shower.

"Can I have your attention guys," Coach Johansen said as soon as Zachary had stepped out of the bathroom. All the players, including Zachary, reacted immediately by taking their seats around the visiting team's dressing room. In a matter of seconds, the chatter in the room died down.

"That was an incredible performance you guys put up in the second half," the coach began, smiling and looking around. "We managed to win, and we're now nine points ahead of the second-placed Strømsgodset on the Tippeligaen table. I have to emphasize that you guys were absolutely incredible, especially in the final ten minutes of the game. I dare say that if you could play like that in every game, we might win a treble this season." He added with a bit of humor.

The players laughed at that.

"But," the coach continued, sweeping his gaze across most of the players in the dressing room. "We still have a lot of work to do before we can end our season successfully. On Wednesday, we've got a tough fixture at Lerkendal against St. Johnstone Football Club in the second round of the Europa League qualifying round. If we don't win, our hopes of competing in the Europa League tournament will end this coming week."

"We can't have that," the coach continued, stroking his red beard. "Our main priority this month is to qualify for the Europa League group stage. So, I expect you all to remain focused and ensure that we win both the home and away games against St. Johnstone. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied, more or less in unison.

"That's good," Coach Johansen said, nodding. "We must also keep our domestic priorities in mind. We've got to remain in tip-top shape to maintain our position at the top of the table. We only have eleven games left before we complete the Tippeligaen match schedule. So, I expect you all to put out two hundred percent effort so that we can emerge as champions at the end of the season. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

"You guys have to believe in yourselves," Coach Johansen said with a smile after a short while. "You're a strong team that can go places if you remain focused throughout the entire season. So, continue working hard, play every game like it's a final, and we'll be able to create history at Rosenborg this season. Are you with me, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

"Good," Coach Johansen said, nodding. "For now, let's prepare and head back to Trondheim first. I expect to see you at Lerkendal for training tomorrow afternoon since we need to prepare for the mid-week Europa League game."

Chapter 243 - A Good Run Of Four Games

The following Wednesday, Zachary and co faced off with a tricky St. Johnstone side at Lerkendal Stadium in the second round of the Europa League qualifiers.

The Troll Kids were in high gear since they'd just defeated Strømsgodset with a score of 3:1 over the weekend. They were at the top of their game from the very first minute. However, they couldn't make their dominance count and missed a hatful of chances during the first half. The score remained 0:0 as the players headed into the dressing room for halftime.

The game was more open after the break, with Zachary first testing St. Johnstone Football Club's keeper with a low drive in the 49th minute. However, the number-1 was alert and managed to make a fingertip save to push the ball away from its intended course.

The St. Johnstone players gradually started growing into the game. They began mounting a series of attacks on Rosenborg's goal — with ever-increasing intensity by relying on their phenomenal wing play. They came close to scoring in the 60th and 65th minutes of gameplay. But, on both occasions, Daniel Rønd, the Rosenborg keeper, was alert and managed to save the day and keep matters level at Lerkendal Stadion.

Rosenborg then took the lead abruptly in the 70th minute through a sensational counterattack. It was all started by Daniel ?rlund, the keeper, quickly bowling the ball out to John Chibuike, the left-winger, after claiming a St. Johnstone cross. The Troll Kids flew forward like a pack of wolves on the hunt, leaving the opponents in the dust. Possession soon fell to Zachary, who curled home a superb effort from the edge of the box to score Rosenborg's opening goal with only twenty minutes to the ninety-minute mark.

Steven MacLean, the St. Johnstone center-forward, got a golden opportunity and came close to scoring an equalizer five minutes later. But he somehow failed to seal the deal and instead kicked the ball over the crossbar when he was one-on-one with the keeper.

Despite that, the St. Johnstone players didn't let up the pressure. They continued launching attack after attack on the Rosenborg backline for the next ten minutes. They seemed pretty intent on equalizing and getting the vital away goal in the first leg of the Europa League qualifiers. However, by committing more men forward, they left themselves open at the back. As a result, they gifted Nicki Nielsen a chance to score Rosenborg's second goal in the 86th minute of the game.

After that, the Rosenborg players continued playing defensively and managed to thwart all St. Johnstone's efforts to score. They practically resorted to the park-the-bus tactic and kept the score 2:0 until the final whistle. They were halfway to qualifying for the third round of the Europa League qualifiers.

The Troll Kids rested for two days before welcoming V?lerenga Fotball at Lerkendal on a rainy Saturday evening. For that game, Coach Johansen decided to bench some of his star players since they had to play the return leg against St. Johnstone Football Club the following Wednesday. Zachary, Nicki Nielsen, Mikael Dorsin, and Tore Reginiussen were all on the bench for that fixture. However, Rosenborg still managed to beat V?lerenga Fotball club 1:0. Alexander S?derlund, the substitute center-forward, scored the sole goal, ensuring Rosenborg maintained its 9-point lead at the top of the table.

After resting for three days, the Rosenborg players traveled to the city of Perth in Scotland. In front of ten thousand hostile Scottish spectators, they faced off against St. Johnstone in a heated second-round Europa League qualifiers.

The game was hard-fought, with the club from Perth mounting pressure on Rosenborg from the very first minute amid the passionate cheering from their fans. However, the Troll Kids still put up an incredible performance and kept St. Johnstone at bay. They played a defensive-minded game, keeping the score 0:0 until the referee blew the final whistle. That way, they eliminated the team from Scotland with an aggregate score of 2:0 to qualify for the third round of the Europa League qualifiers.

After the win, the players headed into the next fixture three days later with boundless motivation. They managed to thrash V?lerenga 3:1 in the quarter-finals of the Norwegian Football Cup. Alexander S?derlund, Mikael Dorsin, and Nicki Nielsen scored the three goals for the Troll Kids, sending them into the semi-finals of the Cupen. Zachary was phenomenal as usual and provided two assists in that game.

The day after the V?lerenga game, Zachary woke up early as usual. Without wasting any time, he immersed himself in his post-match recovery routine for the next hour. He then washed up before taking a heavy breakfast to sate his hunger.

After that, he settled on his sofa and started training in the G.O.A.T Skills Simulator to relax. In the virtual world created by the system, he trained tirelessly, refining his set-piece and dribbling techniques by practicing them hundreds of times. He only withdrew his mind from the system simulator a few hours later when it was time for lunch.

Without any dilly-dallying, he feasted on a light lunch before getting into his R8 GT and cruising to Lerkendal for that day's official team training. Since Rosenborg had a tight schedule that month, the coach had already encroached on the relaxation time of the players. They had only been allowed half a day of rest after playing in each official game since the start of August. However, none of them raised a complaint about the hectic schedule. They all understood that it was necessary to give their all to win trophies that season.

"Can I have your attention, guys," Coach Johansen yelled at the top of his voice as soon as all the Rosenborg players had assembled on the training ground. "Come over here. I have an announcement to make."

All the players, including Zachary, immediately put a halt to their training routines. Without wasting any time, they started jogging across the green — towards the center circle.

Zachary couldn't help but do a double-take as he approached the coach's position. Standing beside the coach were three famous players from his previous life. They were all dressed in Rosenborg training kits, observing the rest of the players making their way to the center circle.

'How did Coach Johansen manage to sign all three of them?' Zachary wondered as he joined the rest of his teammates in the center circle. He was surprised since he'd initially assumed the coach would only manage to acquire the services of one of the defenders on his list.

"Okay, guys, pipe down," Coach Johansen intoned, raising his hand in a gesture to request silence. His tone was sharp and commanding, and the players immediately quietened down.

"Good afternoon to you all," the coach began with a greeting. A soft smile outlined his face.

"Good afternoon, coach," the players replied in chorus.

"I've gathered you all to introduce three new players who have joined Rosenborg during this transfer window," the coach said after a moment. "Standing on my right are two defenders: Erik Bailly and William Troost-Ekong. On my left is the defensive midfielder: Thomas Partey. The three of them have already finished all the necessary transfer procedures. They'll start training with the main squad today. Please join me in welcoming them to the team."

All the players forming a semi-circle around the coach started clapping, more or less in unison, to welcome their three new teammates.

