

## Greatest 281

### Chapter 281 - Award Ceremony And More System Rewards

"It's the moment we've all been waiting for," the booming voice of the announcer reverberated across the entire stadium after the organizers had set up the podium. "We're about to welcome the Rosenborg players and coaching staff to the podium to receive their medals. But first things first, let's put our hands together for the tournament's top scorer and MVP as he steps forward to receive his accolades."

Grinning from ear to ear, Zachary walked onto the podium with a slight swagger in his step amid waves of thunderous applause. He quickly shook hands with the Norsk Toppfotball officials, received his accolades, and stepped aside to give way to the rest of his teammates.

He had set a new record by receiving two golden boots and two of Norway's most prestigious best football player awards on a single day, just over a span of about two hours. The first was before kick-off, and the second was after the final whistle of the Cup final. He'd made history. Anyone could tell he was trying his best to contain his excitement while standing there on the podium with his three accolades.

"Let's welcome the best coach of the tournament," the announcer intoned, his booming voice shaking the stadium again. "His tactics today were overwhelming as he sent Rosenborg's old rival, Molde, packing to win the Norwegian Cup finals. Ladies and gentlemen! Let's put our hands together for the one and only, the best coach of the season, Coach Boyd Johansen."

The cheers of the Rosenborg fans hit another crescendo as Coach Johansen stepped forward. His hands were trembling a little as he accepted the Cupen winner's medal from the officials. He seemed quite excited as he had just achieved a perfect start to his tenure as the Rosenborg coach by winning a prestigious domestic double.

"Rosenborg! \*Clap\*Clap\* Rosenborg..."

The cheers continued reverberating, causing the entire stadium to experience mini-tremors as the rest of the Rosenborg players followed their coach onto the podium. To spice things up, the announcer began listing out the achievements of individuals starting with Daniel ?rlund, the keeper, as another surge of frenzy descended upon the stadium.

The atmosphere was boiling with tangled emotions as the Rosenborg players stepped forward, one after the other. With toothy grins framing their facial features, they took turns shaking hands with the Norsk Toppfotball officials before receiving glittering medals and stepping to the side in an orderly manner.

And finally, the ribbon fell, causing all the Rosenborg fans still in the stands to go into a wild frenzy. Under the illumination of the last rays of the setting sun, the supporters started singing popular Rosenborg chants as the Norsk Toppfotball chairman stepped forward to present the trophy.

Without further ado, Tore Reginiussen, the Rosenborg captain, came forward and received the trophy as the fireworks went off in the background. At that moment, all eyes were on the podium as the captain rejoined his teammates before lifting the trophy high and then passing it on to his teammates.

Another explosion of emotions ensued in the stadium since, by then, the Rosenborg players, coaching staff, and fans could no longer suppress the insane excitement coursing through them. Some laughed, others sobbed while hugging tightly, and the rest roared out loud like a bunch of madmen in their state of drunken happiness. The excitement in those few moments was so infectious that even stoic fellas, like Coach Johansen and Zachary, couldn't avoid joining the celebrations.

Later that night.

Zachary was seated on a training mat in his living room, going through a routine of pre-bed yoga. He went through the exercises seriously, doing yoga pose after pose without cutting corners since he had a clear goal in mind concerning where he wanted his fitness to be.

He understood that he still had a long way to go and wasn't about to let the success of winning a low-tier double get to his head and stop him from achieving his goals. He'd even rejected several victory party invitations from his teammates right after the trophy ceremony earlier. He'd instead opted to return home and start on his post-match recovery routine with the intent of returning to full fitness in the shortest time possible.

As far as he was concerned, winning the Tippeligaen and the Norwegian Football Cup was just the beginning. His goal was unchanged, and he still intended to rise to the top of the footballing world. He yearned to bat heads and hold his own against the strongest and mightiest footballers in the world. However, to get to that level, he needed to spend more time in gyms or on the training field, honing his skills. Even with the system, he just couldn't cut all corners and rise to the top without putting in any effort.

It was that simple.

Of recent, he'd started watching highlights of football greats during his free time. He would spend some evenings before his 52-inch LCD TV screen scrutinizing past performances of phenomenal players like Ronaldinho Gaúcho, Maradona, Zinedine Zidane, Thierry Henry, Lionel Messi, and Cristiano Ronaldo. Be it their positioning during attacks, footwork, reactions in critical situations — he'd assessed them repeatedly with the intention of learning from them. However, he always felt totally humbled each time he witnessed those monsters destroying their opponents since his skills at the moment couldn't hold a candle to those of the greats.

For instance, Ronaldinho Gaúcho, at his best, could play around with top defenders, making them look like a bunch of nobodies. His technical skills, creativity, dribbling ability, and accuracy from free-kicks, as well as his use of tricks, feints, and no-look-passes, were simply a marvel. He singlehandedly paved the way for the emergence of sexy football with his mind-blowing displays.

At one time, the phenomenal Brazilian even looped the ball successively over the heads of a group of top defenders. With a couple of deft touches and a moment of immaculate ball-handling, he made them seem like a bunch of headless flies before stepping away gallantly like a king. Another time, he took on the whole Real Madrid backline, ducking and weaving through the ranks of one of the best defenses in the world at the time, before burying the ball in the back of the net. The man was a wizard with the ball that dazzled everyone with his tantalizing displays during games.

Zachary always felt goosebumps all over his skin after watching Ronaldinho Gaúcho's highlights. No player had ever made as big an impression on him as the phenomenal Brazilian. With a smile plastered on his face and feet made of gold, he could do the impossible and turn the game into what seemed like a circus show whenever he was on the field. There had never been a player like him ever, and Zachary admired him greatly.

So, how could he relax just after winning a low-tier double in Norway? How could he take a break when his skills were far from reaching even half of those of his idol - Ronaldinho?

Zachary was determined to utilize every second of the next few years of his professional career to raise his skills to a level much higher than the zenith of his previous life. With the system supporting him, he believed that attaining Ronaldinho-like footballing prowess or becoming the best player in a generation were achievable goals. As long as he worked hard and spent more of his time training, anything was possible.

Zachary's eyes glittered with resolve as he continued going through the simple yoga routine in his living room. Without any break, he performed the rest of the yoga poses meticulously. He didn't stop until thirty minutes later when he was sweating all over once again.

After letting out a breath, he stood up from the training mat and picked a bottle of water from the fridge, intending to hydrate himself. But then, he recalled that the system AI had already notified him about the Norwegian Football Cup mission completion a few minutes prior. So, without further ado, he decided to check on the mission rewards before anything else.

"System," he said after opening the bottle and chugging down some cold water. "Bring up the Norwegian Cup Serial mission completion details right away."

"DING"

"Command received," the AI's apathetic voice sounded in his mind the next instant. "Mission completion details for the Norwegian Football Cup Serial Challenge will be coming up shortly!"

"Great!"

Zachary could feel his heart racing just as the near-transparent crystal-like display manifested before him the next instant. Without further ado, he turned his full attention towards the contents of the system interface.

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#5 new messages

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CONGRATULATIONS

->You have completed the system mission (2013 Norwegian Football Cup Serial Challenge).