"Moving on," the coach said after signaling for the three new players to join the rest of the squad. "We'll be playing FK Minsk on Thursday in the third round of the Europa League qualifiers. I'm sure this will be a tough fixture since we'll be away in Belarus. But we have to give our all and make sure that we emerge as victors after the two legs."

"If we lose, our journey in this season's Europa League will come to an end. But should we win, we'll have qualified for the group stages of the Europa League. And I believe that I don't need to tell you about the benefits of participating in the Europa League for you players. Are we on the same page, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

"Good," Coach Johansen said, nodding. "Since everyone is on the same page, let's get right to business. Today, we'll start with a light dynamic session, focusing on recovering from yesterday's match fatigue as

quickly as possible. We'll then work with the ball by playing some Rondos before officially starting our positioning training for our Thursday match against FK Minsk. I expect you all to remain focused throughout the session since we have less than two days left to the game."

"Any questions?" The coach asked, sweeping his gaze across all the players in the semi-circle.

Mikael Dorsin, the assistant captain, raised his hand right away.

"Yes, Mikael." Coach Johansen pointed at him.

"Thank you, coach," Mikael said with a smile. "When are we departing for Minsk? Will it be on Wednesday or Thursday morning?"

"Wednesday in the afternoon," Coach Johansen replied right away. "The flights from Trondheim to Minsk usually last more than nine hours. That's why we need to travel the day before, to give ourselves enough time to rest before the game. Anyone else with a question?"

All the players remained silent that time around.

"Since there are no more questions," Coach Johansen said, sweeping his gaze across the players, "Let's get down to business. Head back to the other end of the pitch so that you can start on your dynamic warm-up session with Coach Rolf Aas." He added, shooing away the players with a wave of his arm.

Chapter 244 - Against FK Minsk I

Before the commencement of the first leg of the Europa League qualifiers third round, Vadim Skripchenko, the head coach of FK Minsk, had thought that he'd made ample preparations for the match. He'd assumed that his team was more than ready to face off against Norwegian giants Rosenborg and advance to the group stages of the main competition. However, only ten minutes into the game, one player on the Rosenborg side had shattered his views and crushed his hopes with his sheer brilliance on the field.

Zachary Bemba, the Rosenborg number-33, was in beast mode in the attacking midfield, rendering all FK Minsk's strategies ineffective. He was all over the middle section of the pitch, tackling and winning both aerial and ground duels to help Rosenborg dictate the tempo early in the first half. If the FK Minsk

players dared to relax and leave a slight gap in their defensive shape for a moment, he would immediately unleash a defense-splitting pass behind the backline. Or worse, he would run at the defenders to rump up the pressure on FK Minsk.

It wasn't long before he managed to set up Rosenberg's first real chance at goal with his incredible vision and brilliance on the playing field.

In the 13th minute, Zachary brought the ball under control with his chest after winning an aerial duel against Nikita Bukatkin, one of the FK Minsk defensive midfielders, close to the center circle. He immediately spun around with the ball hooked to his left boot, shrugging off Nikita Bukatkin, who was still trying to upend him.

From there, he didn't look back. He raced with the ball across the middle third, eliciting a wave of thunderous cheers from the traveling Rosenberg supporters in the stands of the GOKTsOR Stadion in Minsk, Belarus.

Coach Vadim Skripchenko could tell Zachary's speed across short distances wasn't that impressive. However, the young Rosenberg number-33 had an incredible vision and command of the ball while racing across the green. It was as if he could find the openings in the defensive shape of his opponents in an instant before immediately exploiting them to carry the ball forward and advance the attack. Due to his uncanny ability, he was able to step in the final third only a few seconds after initiating the attack.

Sergey Kozeka, the other FK Minsk defensive midfielder, soon came up to block Zachary's run. He closed down on Zachary with the intensity of an apex predator ready to draw blood after tracking down its prey. He also didn't forget to spread out his arms and angle his body in a way that cut off all Zachary's paths of advance towards the Minsk box.

In response, Zachary decreased his speed slightly, seemingly to assess the obstacle before him. The next instant, he controlled the ball to slide up—over his heel towards his left calf while keeping his eyes on the approaching defender. Without losing a moment, he swung his leg backward with the ball secured to his heel before his opponent could tackle him.

"Oh my, what the f*ck!" Coach Vadim Skripchenko could not help but let loose a loud curse as he watched Zachary loop the ball in an arc over both himself and the approaching opponent. The young number-33 even managed to elicit another wave of thunderous cheers across the FK Minsk home stadium after executing his move with an uncanny soft touch using his back heel.

'Why does he seem more dangerous than in the videos of Rosenberg's previous matches?' Coach Vadim Skripchenko wondered as he watched Zachary approach the box and unleash a right-footed shot through the crowd of opponents towards the goal.

Coach Vadim Skripchenko could feel his heart practically beating hard with anxiety as he watched the ball flashing towards the bottom right corner. It was like a bullet out of a sniper muzzle about to hit home on its intended target. But the next instant, the FK Minsk coach let out a pent-up breath of air as he watched Vladimir Bushma, the goalkeeper, make an incredible save. The number-1 had managed to punch the ball out of play and keep matters level in the 14th minute of gameplay.

However, before the coach could relax, he saw Mikael Dorsin, the Rosenberg left-back, take the corner kick quickly, even before his players could shape up.

"What the f*ck are you guys doing?" Coach Vadim Skripchenko bellowed at the top of his voice, immediately racing towards the touchline. "Hurry up and close them down. Don't allow them close to our box."

However, before the FK Minsk players could array themselves in a proper defensive shape, he saw Zachary receive the short corner ball from Mikael Dorsin. He flicked the ball forward, skipping past a sliding challenge by Aleksandr Sachivko, the FK Minsk center-back. Zachary then passed it to Nicki Nielsen, the center forward a short distance away, before driving forward — into the box like a whirlwind.

Coach Vadim suppressed a rising wave of panic as he continued following Rosenberg's attack. But despite his best efforts, he was still shuddering in trepidation when Zachary received a return pass from Nicki Nielsen inside the box. Without losing his composure, the young Rosenberg number-33 flicked the ball forward — and then released a right-footed shot towards the goal from around the edge of the penalty area.

As expected, the attempt was a tricky one, spinning around the despairing dive of Vladimir Bushma and homing into the back of the net. The score was then 0:1, with Rosenberg taking the lead in the 15th minute.

Coach Vadim Skripchenko felt a flare of frustration as he watched the Rosenberg players celebrating in the middle of the pitch. Rosenberg's opening goal had been a result of the laxity in the concentration of

his players. They'd let the Rosenborg players take the corner kick quickly, allowing them to score the vital away goal in the first leg of the Europa League qualifiers. As a result, FK Minsk's chances of qualifying had gone down.

"Focus, guys," Coach Vadim Skripchenko hollered out loud after a short while, clapping his hands to get the attention of his players. He was a professional coach. He knew that he needed to motivate his players and straighten out their attitude before play restarted. Or else, FK Minsk would find itself conceding more goals in the following few minutes.

"Don't let the goal put you down," he continued yelling without a pause while pacing the entire length of the technical area. "We still have more than 70 minutes to score and bring the match back to level ground. So, let's forget that we have conceded and proceed with our game plan. Sergey! Stick to that number-33 like glue, and don't allow him to do as he pleases in midfield. The rest of you stay sharp and close down all the spaces in the midfield and defense..."

Chapter 245 - Against FK Minsk II

The game restarted right after Zachary had finished celebrating the goal with the rest of his teammates. Roman Vasilyuk, the center-forward in FK Minsk's 4-2-3-1 formation, immediately kicked the ball back into midfield, sending the stadium into raptures.

Even though FK Minsk was trailing a goal to nil, Zachary's ears could still pick up the loud and rhythmic chanting of the home fans within the stands of the GOKTsOR Stadion. It seemed that conceding a goal had not dampened their morale in the slightest. They were still as passionate as they'd been at the start of the game, cheering on their team like there wasn't a tomorrow.

Zachary blocked out all the noise and focused solely on the pitch. He believed he could get a few more golden opportunities to create goal-scoring chances for his team. That was because he was playing against opponents unfamiliar with his capabilities.

Moreover, he was in tip-top shape that day. He even felt that his agility had improved by leaps and bounds. It was fast-rising towards the S-grade bottleneck. Probably within less than a year, he could make another leap in his abilities and advance another attribute of his to a higher grade. But that was if all the other factors remained constant.

A steady surge of confidence burned within him, fuelling his performance in the game. With a calm mind, he'd decided to give his all for the remainder of the match.

Whenever Rosenborg would lose possession, he would rush back into his half and defend with the rest of his teammates. Other times, when there was a chance for a counterattack, he was the first to race across the green to the other side of the field.

He was determined to help his team qualify for the group stages of the Europa League. He had no intention of being penalized for failing to achieve even a single milestone of the system's Europa League serial mission. He was the perfect example of a hardworking player on the field for the entire match. He could have even given the future N'Golo Kanté a run for his money when considering his work-rate alone.

Rosenborg enjoyed long spells of possession with him in the midfield. He linked well with Mike Jensen and Thomas Partey, the two defensive midfielders in Rosenborg's 4-2-3-1 formation, to dictate the tempo and create a few more goal-scoring chances.

With an insatiable appetite for destruction, Zachary initiated another Rosenborg counterattack in the 74th minute, late in the second half. He raced back to Rosenborg's half and executed a perfect sliding tackle, winning the ball from Vitali Kibuk, the FK Minsk attacking midfielder. He immediately passed to Thomas Partey, the Ghanaian defensive midfielder in open space some few yards away.

But he didn't stop at that. He quickly turned and raced along the touchline towards the other side of the field even before Thomas Partey could receive his pass. He was like a bullet train on the rails, his long strides eating yards of space as he shrugged off the opponents tracking him. He was only hoping Thomas had already developed the vision to pick out his run and send him on his way towards the goal.

Thomas Partey, the young defensive midfielder destined to achieve great things with his football career a few years from then, didn't disappoint. He managed to unleash a defense-splitting pass over the zone of intense rival pressure — into the space ahead of Zachary on the left flank. With that well-timed ball, he managed to take out almost all the entire FK Minsk defense from the equation.

Zachary couldn't help but smile as he watched the ball bounce a few yards ahead of him. He was delighted that his bet on the young Ghanaian defensive midfielder had paid off. However, that didn't slow him in the slightest. He met the ball with his head and flicked it forward, continuing his run towards the FK Minsk goal like a human version of a hurricane.

He was intent on destroying and snuffing out all the chances of FK Minsk making a comeback. So, he gave his all to up his speed as he started cutting into the pitch.

Sergey Sosnovski, the FK Minsk center-back, came to close him down after a short while. But Zachary didn't even bother to slow down to draw in the defender. Instead, he fed the ball past him before beating him for pace and continuing towards the box, speed like the wind.

However, the next instant, he realized that he'd taken a heavy touch while beating the last defender. The keeper was already rushing out of the goal and would probably get to the ball before him.

Zachary felt a sudden flare of frustration as he realized he might not manage to score. But he immediately crushed it and upped his speed, continuing towards the keeper like a racehorse. He'd decided not to give up the chase, at least not until the keeper had claimed the ball.

The time seemed to freeze the next instant since he was on a straight collision course with the gigantic keeper, who was nearly as tall as him. But, he hardened his resolve and observed the keeper closely — while continuing his mad dash.

As if in slow motion, he watched the keeper stretch out his hands, readying himself to collect the ball. It was at that moment that he stretched out his left boot to make the slightest touch on the ball, which was about to find its way into the keeper's hands.

He then braked instantly, stopping himself from colliding with the keeper while still keeping an eye on the ball.

A soft smile lit up his face the next instant as he realized that his simple touch had been enough to nudge the ball away from its course towards the keeper's hands. It had rolled past his side before coming to a halt a yard or two before the goal line in FK Minsk's box.

It was then a fair ball for anyone to claim.

Zachary sprung into action immediately with the agility of a cat that had caught the scent of some catnip. He circumvented the goalkeeper with all the haste he could muster before pouncing on the ball with a sliding tackle.

He managed to reach its position just a couple of milliseconds before an FK Minsk defender could get there. He then nudged it into the back of the net with an outstretched boot to score Rosenberg's second goal in the 75th minute.

Chapter 246 - An Unforeseen Incident

FK MINSK 0 : ROSENBORG BK 2

Coach Johansen nodded to himself, suppressing a smile after taking a fleeting glance at the stadium's jumbotron. His players had put up another incredible display to dominate FK Minsk while playing away. As a result, Rosenberg was leading 2:0 in the 80th minute against the tricky Belarusian side in the first leg of the Europa League qualifiers third round.

Zachary was as brilliant as ever. He'd put up a commanding performance in the attacking midfield and even scored both of Rosenberg's goals. Coach Johansen wasn't the least bit surprised. He'd long grown numb to seeing the young prodigy perform miraculous feats on the field.

What had amazed him instead was the display put up by Thomas Partey, his new signing, in the defensive midfield position.

The Ghanaian was a natural-born mechanic on the pitch. He could tackle, jump high to win aerial duels, and also pass the ball brilliantly. Coach Johansen was already glad he'd decided to bet on Zachary's list and secure the four defensive-minded players. He couldn't wait to test the skills of the other three in a real game since he'd already deemed them incredible talents during training.

'I wonder how Zachary managed to spot such talents!' He mused, sighing. He was still in awe that the 18-year old prodigy, who spent almost all his free time training either in the gym or at Lerkendal, could manage to scout out four talented players. Moreover, that was all in one go. Even the most seasoned scouts, like Mr. Stein, would find it nearly impossible to accomplish such a feat.

"Coach," Trond Henriksen, the assistant head coach of Rosenborg, intoned from beside him, breaking him out of his reverie. "Have you noticed that Zachary has been running with a slight limp in his stride since he scored the second goal? I'm guessing he took a knock during the collision with the defender. Maybe, we should substitute him out and have him checked by the medics to avoid future problems."

Coach Johansen's eyes narrowed, his heart starting to race with anxiety on hearing his assistant's assessment. He immediately cast his gaze on Zachary, who at that moment was jogging back towards the Rosenborg half to defend against an FK Minsk corner. To Coach Johansen's horror, the young prodigy was limping slightly for sure.

"Immediately signal for the fourth official to announce a substitution right away," he ordered, his voice laced with urgency. "Hurry up! Also, tell Jonas Svensson to start warming up. I need him on the pitch, in place of Zachary, immediately." The coach spat out words at the pace of the machine gun. He was worried that Zachary would worsen his injury if he stayed on the field any longer. He had no intention of losing his best player.

"I'll talk to the fourth official right away," Trond Henriksen replied solemnly. "We should be able to make a substitution within three minutes at most."

"Make it two minutes."

"Okay, I'll try," Trond Henriksen replied as he walked away, leaving Coach Johansen with a head pounding with nervous tension.

Zachary suppressed a rising panic as he leaped high to defend the corner. He could feel a sharp, stinging pain in his thigh as his feet landed back on the ground after heading the ball out of play for another FK Minsk corner.

'Oh my, not this! Have I gotten injured?' He mused, frowning.

Ominous thoughts spun at the back of his mind as he stretched out his leg a few times to determine whether something was amiss. To his terror, he could still feel a mind-numbing pain in his thigh muscle

every time he moved his leg around. It caused him an immense amount of discomfort that tickled at his nerves, making even simple leg movements all but impossible.

"Is something wrong, Zachary?" Mikael Dorsin, the assistant captain, inquired after arriving beside him a short while later. "You seem to be experiencing some discomfort! What's wrong?"

Zachary could feel that his tone was filled with sincere concern. So he honestly told him about the sharp pain in his thigh.

"Oh my, sorry to hear about that," Mikael said, eyeing his right leg. "When did you first experience the pain? Don't tell me it's when you collided with the defender before you scored the goal."

Zachary sighed, nodding. He'd silently confirmed the assistant captain's guess since he'd first noticed the pain while he was celebrating his second goal. Over time, it'd grown to an unbearable level, especially after leaping to head the corner ball out of play.