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->Mission Rewards

1) 6000 Juju-points

2) A-grade Physical-Conditioning-Elixir

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->Mission Summary

\*Milestone 1: Play all matches in the Cupen. The user must be among the starting eleven or a playing substitute for every tournament match. {Milestone Not Achieved; Rating C}

\*Milestone 2: Help your teammates win the finals and become the champions of the Cupen. {Milestone Achieved Successfully; Rating S+}

\*Milestone 3: Provide the most assists in the Cupen. {The user was third on the list of assist providers in the Cupen. Milestone Not Achieved, Rating C}

\*Milestone 4: Become the top scorer in the Cupen. {The user was the top scorer of the Cupen with six goals. Milestone Achieved Successfully; Rating S+}

\*Milestone 5: Become the MVP of the Cupen. {The user was contributed massively towards Rosenborg's Cupen victory, especially with regards to work rate, goals scored, and assists provided. Milestone Achieved Successfully; Rating S+}

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Overall Mission Rating: A

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Bonus Rewards

You have earned 1000 Bonus Juju points.

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Chapter 282 - Another System Upgrade

"This is great."

Zachary's eyes immediately glittered with boundless delight, looking like bright stars in the night sky. At long last, he had met the requirements for the system's 2013 Norwegian Football Cup Serial Challenge mission completion. He could hardly contain his excitement as he was about to enjoy more rewards from the system, which comprised the long-awaited A-graded physical-conditioning-elixir.

The elixir was the perfect complement for the vitality-enhancing-elixir, which he'd already obtained from the system. Consuming both panaceas would amplify their effects and enhance his fitness to a much higher level.

"System," he intoned. "Please show me the rest of my data."

"DING"

"Command received," the system AI replied. "User data coming up shortly on the interface."

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## SOCCER G.O.A.T SYSTEM

SYSTEM LEVEL: 3 (22,240/10000 Juju-points to level-up)

USER: Zachary Bemba

AGE: 18 years

TALENT ASSESSMENT: Grade-A

JUJU-POINTS: 22,240

(Evaluation: A promising and sensational young professional player)

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### USER MENU

\*USER STATS

\*G.O.A.T MISSIONS

\*SYSTEM SHOP

\*SYSTEM LOTTERY

\*SNOOPING TOOL

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NB: Please level up the system to unlock more functions.

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Zachary's heart skipped a bit on taking a glance at his stock of juju points. After completing both the Tippeligaen and Norwegian Cup serial challenges, he'd gained an incredible sum of 15,000 juju points from the system. Including his original 7240 points, he then possessed a total of 22,240 points, which was more than twice the amount he needed to upgrade the system.

"With all these Juju points, maybe I should finally upgrade the system," he mumbled to himself, sinking into a moment of contemplation.

Over the preceding few weeks, he'd been resisting the temptation to upgrade the system simply because he needed a reserve of Juju points for his day-to-day training needs. Both the G.O.A.T Skills Simulator and the weekly purchases of the physical-conditioning-elixirs required Juju points. So, his hands had been tied.

However, after completing the Norwegian Cup Serial challenge and acquiring a large reserve of juju points, he could no longer hold himself back. So, without further ado, he navigated to the home menu before clicking on the upgrade button, displayed in the top left corner of the near-transparent system interface.

"DING"

"The user has chosen to upgrade the system," The system AI's apathetic voice resounded within his mind right after his finger made contact with the crystal-like display.

"To proceed with the upgrade, the system will have to deduct 10,000 Juju points from the user's stock."

"Additionally, the system will shut down for eight hours during the upgrade process. The user will not be able to use any of the system functions or even summon the interface until the eight hours elapse."



"Does the user still wish to proceed with the upgrade? Please click on either the 'accept' or 'reject' buttons on the screen to confirm your choice."

Zachary blinked reflexively and fixed his gaze on the new contents of the interface. A 'commence upgrade' button had just floated to the front of all the contents of the screen. The 'accept' and the 'reject' buttons, mentioned by the AI, were below it and blinking bright red on the interface.

"Time waits for no man."

Zachary didn't waste time deliberating any longer. He'd already decided to upgrade the system, and nothing would change his mind. So, he clicked on the accept button to confirm and waited with bated breath.

"DING"

A new system notification resounded in his mind the next instant.

"SYSTEM ALERT!!"

"The user has confirmed an immediate upgrade of the system."

"10,000 Juju points will immediately be deducted from the user's current stock of Juju points to upgrade the system from level-3 to level-4."

"The user can check further details on the system interface."

Zachary had already focused all his attention on the system interface even as the AI's voice continued resounding within his mind. He could already see that the system was already in the process of upgrading to the next level just by looking at the messages flashing on the screen.

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"SYSTEM ALERT!!"

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SYSTEM UPGRADE INITIALIZING

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SYNCING AND SAVING USER DATA

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LOADING NEW PACKAGES

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REBOOT PROCESS COMMENCING IN 5, 4, 1, AND 0...

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The crystal-like display trembled slightly for a few seconds after the countdown reached zero before dimming almost abruptly and disappearing into thin air.

At that moment, Zachary could no longer summon the interface no matter how many times he tried. However, he was not worried since he had gone through the process before. With a light heart, he washed up quickly, then feasted on a light meal before jumping into bed for the night.

"Bzzt Bzzzt! Bzzt Bzzzt!"

Zachary woke up abruptly to the sound of his phone vibrating the following day. He opened his eyes and realized that he'd slept longer than he'd intended since it was already bright outside.

Without deliberating for long, he reached out with his hand and picked his phone from the bedside table. After glancing at the screen, he was surprised by the fact that the incoming call was from Emily. It was rare for his agent to call that early in the morning unless there was an emergency. So, without losing a second, he accepted the call and placed the phone next to his ear.

"Hello, Emily," he spoke into the phone after clearing his voice. "How's your morning?"

"My morning is as fine as it can be, Zachary," Emily replied from the other end of the line right away. "And how's yours?"

"My morning is also fine," Zachary was quick to reply. "But to what do I owe the pleasure of receiving such an early morning phone call from you? I hope it isn't to deliver some bad news?"

Emily chuckled. "I'm sorry for calling so early. But we need to meet a.s.a.p. and discuss some important business. Do you remember I promised to initiate talks with a few clubs as part of preparations for your transfer out of Norway mid-next year?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well," Emily said a bit hesitantly. "I've already initiated talks with a few clubs, and their immediate responses are very positive. One of the clubs sent scouts to watch your performance in the Europa League match against Salzburg and then the Cup finals. The club's representatives are very serious and hope to start negotiating personal terms with you right away."

Zachary couldn't help but crease his brows slightly. "But didn't I mention that I would only transfer out of Rosenborg mid-next year at the earliest? So, even if they table down the best offers, I'll still not leave Rosenborg until then."

"I'm aware of all that, Zachary," Emily said with an audible sigh. "And I mentioned that exact point to the scouts of the club. However, after witnessing your performance in the Cup finals and the Europa League game against Red Bull Salzburg, they insisted on tabling their offers right away. They are of the view that you could still come to a preliminary agreement with them even if you can't join them right away. They hope to secure your services before their competitors notice you."

"Ohhh!" Zachary said, a light bulb going off in his mind. It seemed the club that had noticed him was not confident in its financial muscle. Their scouts must have been worried that his growing skills on the pitch would attract more teams to vie for his services as time passed. So, they hoped to act fast and gain a cheap bargain by securing his signature before his market value could skyrocket out of their reach. That seemed to be the only plausible explanation.

"As long as they don't insist on me moving before the transfer window mid next year, I'm open to any other negotiations," Zachary said after a moment of deliberation. "It doesn't do us any harm to check out their current offers. Maybe, we'll get an offer that's hard to refuse if we play our cards right."

"That's good to hear," Emily said, her voice taking on a relaxed tone. "I was afraid you would flat-out refuse all negotiations until next year, which would make my job a lot harder. I'm glad you're open to talks even if you haven't considered moving yet."

"Ohhh! So, which club has already tabled an offer to you? You also need to note that I can't have any personal negotiations with representatives of any club unless they intend to trigger my buy-out clause."

"Don't worry about all that, Zachary," Emily said with a chuckle. "I'm the agent here, and I know the rules of the industry quite well. I can assure you that I won't allow you to do anything that will lead to a breach of your contract with Rosenborg. Regarding the clubs that have already tabled offers, I can't discuss that on the phone. We need to meet a.s.a.p. to discuss that in person."

"Oh! Okay," Zachary said. "So, where do we meet? And, at what time?"

"It would be best if we meet in the next hour," Emily replied. "Are you at home right now?"

"Yes. Why?"

"If it isn't an inconvenience, we can just meet and have our discussion at your place," Emily replied. "It would save us a lot of time as we don't have to first look for another meeting place. Moreover, it has been a long time since I came to your apartment. As an agent, I feel that it's irresponsible of me to neglect the living conditions of my most important client." She added jokingly.

Zachary suppressed a chuckle. "I guess I have no choice then since I can't hinder my agent's work in any way," he said. "Just come over. I'll wash up right away and wait for you here."

"Okay, great," Emily said from the other end of the line. "Then, see you in a few minutes, Zachary."

"See you in a few minutes," Zachary replied before hanging up.

Despite not wanting to leave Rosenborg for the time being, he was still excited to hear that a few big clubs were interested in him. He was really looking forward to his meeting with Emily.

"DING"

The system notification sound rang within his mind at that moment. Within an instant, the near-transparent bluish interface manifested out of thin air before him, even without being summoned.

Zachary's eyes glistened once again. He could hardly contain his delight.

The system was back online after going silent for eight hours through the night. So, he immediately pivoted his gaze onto the screen before him and began reading the messages flashing on and off the screen.

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#SYSTEM ALERT!!

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-> System upgraded successfully.

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LOADING NEW PACKAGES

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LEVEL-4 VERSION OF SOCCER G.O.A.T USER INTERFACE SUCCESSFULLY INITIALIZED

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LOADING AND SYNCING USER DATA

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Zachary kept his eyes on the crystal-like display while various system alerts flashed on and off the interface. A few seconds later, the familiar contents of the system's home menu appeared before him once again.

"Let's see what the new system has to offer," he mumbled, rubbing his hands together before starting to go through the contents of the new system interface.

Chapter 283 - New Function

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SOCCER G.O.A.T SYSTEM

SYSTEM LEVEL: 4 (12,240/100,000 Juju-points to level-up)

USER: Zachary Bemba

AGE: 18 years

TALENT ASSESSMENT: Grade-A

JUJU-POINTS: 12,240

(Evaluation: A promising and sensational young professional player)

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USER MENU

\*USER STATS

\*G.O.A.T MISSIONS

\*SYSTEM SHOP

\*SYSTEM LOTTERY

\*SNOOPING TOOL

\*TRAINING TOOLS (New)

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NB: Please level up the system to unlock more functions.

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Zachary couldn't help but do a double-take on realizing that a 'training tools' option had freshly appeared on the user drop-down menu of the system's interface. It was hard to miss since it was blinking red on the crystal-like display at that moment. Without losing a second, he tapped the button, hoping to figure out the functions of the new training tools element.

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\*TRAINING TOOLS (New)

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1) ->G.O.A.T Skills Simulator

\*Activate \*Deactivate

#Activation of Simulator costs 2 Juju points per hour

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2) ->Miniaturized Gravitational Field (New)

\*Activate \*Deactivate

#Costs for activating the gravitational field on the user's body are as follows:



(i) 1.1 gEarth gravity for an hour = 1 Juju point

(ii) 1.2 gEarth gravity for an hour = 2 Juju points

(iii) 1.3 gEarth gravity for an hour = 3 Juju points

(iv) 1.4 gEarth gravity for an hour = 4 Juju points

(v) 1.5 gEarth gravity for an hour = 5 Juju points.

(vi) 2.0 gEarth gravity for an hour = 10 Juju points

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Zachary was at the same time both surprised and confused after reading the information under the training tools function. The functions of G.O.A.T Skills Simulator were, of course, not new to him since he'd been using them for more than a year. What baffled him, instead, was the miniaturized gravitational field option.

"System," he called out within his mind. "Can you explain to me the functions of this miniaturized gravitational field? How can it help me improve my abilities?"

"DING"

The system notification sound reverberated within his mind the next instant.

"The miniaturized gravitational field is a very advanced training tool that can greatly elevate the user's fitness if used correctly," the AI replied. "It simply multiplies the gravitational force experienced by the user uniformly all over the body to increase efficiency during training sessions."

"All athletes out there train their fitness by exerting a controlled level of strain on various parts of their bodies. Some do weight training using dumbbells to grow their biceps, and others wear ankle weights to strengthen their calves. There are those who also use elastic bands to fortify their limbs, and so on and so on."

"However," the AI continued. "No matter what kind of advanced equipment athletes might use during training, they'll still never be able to train each and every part of their bodies perfectly. Even the most ingenious exercising regimens out there cannot help you strengthen more than 70% of all the important muscle groups in your body. Some muscles will always remain neglected over time simply because the training plans cannot apply the needed strain uniformly all over the body during exercise."

"However, the system's miniaturized gravitational field is different. The gravity amplified by the system affects all the muscles in your body uniformly. Say, for instance, you activate a 2\*gEarth gravitational field — then every part of your body will experience a strain that's twice your weight. So, even if you stand in one place doing nothing, every single muscle in your body will still be affected by the amplified gravity. In other words, you'll still be training even if you are stationary. The effects will even be better if you're able to exercise with simple routines, such as jumping jacks or shuttle runs under intensified gravity."

"Oh!" Zachary said, the fog in his mind instantly clearing. He could even feel his heartbeat accelerating after understanding the significance of the miniaturized gravitational field.

As long as he activated and maintained the gravitational field, he could train his body while walking, eating, or even sleeping. His body would be under constant strain — a condition that would force all his muscle groups to adapt by growing stronger. Then, if he were to deactivate the training tool after some time, his body would experience an explosion in fitness due to the liberation from the added strain.

Thinking about all that, Zachary realized that the miniaturized gravitational field was the perfect fitness training tool for him at that moment. As long as he consistently trained under its effects, his attributes, especially his endurance, stamina, and strength, would soar in the medium to long term. So, without further ado, he jumped out of bed, intent on testing out its effects there and then.

"System," he intoned after going through a simple stretching routine beside his bed. "Please activate the 2.0 gEarth gravity field on my body right away."

"DING"

"Command received," the AI replied. "The system will have to deduct ten Juju-points to activate the 2.0 gEarth gravity field for an hour. Should the system go ahead and activate the field?"