"Oh, my!" Mikael exclaimed, narrowing his eyes. "Then, why didn't you say anything? Sit down, first. I'll signal the medics to come over before the FK Minsk players can take the corner. We can't let you continue running on that injury."

Zachary nodded as he lowered himself onto the ground. He couldn't believe that he'd gone ahead and injured himself right before qualifying for the main competition of the Europa League tournament. His only hope at that moment was for the system to have an immediate solution for his predicament. Otherwise, he would have it rough over the following few weeks since he couldn't imagine a life without competitive football.

The referee stopped the gameplay right after Zachary had sat on the green, within Rosenborg's box. Within a matter of seconds, the Rosenborg medics had rushed on to the pitch and started checking his right thigh. As expected, they immediately hypothesized that he'd hurt his thigh muscle when he collided with the FK Minsk defender. So, they conducted some first aid procedures on his thigh, mainly cooling it with an ice pack, before advising him to get off the pitch without any delay.

'Why is this happening now?' Zachary wondered, watching the sky as he lay on a stretcher, being pushed out of the pitch by the two medics. He could hear the Rosenborg fans clapping their hands rhythmically and shouting his name at the top of their voices, probably to send him off.

But he wasn't in the mood to revel in their passionate applause at that moment. Instead, he'd broken his iron rule and started communicating with the system's AI mentally. He was trying to ascertain whether the system had an immediate solution for his injury. That was because he'd recalled that a system vitality-enhancing-elixir had cured his ankle injury when he'd just returned back in time. So, he was hoping that the system would help heal him once again. That way, he would be able to partake in Rosenborg's upcoming games without any need for any medical attention.

However, the system's AI crushed his hope the very next instant.

"It's unfortunate to hear that the user has gotten injured," the AI said in its feminine apathetic voice, bland without any trace of emotion. "And yes, even a B-grade vitality-enhancing-elixir can cure your injury within a short period if you consume it. However, the user must understand that such an elixir is among the highest prizes in the system store. Thus, the system can only offer it to the user as a reward after he has completed a corresponding system mission. That is an iron-core rule in the core programming of the system. It cannot easily be changed unless the user can upgrade the system to the highest grade possible to unlock more privileges."

Zachary felt his mood sink. He ceased all mental communication with the system AI after discovering it couldn't help him recover immediately. He could only gnash his teeth and wait for the medics to make a more detailed diagnosis before finding out how long he would take to overcome the thigh injury.

"Don't worry about anything and take a moment to rest," Coach Johansen said, placing a hand on his shoulder when he arrived in Rosenborg's technical area on a stretcher. "Just relax and leave the game to the rest of your teammates."

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied.

"Status report," Coach Johansen then said, turning to the medics.

"He seems to have hurt a thigh muscle," one of the medics said. "But we need to carry out a more detailed diagnosis in the hospital to find out more. We recommend taking him to the hospital right away."

"Oh!" Coach Johansen said, frowning.

"Is it possible to first finish watching the game before heading to the hospital?" Zachary could not help but interrupt after hearing the recommendation from the medic. "Only seven minutes are till the end of the game."

The medic frowned slightly at Zachary's request. He seemed to ponder on it for a few seconds before begrudgingly nodding his head in consent. "It's okay to watch the remainder of the game. But stay still, and don't try to move your leg until we've made a full diagnosis. Okay?"

"Okay," Zachary concurred, nodding. He then propped up his head from the stretcher and started following the proceedings on the pitch from the sidelines.

The FK Minsk players had grown bolder and started launching prolonged attacks on Rosenberg's goal. But the Troll Kids were putting up an incredible defense-minded performance to deny the Belarusian side any chance of scoring.

Thomas Partey, the newly signed defensive-midfielder, was especially impressive in the last minutes of the game. His sense of positioning on the pitch was incredible. On several occasions, he managed to intercept dangerous through-passes at the edge of Rosenberg's defensive third, further frustrating the efforts of the FK Minsk players. He was a player destined to mature into a beast in defensive midfield, for sure.

With all the Rosenberg players giving their all to defend against the FK Minsk attacks, the score remained 0:2 until the referee blew the final whistle. But that was after an intense six minutes of added time.

"Zachary, let's head to the hospital," the medic said, placing an arm on his shoulder immediately after the game had ended. "We shouldn't delay any longer."

"That's okay, doctor," Zachary said, laying his head back on the stretcher and closing his eyes. "We can leave right away."

He'd calmed down considerably after watching his team go on to win the game. At least his teammates were trying their best to keep Rosenberg's Europa League hopes alive, even in his absence. That put him at ease.

Chapter 247 - An Injury

"You've experienced a severe muscular contusion to the quadriceps at the front of your thigh," Zachary heard the middle-aged radiologist announce with a slight Russian accent. "We've also discovered a moderate contusion to the bone beneath the damaged tissue. However, the good news is that there's no fracture or torn muscle in your thigh. So, your injury will heal pretty quickly as long as you avoid strenuous activities, get proper rest, and take other necessary recovery measures."

Zachary let out a pent-up breath of air after hearing the diagnosis. For the previous thirty minutes, he'd been lying on one of the comfy recliner chairs in an imaging lab at the Minsk Regional Clinical Hospital, anxiously awaiting the radiologist's verdict.

His greatest fear had been the possibility that he'd fractured a bone or tore a ligament. He'd found it hard to stay calm as he waited since he understood that injuries of such severity could take even longer than four months to heal. Furthermore, the progress of his career would have been significantly slowed down as he struggled to regain match fitness after the recovery period.

A smile lit up Zachary's face for the first time since his arrival at the hospital in the Minsk city center. After hearing from the radiologist that the injury wasn't too severe, he felt like he'd unloaded a massive weight from his shoulders.

"How long will an injury like this take to heal?" He asked the radiologist. His main concern at that moment was how quickly he could get back to playing competitive football.

"Between six to nine weeks," the radiologist responded right away. "The exact recovery time varies from individual to individual. So, I can't give any specifics. But since you're a professional athlete, you should take an eight-week rehabilitation rest to avoid any future complications arising from the injury. That should be enough time for both the muscle and bone contusions to heal without any problems."

"Oh," Zachary said, frowning and feeling his mood sink again. Eight weeks of recovery meant he wouldn't partake in any Rosenborg games until late October. By then, the season would be close to conclusion. He would only get the chance to play in three or four fixtures before the closure of the Tippeligaen in early November. Moreover, he would also miss out on the Europa League group stages if his team managed to qualify. That frustrated him to a great extent.

"Don't worry about any unnecessary stuff, Zachary," Eivind Pedersen, one of the Rosenborg medics that had accompanied him to the hospital, chipped in. "You need to put all your focus into recovery if you hope to heal as quickly as possible. Forget about everything else and focus on healing. We'll be there to support you the entire time."

"Okay," Zachary said, nodding. Although he was still in low spirits, he saw the wisdom in the medic's words. From experiences in his past life, he understood he needed to have a positive attitude and put in a great deal of effort if he hoped to speed up his recovery. Those elements were essential in any professional athlete's injury rehabilitation program. So, after calming down, Zachary forced himself to forget about the injury itself and the matches he would have to miss — so that he could pivot all his attention onto his recovery. That was what mattered the most at that moment.

'ROSENBERG'S YOUNG STAR, ZACHARY BEMBA, OUT FOR TWO MONTHS AFTER PICKING UP AN INJURY IN THE THIRD ROUND OF THE EUROPA LEAGUE QUALIFIERS.'

Kristin couldn't help but frown and shake her head repeatedly after reading the headline on the sports page of the Friday Adresseavisen newspaper. Her frustration spiked as she realized what a blow Zachary's injury could be to Rosenborg's hopes that season.

Since Zachary was out for two months, he wouldn't play in Rosenborg's second-leg Europa League game against FK Minsk scheduled for the following Wednesday. He would also miss the semifinals of the Norwegian Cup and Rosenborg's upcoming eight Tippeligaen fixtures. He would only return to full fitness for the last two Tippeligaen games and the Norwegian Cup final in early November.

She wasn't confident Rosenborg could maintain their remarkable form throughout all those games in Zachary's absence. She was distraught by the news of his injury.

"What's the matter, Kristin?" Monica Rønning, her flatmate, asked from across the table covered with a variety of dishes. The two of them were having breakfast in the living room of their apartment in Stjerdalsveien.