"Yes, please," Zachary was quick to reply while flexing his arms to get ready for the imminent additional strain that was about to descend upon his entire body. "Please go ahead and activate the field."

"Action confirmed," the AI intoned. "The system will apply the 2\*gEarth gravity on the user's body in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0..."

Zachary felt a formless wave of energy descend upon each and every part of his body after the countdown reached zero. Before he could catch a breather, he felt the weight of each segment of his body growing heavier as if a huge rock was pressing down on him. It was a very uncomfortable feeling since he could even feel his heartbeat slowing due to the increased weight of the blood flowing through his vessels.

However, since he was a professional athlete, who'd been training his body for years, he adapted to the amplified gravity after a few seconds. Without losing a moment, he started jogging around the bedroom slowly with the intent to test his endurance under the new physical constraints. However, he had to stop a few seconds later after feeling a pang of dizziness assault his mind.

"System," he said in-between gasps of breath. "Deactivate the 2g gravitational field immediately."

"Command received," the AI replied, its tone as emotionless as ever. "The system will deactivate the 2\*gEarth gravity field in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0..."

Zachary felt the pressure on his entire body gradually dissipate when the countdown reached zero. At that moment, he felt like a fish that had just returned to a pool of water after spending a few minutes on land. "How come the effects of this 2g gravity on my body are this bad?" He wondered out loud.

"DING"

The user should note that being under 2g gravity is like gaining twice the user's current body weight in an instant," the AI chimed in. "Thus, it will take time for the user to adapt and function normally for a

few minutes with such an increased double weight. The system thus recommends for the user to start with 1.2 g gravity for light training and 1.5 g gravity for heavy training sessions at the beginning. But even so, the user will have to tone down the intensity of the exercises considerably while under the 1.5g miniaturized gravity."

"Oh!" Zachary exclaimed. "Why didn't you mention all that before? Okay, please activate the 1.2g gravity for the moment."

"Command confirmed," the AI intoned. "The system will apply the 1.2\*gEarth gravity on the user's body in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0..."

Another wave of energy instantly covered Zachary's entire body. But that time around, the force acting on his body was much weaker. It was just perfect for him with his A-graded fitness as he felt only slightly heavier. He even guessed that he could endure and function almost as usual under the effects of such a gravitational field.

"System," he said with a grin. "Please maintain the 1.2g gravity on my body starting from now. I wish to start training my body constantly all day under the effects of the increased gravity. Let's see if maintaining this field all day for a few weeks can quickly enhance my fitness."

"Command confirmed," the AI's voice resounded in Zachary's mind. "The system will subtract two Juju points every hour and maintain the 1.2g gravitational field until the user communicates otherwise. The user should also note that consuming physical-conditioning-elixirs while under amplified gravity will have a much better effect."

Zachary's eyes gleamed with anticipation. "Then I'll start consuming some B-graded elixirs while training under the gravitational field. Are there any other changes in the workings of the system after the upgrade?"

"Yes, there are," the AI replied. "The user's authority has increased after the system upgraded from level-3 to level-4. As a result, the user can now learn a maximum of two G.O.A.T Skills before the next system upgrade. The user will also be able to trigger sudden missions much more easily."

"Then, that's good," Zachary mumbled, his eyes crinkling at the corners. Before the upgrade, Zachary could only learn one skill after each upgrade. So, he was very excited when he discovered that he could purchase an extra skill from the system.

Zachary first stole a peek at his bedside clock and noticed that it was only 8:35 AM. Only a few minutes had elapsed since he'd ended his call with Emily. So, he figured he still had some time to kill before she arrived for the meeting.

"System," he said, settling back on his bed. "Bring up my G.O.A.T Skills data."

"DING"

"Command received," the AI responded right away. "The user's G.O.A..T Skills data coming up on the interface right away."

#### Chapter 284 - New Skills In The System Shop

Zachary blinked and focused on the contents of the bluish near-transparent interface after hearing the system AI's reply.

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->G.O.A.T Skills: 7

(i) ZINEDINE-PIRLO MENTAL JUJU

[1st-level: Progress: 100%]

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(ii) ZACHARY-ARROW-SHOT

[Progress: 1st level mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(iii) BEND-IT LIKE BECKHAM JUJU

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(iv) CRUYFF-TURN

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(v) RONALDINHO ELASTICO DRIBBLE

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(vi) DEAD-BALL SPECIALIST JUJU (Quasi-Passive skill)

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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(vii) MARSEILLE TURN

[Progress: 100%, Mastered beyond 100% completion]

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"Awesome!"

Zachary felt a sense of contentment flooding his entire being after perusing through his G.O.A.T Skills data.

Over the past year, he'd worked tirelessly to improve all the skills within his repertoire. He had even spent most of his free time on the pitch or within the system simulator, honing his skills with a one-track mind. As a result, he'd mastered all the G.O.A.T skills beyond a hundred percent completion and could freely use them on the pitch, no matter the situation.

He could perform an elastico dribble or any other skill even during the most critical of situations during a match. He was already a grandmaster as the techniques were basically already a part of his style and ingrained into his muscle memory. So, there wasn't anything stopping him from learning more G.O.A.T Skills from the system at that moment.

"System," he said, rubbing his hands together in anticipation after taking another peek at his bedside clock. "I would like to purchase some new G.O.A.T Skills from the shop."

"Command received," the AI replied. "Data loading, please wait."

Zachary could feel his heart palpitating as he observed the near-translucent crystal-like display before him. He watched with bated breath as the contents of the interface flashed and morphed abruptly into the system shop menu.

Within an instant, the purchase-skills tab grew more prominent on the interface while blinking red before flickering slightly and turning into six glittering skill cards. They gradually floated forward and soon hovered before everything else on the interface.

On the cards were pictures of various famous footballers, namely Cristiano Ronaldo, Robinho de Souza, Zinedine Zidane, Luis Suarez, Robert Lewandowski, and Steven Gerrard, all working with the ball in the images, respectively. And below each of the cards were a few words inscribed in beautiful calligraphy.

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1) CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju: For positioning and heading accuracy within and outside the box. Requires at least S- grade Body Control to master the skill. [Costs 2,000 Juju-points]

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2) Robinho Step-Over Juju: For dribbling, tricks, and feints. Requires at least S- grade Body Control and S- grade Agility to master the skill. [Costs 2,000 Juju-points]

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3) Zinedine Touch Magic: Zone control, heightened technical ability in crucial moments, passing in all ranges, and deadly momentary dribbling. With the Zinedine Touch Magic, you can leave opponents in the dust with one or two magical touches. Requires at least S- grade Body Control to master the skill. [Costs 4,000 Juju-points]

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4) Box-Vampire Suarez: The true art of positioning, skipping past opponents, and deadly finishing within the box. You'll be able to draw blood every time your opponents grow lax within the box. Requires at least S- grade Body Control and S- grade Agility to master the skill. [Costs 4,000 Juju-points]

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5) Box-Assassin Lewandowski: Most of the time, no one can stop you when you receive the ball within the box. Requires at least S- grade Body Control and S- grade Agility attributes to master the skill. [Costs 4,000 Juju-points]



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6) Rocket-Launcher Steven Gerrard: Immaculate positioning and deadly shooting outside the 18-yard box. The keepers will fear you when you receive the ball in the final third. Requires at least S- grade Body Control, S- grade Agility, and S- grade Strength attributes to master the skill.

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NB: The user can only learn a maximum of two skills before the next system upgrade. To obtain more opportunities to learn more skills, the user can upgrade the system at any time.

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Zachary let out a breath after perusing through the information on the interface. He was more frustrated than excited at that moment simply because he didn't meet the requirements to master even a single new skill available in the system shop. He felt that the situation was really unfair.

Several legendary skills that could make the careers of any pro footballer out there were before him on the system screen. However, he couldn't touch them since his fitness was lacking. At that juncture, he was like a eunuch, spending a night with several nude beautiful women. His dreams were so close but yet still so far.

"What a bummer!"

Zachary decided to close the interface immediately due to his growing frustration. He'd decided to open the system shop once more only after he'd finished consuming the A-graded vitality-enhancing-elixir a few weeks from then. Hopefully, a few of his attributes would have improved to the S-grading by then, and he would be able to purchase a few skills.

"What's meant to be mine will eventually be mine," Zachary mumbled to encourage himself. "There's no need to rush."

Without wasting any more time, he rushed towards the bathroom to wash up since he was sure Emily was about to arrive for the meeting. He didn't want his agent to find him still in his pajamas despite the heads up she'd given him.

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"Di-ing-diing!"

The doorbell sound reverberated through the apartment at nine sharp that morning. Zachary, of course, didn't waste time heading towards the door as he'd been waiting for his agent to arrive for a few minutes already. He wasn't afraid to let her into his place as everything was in order and all the unwashed training clothes well-hidden in the wardrobe. At that moment, he was simply the perfect image of an immaculate host welcoming a long-awaited guest.

"Ta?da," Emily said, beaming as soon as the door opened. "Good morning once again, Zachary. I'm sorry to intrude."

"No problem," Zachary said, smiling back. "You're welcome here any time." He added, giving her a once over.

She'd worn a pretty pull-neck sweater over a pair of fitting blue lady's formal pants that brought out her shapely figure that day. She looked dazzling, like a supermodel showing off some trendy office wear fashion brand, as she stood there in the doorway waiting.

"Well," she said, the corners of her lips lifting slightly into an amused smile. "For how long are you planning to stare at me? Aren't you even going to invite me in?"

"Oh, sorry," Zachary said, smiling sheepishly. "Please come in and make yourself at home."

"Thank you," Emily replied and stepped past Zachary, heading into the apartment. "Your place is quite nice and well organized."

"Thank you," Zachary replied with a smile as he followed after her into the living room. On the inside, he was smirking since he'd just organized the entire place only a few minutes prior. "Should I get you some breakfast, or should we move straight to discussing business?"

"I suggest we move straight to business since I'm almost running late for my next meeting," Emily replied, settling down on one of the sofas in the living room. "Moreover, I already took some breakfast at my hotel early in the morning. So, I can't stomach any more food right now."

"Then, I'll get you a glass of juice before we start," Zachary said, turning around and heading towards the fridge. "I would feel very guilty if you came to my place and left without even enjoying a drink. At least, humor me by having a glass of cocktail juice prepared by myself."

Emily chuckled. "Okay, then," she said, seeming amused. "It won't hurt to take some juice as we discuss business.. Thank you for your hospitality."

#### Chapter 285 - Prominent Football Clubs Showing Interest

Sunlight was already streaming golden through the living room window in a well-mannered announcement of the just risen sun. Zachary smiled and glanced squarely at Emily, who was seated on an opposite couch, sipping on her cocktail juice. "So, which clubs have already shown interest in acquiring my services," he asked.

"Well," Emily replied, a mysterious smile framing her face. "Five teams have already since I put the word out that you were about to transfer out of Rosenborg."

"The most serious of those, so far, is Tottenham Hotspur, which by the way, has already sent scouts to view two of your matches. It's also the team that suggested the prospect of coming to an earlier agreement with you, even if you intend to transfer mid next year."

"Tottenham!" Zachary mumbled, his heart skipping a beat. He hadn't expected such a top league team to show interest right after he'd just hinted about wanting to transfer. Had the team been following his progress before he even made his intentions known? Zachary didn't know. However, he wasn't totally against the possibility of joining the London-based team when he transferred out of Rosenborg the following year.

Tottenham was a club that would be teeming with several world-class talents in the following few years. Phenomenal players like Harry Kane, Christian Eriksen, Emmanuel Adebayor, Kyle Walker, and Son

Heung-min would be with the London-based club for several seasons. So, Zachary figured he could fit in quite well and possibly have a marked impact with such a talent-packed squad.

Moreover, Mauricio Pochettino, a world-class tactician, was about to take the reins at the club. The Argentine coach was good at developing talent and rising to big occasions. His teams usually played a very aggressive high-pressing attacking style of football. Zachary was tempted to work with such a manager for the next few years of his career.

"To be honest," Emily continued after taking a sip on her juice. "Tottenham is my home team in London. So, I gave them a slight advantage by informing them first about an incredible client of mine that wants to transfer next year. Surprisingly, they reacted faster than I expected and even sent scouts to your matches. But if you're totally against joining Tottenham, then we can be patient until a few more clubs table down their offers."

"I'm not totally against joining Tottenham," Zachary said, looking up to hold his agent's gaze. "If they can offer me personal terms that I find hard to refuse, then I'll consider joining them after ending my tenure at Rosenborg."

"Oh!" Emily said, beaming. "And what are these personal terms that you'll find hard to refuse? Say they offer you £50,000 per week. That's £200,000 per month, which is more than twice what you're about to start earning from Rosenborg next month. Moreover, when you top that up with match bonuses, you might end up hitting even £80,000 per week, which would make you among the highest earners at the club. Is that an offer you can refuse?"

"The offer sounds a bit attractive," Zachary replied with a smile. "But even then, Tottenham will still have to come to a preliminary agreement with Rosenborg first about my transfer fee before we start any serious negotiations. If that fails, their only option would be resorting to triggering my buy-out clause. But all those are matters to be tended to next year. I don't see how they can even suggest I come to a preliminary agreement with them more than six months before I intend to transfer."

"You can leave all that to me, Zachary," Emily said in a poised tone. "My job as an agent is to understand your needs and then make them happen by negotiating with the parties that might be interested in your services. After that, I'll handle all the contractual issues with the parties involved and get you a good deal. As long as I know what you want, I'll try my best to get it for you."

"On the other hand, your roles include continuing to play incredible football on the pitch and making your intentions known to me," Emily continued while holding Zachary's gaze. "That's why I asked whether a weekly salary of 50,000 British Pounds from Tottenham would be an offer you would find hard to refuse. I need the answer so that I can strategize on how to approach the Tottenham scouts."

"Well," Zachary said, letting out a breath. "£50,000 per week is quite an attractive offer. But, it's not an offer that I would find hard to refuse since it'll be just about twice what I'll be getting from Rosenborg starting this coming December. Only if there is a two-year contract offer, with a weekly salary of at least £80,000, will I readily join a club at the level of Tottenham in the Premier League."

"But," Zachary continued without waiting for Emily to respond. "I know well that I might be setting my goals too high in the skies. So, that's why I suggest we wait for other clubs to table down their offers before making a decision."