Kristin sighed, shaking her head after hearing her flatmate's question. "Zachary picked up an injury in yesterday's game against FK Minsk," she said, returning her gaze to the newspaper article. "The medics estimate that he'll need about two months to recover fully."

"Oh, my!" Monica exclaimed, her eyes widening. "That's just unfortunate. What sort of injury did he pick up?"

"It's a contusion to the thigh quadriceps and bone," Kristin replied, her eyes still on the newspaper page. "He picked it up during a collision with a defender right before he scored Rosenborg's second goal. He's truly unlucky this time around."

"A muscle and bone contusion!" Monica mumbled, inclining her head slightly, deep in thought. "I picked up a similar injury while skiing in Sweden last November. It's not a severe type of injury. Everything depends on how he manages it. His injured leg should regain motion quite quickly — probably in a couple of weeks as long as he rests and applies ice. However, it will take him at least six weeks to recover fully. I'm guessing the medics have added two more weeks to allow Zachary enough time to regain full fitness after the recovery period. That must be why they quoted two months rather than six weeks as the period he'll be out."

"Oh, that's some good news at last," Kristin said, finally looking up from the newspaper. "All that's on the web is negativity. Some people are already speculating that the injury could affect Zachary's form negatively, especially since he's a young player. They claim he'll find it hard to recover completely and that Rosenborg will lose its place at the top of the table. I've even seen posts saying the Troll Kids will fail to qualify for the group stages of the Europa League after the return leg against FK Minsk next week."

"Well," Monica said, smiling a bit. "I think they're right. Rosenborg will find it more difficult to win games in Zachary's absence for sure. Just imagine a Rosenborg without Zachary for the entire season. You guys would be like third or fourth on the table without his goals and assists."

"That's true," Kristin concurred, sighing. "However, I believe the rest of the team will rise to the occasion and keep winning. None of our opponents in the Tippeligaen can stop our momentum this late in the season."

"Moreover," Kristin continued without a pause. "Coach Johansen has signed four new players that look quite promising. One of them is Thomas Partey, a defensive midfielder. He put up a brilliant performance in his debut game against FK Minsk yesterday. With him on the squad, we have a good chance of winning our remaining games and maintaining our lead at the top of the table. The only

competition that worries me is the Europa League. Without Zachary, I don't see us qualifying out of the group stages."

"Let's hope the mighty Coach Johansen has a solution to all this," Monica said before changing the topic. "I'm guessing Zachary's social media accounts must be experiencing a surge of activity. His followers should be expecting an official update on his status. How are you handling it?"

"I've chosen to ignore them until I manage to get in touch with him," Kristin replied, smiling ruefully. "I'll not post anything on his behalf before talking with either him or his agent."

"Zachary is truly unlucky this time around," Monica sighed. "He would have been the leading contender for the golden boot and best player awards this season if he could have maintained his form over the next few games. However, with the injury, I don't see that happening."

"Let's just hope that he recovers fast. That's what matters most at the moment."

After spending a night in Minsk, Belarus, the Rosenborg squad returned to Trondheim the following evening. Coach Johansen immediately decided to head to his office after sending off his players at Lerkendal. He hoped to prepare the game plan for the match against Sandnes Ulf two days away before heading home to rest.

However, after settling in his office chair and opening up his laptop, his mind started wandering. Zachary's injury had come at the worst possible time – just when Rosenborg was close to qualifying for the Europa League.

Coach Johansen understood that Rosenborg would find it hard to realize its goals in the Europa League without Zachary's attacking prowess. Only a player like Zachary, who possessed world-class talent, could maintain his consistency even against the top teams in the Europa League. Coach Johansen had been banking on him to help Rosenborg through the group stages with his brilliance.

"*Knock*Knock*Knock..."

The sound of knocking on his office door broke him out of his reverie. "Come in," he said right away, not feeling any surprise. He was expecting Trond Henriksen, the assistant head coach, to pass by with another update on Zachary's injury.

"Good evening, Coach," Trond Henriksen said with a polite smile right after stepping into the office the very next instant.

"Good evening to you too, Trond," Coach Johansen replied, half-smiling. "How is Zachary? Has he started treatment at St. Olav's yet?"

"Yes, he has," Trond Henriksen replied. "The doctors at St. Olav's have also given a diagnosis similar to the one from Minsk. His quadriceps is slightly damaged and will need roughly four weeks to heal. The bone contusion is more problematic and requires about six weeks to heal properly. Zachary should return to full fitness in about two months if all goes well. The doctors have promised to do their best to help him through the recovery process."

"That's good," Coach Johansen said, nodding and leaning back into his chair. "Now, we only have to try our best to continue winning even though Zachary is out for two months. Have you been monitoring the three under-19 players that you previously mentioned?"

"Are you referring to the Kasongo boy and the Otterson brothers?" Trond Henriksen inquired, raising a brow.

"Yes," Coach Johansen said, nodding. "How have they been performing of recent? Are they ready to join the senior team?"

"Yes, they are," Trond Henriksen was quick to reply with a smile. "Kasongo has been exceptional throughout August. He has scored two more goals and also provided two assists on the Rosenborg under-19 team. Paul Otterson is also good in his own way and has also scored two goals this month. But I believe the most promising among the three is Kendrick Otterson, the oldest. I've realized that Kendrick is a natural-born goalkeeper who can make impossible saves even while under pressure."

A soft smile lit up Coach Johansen's face on hearing his assistant's assessment. His mood lifted since the three new players were ready to join the senior team. Coach Johansen hoped they would be the spark

that could revitalize the Rosenborg team spirit. That way, the Troll Kids would continue winning even in the absence of Zachary.

"You can arrange for them to join first-team training starting this weekend," Coach Johansen said after a short while with a smile. "I hope they surprise me and emerge as new stars on the team."

Chapter 248 - Two Months

Zachary put all his focus into the recovery process immediately after the game with FK Minsk. He avoided making any unnecessary movement and began using crutches to protect his leg from further harm. He was set on following his doctor's instructions to the letter.

In the first week of recovery, he routinely applied ice to his thigh — and kept his leg elevated most of the time to speed up the healing process. He took great caution while caring for his injured leg to avoid harming his thigh further. As a result, the pain had almost completely subsided by the third week.

He then started going through simple leg exercises to stretch and strengthen his quadriceps. Throughout the third week, he executed pain-free static contractions on a daily basis. His routine included four sets of ten repetitions of straight leg raises without weights. The exercises were aimed at enhancing the flexibility of his quadriceps muscle and helping him regain mobility in his right leg.

The rehabilitation was quite tedious, considering he could accomplish most of the exercises while seated or standing in one place. They bored him beyond measure, giving rise to the spirit of giving up on a few occasions. However, since he hoped to recover as quickly as possible, he persevered and went through the rehabilitation without complaint.

Under the supervision of the Rosenborg medics and the doctors from St. Olav's, he slowly started regaining mobility in his right leg. By the fourth week, he started training with weights to bolster his recovering muscles further. He even began swimming for an hour or two daily as a bonus.

He was regaining his fitness at a rate faster than the doctors had initially expected. However, they still advised him to avoid all intensive exercise until his sixth week of recovery elapsed.

In the seventh week of rehabilitation, he finally started going through intensive exercising routines targeted towards enhancing the fitness of professional footballers. Push-ups, jogging, agility drills, weights, and ball work — he started doing them all under strict supervision by the Rosenborg medics. He was intent on returning to the starting line-up before the end of the season. So, he practiced with more than a hundred percent effort during the eighth week of his rehabilitation.

Monday, 28th October 2013.

The late autumn sunlight streamed golden through the window in a well-mannered announcement of the just risen sun. It was just eight o'clock in the morning. However, Coach Johansen was already in his office at Lerkendal, reviewing Rosenborg's previous match statistics on his laptop. He would occasionally frown, sigh, or smile, depending on the match he was analyzing. But if he was observed from a close distance, it was easy to notice that he had smiled more times than his face had morphed into a frown that morning. That was because the coach was quite pleased with his team's performance over the previous two months.