"That's also a good strategy," Emily said, nodding. "However, if I manage to convince Tottenham to agree to pay you £80,000 plus bonuses when you join them next year. What then? Will you agree to come to a preliminary agreement with them?"

Zachary couldn't help but fall into a moment of contemplation after hearing the question. Joining Tottenham was not all that bad. They had a promising squad that would make it to the finals of the Champions League at one point in the future. However, Zachary couldn't help but wonder why a team brimming with talent couldn't win any major trophies during his previous life?

They had a good coach and a good squad with the class and quality. So what was stopping them from winning at the very least a single English FA Trophy in more than a decade? It was simply a puzzle that made Zachary not readily agree to join Tottenham, even if they made him a sky-high offer at that moment.

However, Zachary was a player who didn't want to become a coward and avoid all challenging situations, especially since he was living his second life. He didn't just want to join giants like Barcelona, Real Madrid, or Bayern, where he would enjoy straightforward success and be sure to win trophies as long as he was part of those squads. As far as he was concerned, that would bore him and drive him wishy-washy to the very core.

What he yearned for, instead, was a challenge — whereby he would have to toil for results by giving more than a hundred percent effort during each match. He wanted to feel the pressure constantly

weighing upon his shoulders before each game. He yearned to feel the adrenaline pumping through his veins whenever he marched onto the pitch to face an opponent. Only then would he be able to enjoy football to its fullest and make the best of his career. And, he figured that Tottenham would be the right team to give him that challenge after a few moments of deliberation.

Various thoughts flashed through Zachary's mind as he tried to figure out an answer to Emily's question. He remained silent for a few minutes as he mused over the prospect of joining the London-based team - Tottenham. But in the end, he still chose to wait for a while before making any decisions.

"Well!?" Emily pressed after seeing Zachary lock eyes with her again. "What is your answer?"

Zachary smiled, shaking his head. "If Tottenham does trigger my release clause and then makes me an £80,000 a week salary on top of bonuses offer, I'll find myself hard-pressed to reject them. But before making any final decisions, I would like to wait and see which other teams might be interested in my signature. You never know whether there might be a more fitting team for me among those."

"If I'm getting you right," Emily said with a smile. "You'll most likely sign for Tottenham if they offer you good personal terms, which include a weekly wage of at least £80,000. But you still want me to drag out the negotiations with them so that you can have time to determine whether there are more fitting teams interested in your services. Is that right?"

"Yes, exactly," Zachary replied, nodding.

"Okay, then," Emily said, letting out a breath. "I'll do as you wish. Before I forget, four more clubs have been following your progress closely over the past few months. Their representatives have even contacted me a few times, trying to find out about your availability. But, when I informed them that you would only transfer out of Rosenborg next year, they relaxed their efforts."

"Which clubs?" Zachary asked, his eyes glittering with expectation.

"There is Ajax, the Dutch giants," Emily replied. "There's also Red Bull Leipzig and Borussia Dortmund, both from Germany. And finally, there's also Red Bull Salzburg."

"Oh!" Zachary said, trying to recall details about those four teams. "We shouldn't consider Leipzig or Salzburg as both teams are in low-tier leagues at the moment. As for Ajax, I don't think that the Dutch League would fit my goals in the next few years. So, it's also out of the equation, and that leaves us with Borussia Dortmund, which might be a good prospect for me. But we should first consider a few more offers from the Premier League clubs before considering Dortmund."

"Okay," Emily said, beaming. "I can now see that you would prefer to play in the Premier League over the other leagues. So, I'll keep my ears close to the ground and try to find out which other clubs there, aside from Tottenham, might be a good fit for you and also in need of your services. Should I make any progress, then I'll notify you immediately."

"That would be best," Zachary said. "Thank you for your hard work."

"You're welcome."

"By the way, you'd previously mentioned that a few companies, including Nike, Pepsi, EA Sports, were interested in my signature! So, how far with the endorsement negotiations?"

"Well," Emily said, sighing. "Negotiations have stalled a bit over the past week. All the companies seem to be waiting to see how you'll perform in your last two Europa League group matches before tabling their final offers. Should you put up an incredible performance and then help Rosenborg qualify for the round of thirty-two, then we'll have ourselves plenty of offers. But if you perform poorly in those two matches, we might not get any more offers until next year. It should be as simple as that."

"That's understandable," Zachary replied, nodding. "Those international brands probably require stars that have some fame across multiple countries. Otherwise, it would be a loss if they took on a player who's mainly known in a single country, like me."

"I'm glad you understand," Emily said with a smile. "What is most important for you is to focus on performing at your best during the upcoming matches. Everything else, be it endorsements or transfer offers, will fall into line as long as you perform well. That's a simple truth."

"Don't worry," Zachary replied, tone poised. "I'll give more than a hundred percent because I yearn for my team to qualify for the next stage of the Europa League. I only hope my teammates are as motivated as I am."

"I'm glad that you're very motivated," Emily said, smiling and standing up abruptly. "But please don't allow any other factors to affect your career. For the moment, try to put your career above everything else, whether a girlfriend or partying or any other enjoyment in life. There's simply no need to hurry since you'll have all the time to enjoy later on in your career or even after when you retire. Get to the top first, and everything else will fall in line. Okay?"

"Don't worry," Zachary replied. "I've always put my career before everything else in my life."

"Then, I'm glad," Emily said, beaming. "It's getting late, so I have to rush to my next meeting, which by the way, is with the two Tottenham scouts. I'll update you about the outcomes afterward."

"Okay, then." Zachary nodded. "I'll be waiting."

#### Chapter 286 - A Typical Fruitful Day

As promised, Zachary received an update from Emily about the stand of Tottenham Hotspur's scouts later that morning. The club wasn't totally against offering him hard-to-refuse personal terms as long as he showed he was worth it. He only needed to put up more spectacular performances, especially during Rosenborg's next two Europa League matches, and show a willingness to join the London-based club. Then everything else, whether a sky-high weekly wage or bountiful match bonuses, would be on the table for discussion.

Zachary could tell that Tottenham was pretty much interested in signing him based on their attitude and their reaction to Emily's conditions. It seemed they hoped to sign him immediately since they were very accommodating during the entire negotiation process.

Be that as it may, he didn't let the prospect of joining a top league side unsettle him and disrupt his training plans. He understood that he could only return to targeted intensive training a day early by recuperating faster. So, he resumed his post-match recovery routine, beginning with a yoga session right after ending his phone call with Emily.

He was still yet to push most of his fitness attributes to the S-grading to meet the requirements for learning a few more G.O.A.T Skills from the system. He had to spend more time in the gym or on the



training ground, working tirelessly with a one-track mind since that was the only way to improve his fitness to the next level.

Based on experiences from his previous life, he only had a small window of about six years, at least until he was 24 years, to raise his skills to a world-class level. He had to take advantage of that short duration when his body was still maturing to hone his skills and rise to the top of the footballing world. Otherwise, he would find it hard to make any improvements after hitting the age of 25 since his physical development would stagnate, following the fundamental laws of nature.

The hours flashed by quickly as he went through his yoga session. Soon, it was past noon. Zachary enjoyed a sumptuous home-cooked lunch before jogging all the way to Lerkendal to meet up with Coach Bjørn Peters, his fitness instructor.

Together, they immediately started going through a simple stretching routine, then performed agility drills before diving into an intensive endurance and body strengthening workout. As usual, they worked extra hard, only taking a few minutes of rest in-between exercises. They were so immersed to the point that they didn't even bother to pause when it started drizzling a few minutes later.

Remarkably, Zachary was under the effects of the system's 1.2 g Earth miniaturized gravitational field the entire time. As a result, his body was under augmented physical strain, causing the session to turn out to be more rewarding than usual. By the time they called it a day after warming down in the evening, he was out of breath and sweating profusely.

His weariness even elicited a rare trace of worry from his fitness trainer. But Zachary just waved off the concern with an excuse of still being fatigued from the previous day's match.

He wasn't worried that he would break himself since he had an ample supply of the system's elixirs. He could still exercise as much as he wanted under the increased gravity and recover within two to three hours after consuming a B-graded physical-conditioning-elixir. That was the beauty of having the system functions supporting his training in the background.

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In the evening, after training, Zachary met up with Camilla at the Skybar of the Clarion Hotel, located close to the harbor. The restaurant had an exciting menu based on fantastic regional products that

combined Nordic cuisine with rustic American flavors and sophisticated Asian traditions. It was the perfect place to relax and mingle in Trondheim while enjoying a drink from the bar or just listening to great music.

Zachary and Camilla immersed themselves in the ambient atmosphere and enjoyed a great dinner there. They gorged themselves with various exquisite dishes before heading to Zachary's place for the night at around 9:00 PM. There, they immersed themselves in their world of passion and gave rise to an enthralling deep night sonata. They took their time exploring one another and soaking themselves into each other's comfort until the wee hours of the morning.

"So, are you ready for your upcoming Europa League matches yet?" Camilla inquired as she snuggled up to Zachary just a few minutes after their heated battle. Her emerald-green eyes shone like a pair of rare luminous crystals in the dimly-lit room, and her skin still glittered slightly as an after-effect of intense passion. Even without make-up, she could still catch the attention of the most stoic of men. She was still as alluring and beautiful as ever.

Zachary smiled while caressing her round and plump backside before answering, "I'm not ready yet since I'm still recovering from the fatigue of yesterday's finals. However, I'm sure I'll be ready by Wednesday. And, of course, I will take part in the match without any worries."

"That's good to hear then," Camilla said, tracing circles on Zachary's perfectly lined chest muscles. "I really hope you win the remaining two group matches so that you can qualify for the knock-out stages. What's the team's situation like at the moment?"

"All the players are in high spirits after winning the Norwegian Cup. As long as we prepare adequately, we should be able to give our upcoming opponents a run for their money."

"Perfect," Camilla mumbled excitedly. "Then, there's a high chance that you might win a treble if all your teammates remain in good condition and continue working hard. Right?"

"That's hard to say," Zachary replied, shaking his head. "There are a lot of tough teams in the competition, like Napoli, Valencia, Sevilla FC, and Lyon. Moreover, all the third-placed teams in the Champions League groups, including giants like Juventus and FC Porto, might also join the contention for the Europa League Trophy during the knock-out phase. So, I cannot be sure how far we'll go when we have to face such tough opponents in upcoming matches."

"But if it's you, you can make the impossible happen on the pitch," Camilla said, patting Zachary's chest. "As long as you give your best and keep on scoring to help Rosenborg win, then you never know how far you'll reach. You might even find yourself winning the finals before you know it."

Zachary suppressed a chuckle. "I like your confidence in me. And yes, you're right. We merely have to do our best, and everything else is up to luck or another higher power. Thanks for this bit of encouragement, Camilla."

"You're welcome," Camilla's replied coyly. "By the way, my boss just informed me today to tell you about an upcoming Audi photo shoot on the 3rd of next December. Our brand will be launching a couple of new car models before Christmas. So, as an Audi ambassador, it's part of your responsibility to help us market them."

"Is it just a photo-shoot?" Zachary pressed.

"Yes, just a photo-shoot. You'll only need to pose in front of the new vehicles for a few photos, and that's it. We'll use the images for marketing all around Norway. Moreover, if you attend, there might be an exciting surprise for you afterward."

"Then, I'll most likely be there," Zachary replied with a smile. "But, I have to run this by my agent first before making the final decision. I hope that's okay with you!"

"It's okay," Camilla replied. "Go ahead and do what you've got to do. You can tell her to contact my boss or me if she has any doubts she needs to clarify. Where are you spending Christmas, by the way?"

"I'll probably spend the entire time training within Trondheim," Zachary replied, sighing. "I have to try my best to refine my skills before the start of next season. So, I can't waste any time, even during the Christmas season."

"Ohhh!" Camilla said, snuggling even closer to Zachary. "And here I thought that we might be able to spend some time together on vacation this holiday season. It's really a bummer that you have to train even during holidays?"

Zachary sighed and shifted about to make himself more comfortable. "If it's two or three days, then we can still go for the vacation. But if the vacation is any longer, then I probably won't have the time."

"Three days will be enough," Camilla was quick to reply. "We can head to either Stockholm or Amsterdam on 24th December, and enjoy Christmas there. By the time you return to Trondheim, you'll be well-rested and able to give more than a hundred percent during training."

"Okay," Zachary just mumbled incoherently in agreement since he was already dozing off. "But, let's sleep for now since I have to wake up early for training."

"Good night, then," Camilla said.

"Good night."

#### Chapter 287 - Unexpected Breakthrough I

Zachary woke up a bit late the following day, feeling refreshed. He took a peek at his bedside clock and noticed that it was already 8:30 AM. Without dilly-dallying, he jumped out of bed and washed up before having a sumptuous breakfast with Camilla.

Thirty minutes later, he dropped Camilla off at Møller Bil Trondheim, her workplace, and then continued to Lerkendal to attend Rosenborg's official training that day. He navigated the early morning traffic at a leisurely pace while listening to the newest catchy tunes on his car stereo. He arrived at the gates of Lerkendal a little more than thirty minutes later when the late autumn sun had long risen above the horizon in the east.

He wasn't worried, though, since he was sure that the official training that day would start at 10:00 AM. He still had some time to kill before the coaches arrived on the training grounds.

Zachary slowly pulled his R8 GT into one of the parking spots allocated to Rosenborg players before heading towards the training ground.

Wherever he passed, the Rosenborg employees working in the stadium greeted him enthusiastically and, of course, congratulated him on winning yet another trophy. Some went as far as asking him to sign autographs for them as he made his way across the green towards the locker room.

Zachary could obviously see that the employees held him in high esteem. So, he returned their greetings politely and even signed plenty of autographs before continuing on his way with a slight swagger in his step. On the inside, he was swelling with pride since he'd finally managed to get recognition from both Rosenborg's fans and employees.

It had only been less than a year since he began playing professionally for the Troll Kids. However, he'd already helped the Norwegian giants win the domestic double by becoming a top scorer and MVP for Norway's two most prestigious tournaments. So, he could hardly contain the sense of contentment swelling within him.

A few minutes later, Zachary couldn't help but smile when he got to the Lerkendal training grounds. His mood lifted when he noticed that the atmosphere around the whole Rosenborg team was exceptionally energetic.

It seemed that winning the Norwegian Football Cup had boosted his teammates' morale and obviously pushed them to work even harder in preparation for the two remaining Europa League group matches.