Rosenborg had faced some tough fixtures in the last quarter of the Tippeligaen season after Zachary's injury. It had been a tough two months playing without Zachary, for sure.

The Rosenborg players had performed poorly in a few matches. They'd tied against opponents like Tromsø Idrettslag, FK Haugesund, and Hønefoss Ballklubb during September. They'd even suffered a loss to Molde in their second-leg game, giving rise to tension and dissatisfaction among the supporters.

During those times, Coach Johansen had been on tenterhooks, thinking his team would lose its position at the top of the table. However, the Rosenborg players had continued giving Coach Johansen pleasant surprises. They always bounced back after a poor result and put up incredible performances to win most games. They were resilient and overflowing with the Rosenborg team spirit.

Due to their efforts, Rosenborg was still ahead of the second-placed Strømsgodset on the Tippeligaen table by five points — with only two games to the end of the season. Rosenborg only needed one more

point — which equated to one more draw in the remaining two matches — to be crowned as 2013 Norwegian Champions.

Coach Johansen could hardly contain his happiness. He was on the cusp of winning the Tippeligaen Trophy during his first season as manager. He couldn't have hoped for a better result after Zachary's unfortunate injury in August.

"Bzzt Bzzt! Bzzt Bzzt!"

His phone vibrated a short while later, breaking him out of his intense concentration. He picked it up leisurely from his office table and cast a single glance at the screen before placing it next to his ear. "Yes, hello, Dr. Pedersen," he spoke into his smartphone after clearing his voice. "How's your morning?"

"My morning is fine, coach," Dr. Eivind Pedersen, one of the Rosenborg medics, replied from the other end of the line. "I have called to deliver some good news."

"Oh," Coach Johansen said, his heart starting to race with anticipation.

"Zachary has recovered fully from his injury," Dr. Pedersen continued almost without a pause. "He has completed his rehabilitation and can participate in the team training starting this week."

"That's great," Coach Johansen said excitedly. "How's his fitness? Is he ready to play competitive games?"

"Yes, he is," Dr. Pedersen replied almost immediately. "From our tests, we can conclude that he has already regained full match-fitness. His thigh contusion has recovered without any problems. You can test his match condition yourself when he appears at Lerkendal for training."

"Thank you, doctor," Coach Johansen said, tone polite. "That's the best news I've received over the past few weeks. I'm glad Zachary can finally return to the squad."

"There's no need for any thanks since that's my job," Dr. Pedersen said from the other end of the line. "But you'll need to watch out for one issue after Zachary returns to intensive team training. As you

know, a sports injury has both physical and psychological consequences for an athlete. The most common post-injury psychological response is an elevated level of fear of reinjury. So, Zachary may underperform in the first few weeks after recovery. But worry not. He is a tough guy and should overcome it in a short period of time."

"That's understandable," Coach Johansen replied. "I'll observe how he performs during training this week. If I notice any signs indicating that he has developed some phobia, I'll send him to a sports psychologist immediately."

"That's good," Dr. Pedersen said. "Let me say goodbye for now. I wish you all the best during the remaining matches of the season. We're all waiting for the Troll Kids to emerge as Norwegian champions once again this year."

"Thank you," Coach Johansen said, leaning back in his chair. "But you don't need to worry. We'll become champions. That's for sure since Zachary has returned to the squad."

"That's great," Dr. Pedersen said. "I'll start preparing the champagne since I now have your assurance. Let me say goodbye for now. I have to return to work."

"Goodbye, and thanks for the call."

Coach Johansen grinned as he placed the phone back on his office table. With Zachary back on the line-up, Rosenborg's chances of winning both the Tippeligaen Trophy and the Norwegian Cup had gone up a notch. It was like a higher power had cast blessings onto them – to ensure they would win the double. Coach Johansen's spirits were flying high on realizing Rosenborg was very close to winning the two most prestigious Norwegian Trophies.

"*Knock*Knock*Knock..."

The sound of someone knocking on his office door broke him out of his reverie once again. "Come in," he said almost immediately, leaning back in his chair.

The next moment, he saw the door open before the tall Zachary with an overgrown afro marched into his office. The boy prodigy was as imposing as ever. He was garbed in the official Rosenborg training kit and seemed ready for that day's morning training.

"Good morning, Zachary," Coach Johansen said, standing up and extending a hand. "Welcome back. We missed you on the team."

"Thank you, coach," Zachary replied, taking the hand. His tone was humble. "How have you been, coach?"

"I'm fine, Zachary," Coach Johansen said, settling back in his office chair. "Please, have a seat. How was your holiday? You got two months of rest, and I almost envy you for that." He added with a bit of humor.

Zachary sighed audibly, shaking his head on hearing the question. "The holiday was too boring and almost unbearable," he said. "Imagine sitting at home for two months and doing nothing productive. All I could do was watch TV and go through some light exercising routines. It was the worst possible hell for me."

"Sorry about that," Coach Johansen said, half-smiling. "But it's good you're back. You can now play to your heart's content throughout this upcoming month of November. However, are you ready for action?"

"Of course, I am," Zachary replied, tone confident. "I started going through more intensive exercise routines to regain my fitness two weeks ago. I feel confident, and I'm more than ready to participate in Rosenborg's upcoming match against Viking Stavanger next Sunday."

"That's good, then," Coach Johansen said with a smile. "Let's see how you perform during this week's training. But please make sure that you don't push yourself too hard. Take it slow until you feel comfortable with the ball once again. Are we together?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, nodding. "I understand."

"Good," Coach Johansen said. "You can go ahead and join the rest of the team in the gym for the morning fitness session directed by Coach Rolf Aas. I'll then see you on the training ground in the afternoon for the team session."

"Till after lunch then, coach," Zachary replied, standing up and then heading towards the door.

Coach Johansen couldn't help but sigh as he watched him walk out of the office. At that moment, he couldn't help but envision how Rosenborg's season could have progressed if Zachary hadn't gotten injured.

'Maybe, Rosenborg would have won the three opening games in the Europa League group stages,' he mused, turning his gaze towards the outside scenery through the window. 'We shouldn't be in such a bind, hoping for a miracle to qualify for the next stage of the Europa League.'

After Zachary had gotten injured, the rest of the players had still managed to put up an incredible performance against FK Minsk in the second leg of the Europa League qualifiers third round. They'd managed to beat the team from Belarus 1:0 to cement their place in the Europa League group stages.

All the fans, players, and coaches were ecstatic since Rosenborg had managed to qualify for the main Europa League tournament. Morale had been very high as the players prepared for the second most prestigious international team competition in Europe. However, due to the shortage of creative world-class attacking players, the Troll Kids had ended up losing their three opening games in the group stages.

They kicked off their campaign with a 1:2 away loss to the Belgian team — Standard Liège. They then faced off against Red Bull Salzburg, a team from Austria, at Lerkendal and lost 1:0. After that, they were defeated by IF Elfsborg 1:0 in an away game played in Borås, Sweden. They were at the bottom of the table, having failed to secure even a single point in the group stages. At that moment, they were already trailing Red Bull Salzburg, the leaders of their group, by nine points — and were six points behind second-placed Standard Liège.

Coach Johansen had already considered giving up on the Europa League since Rosenborg's campaign was going miserably. He had thought about cutting his losses and focusing on the Tippeligaen and Norwegian Cup. He had had little to no hope of Rosenborg making up the six-point deficit in the remaining three games of the group stage to qualify for the next round.

However, since Zachary had regained fitness, Coach Johansen could finally see a ray of hope amidst the gloom. The youngster was a magician on the field. He was a winner and would do his best to avoid a loss as long as he was on the playing field. If he could overcome his post-injury phobia quickly, he would perhaps inspire Rosenborg to qualify for the next stage.

"Let's see how he performs in the next five days of training," Coach Johansen mumbled, sighing. "As long as he puts up an above-average performance, I'll give him time during the weekend game against Viking Stavanger. That should be enough to prepare him for the match against IF Elfsborg the following week."

Chapter 249 - Return To The Starting Line-up I

After departing from Coach Johansen's office, Zachary immediately trekked to the locker room to change his sneakers before heading to the gym for the fitness session.

He walked at a moderate pace, occasionally slowing down to look at the posters lined up on the walls of the brightly lit hallways of Lerkendal Stadium.

The posters were pleasing to the eye and gave the stadium's hallways a uniquely majestic feel. They mostly depicted past Rosenborg squads that had managed to win accolades. A few portrayed retired Rosenborg legends that put up incredible performances during their time on the team. Just by looking at them, one could envision the glorious history and past grandeur of Rosenborg. The only blemish was that the radiance didn't include any European accomplishments.

Nonetheless, Zachary always enjoyed gazing at them. He'd often wondered if he would get the chance to have his poster on the walls of Lerkendal Stadium as well.

He was confident in his skills — but he knew he could only spend a few years of his football career at Rosenborg. He planned on spending two or three years in Norway before moving on to greener pastures. He wasn't that self-assured that he could match the achievements of the other Rosenborg legends and have his poster plastered on the walls in such a short time frame. It looked even more unlikely after he'd taken two whole months off to recover from an injury.

'I can only start slow and try to do my best for the remainder of the season,' Zachary resolved. 'As long as I perform well during this week's training, I'll be able to make the squad for the Sunday game against Viking Stavanger. That should be the beginning of my comeback.'

Zachary quickened his pace after taking a glance at Coach Nils Arne Eggen's portrait. In a matter of minutes, he arrived in the locker room. He'd assumed it would be empty since all the players were supposedly in the gym, attending Coach Rolf Aas' morning fitness session. But to his surprise, he found Mikael Dorsin, the Rosenborg assistant captain, changing his attire right beside his locker.

"Hoho!" the assistant captain said, clicking his tongue on seeing Zachary. "Welcome back. We missed you here. How are you?" He stepped forward and gave Zachary a bear hug.

"I'm okay, Mikael," Zachary replied, accepting the hug. "And you? How are you doing?"

"I'm fine," Mikael replied, smiling and stepping away from Zachary. "It's nice to see you again. Is your injury finally healed? And have you managed to regain full fitness?"

"Yes. The doctors cleared me to return to training this morning. I'm as fit as a fiddle."

"That's awesome," Mikael said, settling on one of the benches in the locker room. "Your return will certainly boost our morale when we face off against Viking Stavanger on the weekend. If we win or draw that game, we'll be champions. So, if you had delayed your return by even a week, you would have missed out on the victory celebrations."

"I can see that you're confident," Zachary said, also settling on one of the benches and starting to change out of his sneakers. "But then you should be since we're the best team in Norway. Although Viking Stavanger is a tricky side, we'll still win by a wide margin as long as we play at our best as a team. How is the team's morale at the moment?"

"The morale is a bit on the low side," Mikael replied, shaking his head. "We lost to Molde last Saturday and also faced defeat while playing against IF Elfsborg during the previous Thursday's Europa League fixture. Most of the players on the team have been in low spirits because of those two consecutive defeats. I was even worried we might fail to win the weekend game against Viking Stavanger. But since you're back, I'm relieved. With you on the team, there's no way we can lose to a side like Viking Stavanger."

"Don't count on me too much," Zachary said hurriedly, shaking his head. "I have been out of action for two whole months. I'll try my best in training and the upcoming games for sure. But I'm just not that confident I'll regain my previous form immediately."

Although Zachary wasn't sure he would return to his peak state right after his two-month injury, he still had high hopes for Rosenborg's upcoming games. As long as he managed to make the starting line-up, he was sure he would impact the results, even when not at his best. That was because his game didn't just depend on dribbling and sprinting through opponents. He was also a Maestro — good at passing, unleashing long shots, and taking free-kicks.

Zachary had trained his passing and free-kick techniques in the G.O.A.T Skills Simulator during his two-month recovery period relentlessly. As a result, the mental aspect of his game was sharper than ever. He was confident he could still unleash tricky passes behind the defense and score free kicks whenever he got the opportunity in a competitive game.

As long as the opponents relaxed and gave him some breathing space on the playing field, he would punish them. Even in critical moments, he was sure he would be able to take an entire defense out of the equation with a single defense-splitting pass. Moreover, if defenders dared to commit any fouls close to their eighteen-yard box, he would still manage to discipline them with his set-piece technique.

"All that matters is that you try your best," Mikael said, flashing Zachary a smile. "But remember not to force your way back into the game. Instead, you should ease back into training slowly until you feel comfortable and confident whenever you're facing an opponent with the ball."

"That's what I plan to do," Zachary replied, starting to pull on his stockings. "Thanks for the advice. But why are you here and not with the rest in the gym? Do you plan on dodging Coach Rolf Aas' fitness session?"

Mikael smiled on hearing that. "I received a knock to my ankle during the game against Molde on Saturday. So, I had to pass by the hospital first — to have it checked out. That's why I'm late for training."

"Is everything okay, then?" Zachary inquired hurriedly. "Don't tell me that you're also injured, now."

"There's no need to worry about me," Mikael replied, tone nonchalant. "It's not a big deal. The doctors have assured me it's just a bruise. It'll heal in one or two days at most."

"That's a relief," Zachary said, letting out a breath. "We wouldn't want to lose you at this critical point late in the season. We still have two more matches in the Tippeligaen. Then, we have to play the Norwegian Cup finals, plus the three remaining Europa League group stage games. We can't afford to lose any player right now."

Mikael chuckled on hearing that. "I'm not going anywhere. But that reminds me about our Europa League campaign. I always get depressed just by thinking about our performances in the opening three games of the tournament. We couldn't even manage a single draw in all the games! We were truly miserable." He sighed audibly.

"But we still have a chance to qualify," Zachary said, also sighing. "As long as we win our remaining three games, we'll have a good chance to qualify for the knock-out stages. We have to come back with a bang — by defeating Red Bull Salzburg, the table leaders, on November 7th. As long as we win that game, we'll have the necessary momentum to thrash the rest of the group."

"That's a lofty goal, and I like it for sure," Mikael said, sighing. "But you have to remember that Red Bull Salzburg is quite the powerhouse in the Europa League. Moreover, we're playing away in Austria. That game will be a very tough battle for us."

"That doesn't matter," Zachary replied, tone emphatic. "As long as we don't give up and try our best, we have a good chance of winning. We must play that game like it's a final. We can't afford to lose."

Zachary would face a penalty from the system if Rosenborg failed to qualify for the knock-out stages of the Europa League. He would have to pay a total sum of 120,000 Juju points if he couldn't accomplish any milestone in the system's 2013/14 Europa League Serial Mission. It was one hell of a system penalty that he couldn't afford to incur in the short term — without hindering the smooth progress of his career.

He had already failed to complete the first milestone of playing at least 80% of Rosenborg's Europa League fixtures. He could only set his sights on the second milestone — which necessitated him to help his team qualify for the knock-out stages. That was the only way for him to escape the penalty.

"Let's not set our sights at those far-off lofty goals for the moment," Mikael said, standing up. He'd already finished donning his training attire and seemed ready for the fitness session. "Instead, we should focus on the next Tippeligaen fixture."

"We have to put up our best performance to win against Viking Stavanger next Sunday," the assistant captain continued. "We'll become the 2013 champions if we can win or at the very least acquire a draw in that game. After that, we'll have gained all the momentum to face off against Red Bull Salzburg. Moreover, our schedule will free up considerably since we won't have to table our main squad during the last game of the season against Lillestrøm. So, we'll have all the time to prepare for the other two remaining Europa League group games without any interruptions."

"You're right," Zachary concurred, also standing up. He'd also finished donning his gym attire and switching his sneakers. "It all starts with us winning the Sunday game and becoming the 2013 Norwegian champions. Otherwise, we won't have the necessary capital to challenge Red Bull Salzburg or Standard Liège."

"I'm glad you understand," Mikael said, patting his shoulder. "And I'm also glad that you're back, Zachary. We have missed your contributions to the team."

"Thanks, Mikael," Zachary said, grinning. "We should probably head to the gym now. Otherwise, we might have to face Coach Rolf Aas' wrath if we delay any longer."

"Okay," Mikael said, placing his bag in his locker.. "Let's go do some gym work."

Chapter 250 - Return To The Starting Line-up II

Zachary gave his all during the next few days of practice. He worked harder than ever to regain his peak fitness by following a strict and carefully planned exercise regimen.

His daily practice sessions included gym work, agilities, endurance training, team passing drills, and ball work. He worked at everything with hundred percent dedication and no complaints under the guidance of the Rosenborg coaches.

Zachary only encountered a few minor problems as he immersed himself back into the hectic team training sessions. He'd realized that his body control and dribbling skills had diminished considerably over the two months of recovery. So, he found it quite arduous to dribble past any of the Rosenborg first-team defenders. Moreover, on a few occasions when the defenders tried to tackle the ball from his

feet, he would panic and sometimes end up losing possession. He subconsciously feared suffering another injury.

He was aware that it was just some mental trauma resulting from the injury. But even though he understood the core of the problem, he couldn't do much about it. So, he decided to switch his entire playing style to one-touch or two touch-passing without bothering to dribble past even a single player during training.

Whenever he would receive a pass, he would control the ball before immediately relinquishing it to a teammate without delay. He would then run into space the next moment and wait for the ball to return to him. With his high game intelligence, graded at A+ by the system, he switched to a playing style that limited the possibilities of coming into contact with the opponents in a matter of days. By the fifth day of training, he'd managed to evolve his game to fit his new state of mind so that he wouldn't be affected by his post-injury phobia.

Saturday, 2nd November 2013.

The sunset slowly but steadily blossomed upon the horizon as if a million scarlet blooms had ignited. On that autumn evening, Zachary was still on the training ground at Lerkendal training his set-piece technique.

"That's set-piece number forty into the back of the net," Paul Otterson yelled excitedly from the sidelines after Zachary managed to dispatch another free-kick into the top right corner. "Kendrick," the Swede continued with a bit of humor. "Why aren't you diving or trying to make any saves? You're just standing there and allowing Zachary to put more free-kicks into the back of the net. Don't you feel any shame?"

"If you think you can do better than me, you're welcome to come and stand in my place, between the posts," Kendrick yelled in a dismissive tone. "Otherwise, shut up and return to your training. Remember that you haven't completed the required gym work for today evening. Coach Johansen will demote you back to the under-19s if you keep on lousing around."

"Guys," Zachary yelled, placing another ball right in front of the box. He was preparing to send another free-kick over the wall. "It's already coming to 4:30 PM. Coach Johansen will be calling us for the prematch tactical briefing very soon. So, we can't afford to waste any time."

"Paul and Kasongo!" He turned towards his two friends. "You guys don't have to stand there, watching me taking free-kicks. You can utilize this time to do agilities or jog around the stadium. Or, you can even start on some simple passing drills together. Remember that time waits for no man. Okay?"

"Yes, sir," the two of them replied in unison as if Zachary was their coach.

"Then, off you go," Zachary said, shooing them away with a wave of his hand. "Go busy yourselves with your training and stop bothering us here. We'll link up again when we're heading to the tactics room later." His tone was sharp and commanding. The two of them could only smile ruefully before begrudgingly walking away to train in another part of the playing field.

"They are still as playful as ever," Kendrick commented as soon as the boys had moved out of earshot. "It's like they don't feel any pressure even when faced with the whole competitive atmosphere on the first team."

"I'm sure that they are under tremendous pressure," Zachary replied, shaking his head. "Joking around is their way of coping. Let's hope their playfulness won't affect their training in the long run." He sighed.

His three friends from his academy days had made tremendous progress while playing for the Rosenborg under-19 team over the first half of the year. As a result, Coach Johansen had invited them to begin training with the team at the end of August, just after he'd gotten injured.

Kendrick Otterson, the goalkeeper, had quickly gotten into high gear and easily adapted to the intensive atmosphere on the first team. He was very hardworking and had managed to improve his skills considerably over the previous two months. On the other hand, the other two, Paul and Kasongo, were still as playful as ever and not taking anything seriously. They weren't doing their best to improve their skills during their spare time. They would immediately lose all motivation as soon as the official training sessions ended.

Zachary worried that their skills would regress—and as a result, the coaches would demote them back to the under-19 team. That was a fate he didn't wish upon his friends.

"The disturbances have gone away," Zachary said after noticing that both Kasongo and Paul had started running laps around the stadium. "Let's get back to training. I need to take twenty more free-kicks before Coach Johansen calls us for the tactical meeting."

"I'm ready when you are," Kendrick replied from in between the goalposts. "This time, I'll do my best to stop you."

"Dream on!" Zachary said, grinning at the goalkeeper. The next moment, he abruptly raised his leg and smashed the ball, sending it spinning—on a curving path towards the top left corner. He'd employed his high-level Bend-it-like-Beckham Juju to take the free-kick.

"You're not scoring this time," Kendrick roared, leaping high and stretching himself into a full-body dive. He was really trying his best to thwart Zachary's attempt at goal. However, all his efforts were just in vain. The ball flashed by his outstretched hand by mere inches, homing into the back of the net.

"That's free-kick number 41 into the back of the net," Zachary said, imitating Paul Otterson's voice as Kendrick picked himself from the ground after failing to make the save.

"Your conversion rate with set-pieces is out of this world," Kendrick commented, shaking his head. "I feel sorry for all the goalkeepers who'll have to face against you during the upcoming matches. Let's continue."

"Okay," Zachary said, smiling and placing another ball before the eighteen-yard box. Without taking a breather, he continued taking set-pieces even when the sun had disappeared beyond the horizon in the west. He only concluded his session when Coach Johansen summoned the team to the tactics room for the prematch briefing at 6:00 PM.

"Good evening, everyone," Coach Johansen said, smiling and sweeping his gaze across all the players in the tactics room. He was in a good mood since training had progressed without issues over the past few days.

"Good evening, coach," the players replied, more or less in unison.

"Tomorrow evening, we'll face off against Viking Stavanger in our second last fixture of this Tippeligaen season," Coach Johansen said, tone pensive. "It's a game we have to win if we wish to become the Norwegian champions tomorrow. We can't falter at this crucial point of the season. Are we together, guys?" He yelled.

"Yes, coach," the players replied, their voices brimming with enthusiasm.

"That's good," Coach Johansen said, nodding. He could tell that the morale of the team was at a very high level. The players seemed highly motivated, probably because they were only a step away from clinching the Tippeligaen trophy.

"We've spent the entire week going over the game plan," Coach Johansen continued with a smile, lowering his voice. Nonetheless, it still carried to all the twenty-four players in the tactics room. "So, I won't waste time discussing the tactics again this evening. Instead, I'll announce the squad for tomorrow and then send you home for the night. I want all the players on the squad to have ample time to rest today night. Are we together?"

"Yes, coach."

"Good," the coach said, unfolding his notebook. "We'll use the 4-2-3-1 formation, and our starting line-up is as follows. Daniel ?rlund will be our goalkeeper. Tore Reginiussen, Mikael Dorsin, Eric Bailly, and Yerry Mina will play our defense."

"In our defensive midfield, we'll have Mike Jensen and Thomas Partey while Zachary Bemba will play as our only attacking midfielder. Our wingers will be Tobias Mikkelsen and Alexander S?derlund, while Nicki Nielsen will play as our center-forward."

"That's it for the starting line-up," Coach Johansen said, looking around. "I expect all the players on the starting line-up to put up their best from the very first minute. I don't want to see any of you slacking off on the pitch. Are we together?"

"Yes, coach."

"That's good," the coach said, half-smiling. "Moving on. On the bench, we'll have Lund Hansen, Cristian Gamboa, Stefan Strandberg, Ole Selnø, Mix Diskerud, John Chibuike, and Pal André Helland. That's it for the substitutes." Coach Johansen glanced up from his notebook.

"Tomorrow," he said, letting out a breath. "Let's do our best to against Viking. We're at home at Lerkendal, so there shouldn't be any reason for us to underperform. We have to win, and we have to win by a landslide. We must destroy Viking Stavanger tomorrow and emerge as champions. For we are ROSENBOORGGG!!!!" He ended his speech with a cheer.

"WE'RE ROSENBOOOOORGGGG, ROSENBORG..." The players chimed in, singing at the top of their voices in chorus. They were in high gear and highly motivated for the game the following day. They were eager to be crowned champions.