Zachary could see that all the players on the training grounds were in high spirits that morning. Most were spread across the field in groups, going through various fitness drills. They were all focused, performing routines without cutting corners, even though the coaches hadn't arrived to supervise them yet. For that reason, the atmosphere on the field was so intense to the point that Zachary felt guilty just standing there on the sidelines watching his teammates train.

"Zach!!"

Zachary's ears picked someone calling out his name at that moment. He turned around and noticed that Mikael Dorsin, Rosenborg's assistant captain, was waving at him from somewhere in the middle of the pitch. With him were four other players, namely: Tore Reginiussen, John Chibuike, Ole Seln?s, and Eric Bailly, all going through a simple stretching routine. "Don't just stand there on the sidelines, gawking," the assistant captain hollered out again after a moment. "Come here and join our drill."

"Okay, just give me a minute," Zachary yelled back, grinning. Without further ado, he fixed his shin guards into his stockings, tied his shoelaces, and sprinted towards Mikael's group like a whirlwind.

"Good morning, Zachary," Mikael was the first to greet him while stretching out a hand for a handshake. "How was your day off yesterday?"

"Good morning to you, too, Mikael," Zachary replied, taking the hand. "My day off was fine and pretty relaxing."

"For once, you're among the last to arrive on the training ground," Mikael said as Zachary took turns greeting the other players in the group. "It's quite a rare occurrence."

Zachary just chuckled without giving a reply. "Shouldn't we be getting back to training?" He said after a moment.

"Okay, then," Mikael said, nodding. "It must already be 9:30 AM. We only have about thirty minutes before the coaches arrive. So, guys, what do you suggest? Should we continue with the stretching? Or should we dive into agilities right away?"

"Zachary," Tore Reginiussen, the Rosenborg captain, chimed in. "Have you warmed up already?"

"Not yet," Zachary replied straight away. "I went through a yoga routine before leaving home. But my muscles must have already cooled down since more than thirty minutes have already elapsed."

"Then, let's continue with the stretching routine for five more minutes," the captain said, glancing at the rest. "That way, we'll let Zachary warm-up before diving into agility and body coordination drills."

"That's perfect."

The rest of the players concurred and immediately started going through a simple stretching routine. They began with neck stretches and then transitioned to upper body warm-up exercises before ending the regimen with lower body stretches. After taking a minute's break, they dived into agilities and body coordination drills right there in the middle of the field.

They soon became so engrossed, stepping quickly through agility ladders and cones, with a hundred percent concentration for the next few minutes. In no time, their shirts were already drenched in sweat due to the intensity of the exercise.

Zachary, on his part, felt that the exercises were much easier than before. His motions through the agility ladders were smooth and immaculate as if they were second nature to him. He breathtakingly went through all the body coordination exercises, including the lateral plyometric jumps, the forward-running high-knee drills, and the shuttle runs without breaking a sweat.

His training efficiency was out of this world since there were no wasted movements as he performed the drills. He was still full of energy when the coaches arrived on the training ground at around 10:00 AM.. On the other hand, most of his colleagues, except Eric Bailly, were slightly out of breath by then.

#### Chapter 288 - Unexpected Breakthrough II

"Your stamina is really monstrous," Mikael Dorsin commented, looking at Zachary as if he was a beast in human skin after the exercise. "How's it that you still haven't broken a sweat even after going through all those intensive drills? You really do make the rest of us ashamed."

"Well," Zachary said after chugging down some water. "I joined your group a bit late. That might be why I'm not yet out of stamina even after going through all those agility and body coordination drills."

"Come on, man," Tore, the captain, chimed in, creasing his brows. "Are you implying that all of us are in this worn-out state because of that one stretching routine we went through before you arrived?"

Zachary chuckled, choosing not to respond. However, on the inside, he was also confused. Usually, he would be nearly out of stamina after going through such an intensive thirty-minute training regimen of agility and body coordination drills.

However, it was different that morning. During the exercise, Zachary had felt like all the drills were second nature since he could control his body perfectly. As a result, he'd avoided unnecessary movements during the exercise and managed to utilize his stamina reserves efficiently, without any wastage.

"Could it be that my stamina and my endurance attributes have made another breakthrough? Or could it be my body control this time around?"

Various thoughts flashed through Zachary's mind as he continued going through a warming-down stretching routine to loosen his muscles after the exercising session. He was a bit tempted to open the system interface immediately and check whether his attributes had experienced any changes.

However, a whistle rung across the entire training ground a moment later, forcing him to put a halt to his actions. He looked around and noticed that the technical staff had finished setting up the necessary equipment, including slalom poles, training dummies, cones, and Astro passing hoops, around the training ground. The official Rosenberg training session for that day was about to commence.

"Guys," Mikael said, glancing around. "It's time for the official training. Let's head to the center circle before Coach Johansen starts throwing a tantrum."

The others, including Zachary, laughed while beginning to march towards the center circle, where Coach Johansen and his assistants were waiting. They moved with haste and soon joined the ranks of the other Rosenberg players who were already starting to form a semi-circle before the group of coaches.

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"Good morning, everyone," Coach Johansen said as soon as all the Rosenberg players had organized themselves in the center circle. His face was all smiles, and he looked particularly spirited that day.

"Good morning, coach," the players replied enthusiastically in chorus. The players were also full of energy and seemed quite motivated that morning.

"Let me first take this opportunity to congratulate all of you upon becoming the Norwegian champions last weekend," the coach said in an animated voice, glancing around. "You have all been working hard ever since the start of this year, toiling day in, day out, and that's why we have managed to win a domestic double for the first time in years. Your hard work has created a new chapter of success for Rosenberg, and that should fill us with pride since we're already the Norwegian Champions on two fronts."

"However," the coach continued, his tone turning somber. "I would also like to remind you that we still have some more work to do before ending our football season this year."



"In our second-last Europa League group game, we'll face Standard Liège away in Belgium next Thursday on 28th November. After that, on 12th December, we'll have to take on IF Elfsborg here at Lerkendal in our last Europa League group game."

The coach swept his gaze across the players arranged before him in a semi-circle. "I guess each one of you by now knows how crucial those two games are for us. We must win those two matches if we hope to qualify for the knock-out stages of the Europa League. We can't lose or draw against any of our two opponents. That would spell the end of our Europa League campaign. We're not allowed to falter since we need all six points from the two group games to qualify. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

"Good," the coach said, nodding. "Since we all seem to be on the same page, there's no need for more words. We'll now begin today's training session with the sole aim of making initial preparations for Thursday's Europa League fixture."

"We only have about two days remaining to Thursday. So, I expect each and every one of you to give a hundred percent effort in both today's and tomorrow's training sessions. If you do that, we'll increase our chances of winning against Standard Liège, come Thursday evening. Are you with me, guys?"

"Yes, coach," all the players roared back enthusiastically.

"Okay, guys, that's the spirit," Coach Johansen boomed, clapping his hands. "In today's session, we'll begin with a dynamic warm-up led by Coach Rolf Aas as usual. We'll then go through some agilitys and do some ball work before diving into the tactics for Thursday's game."

"One more issue, before I forget," Coach Johansen said, his tone becoming somber once again. "The medics have just informed me that Nicki Nielsen is still injured and won't be with us for the Thursday match. So, we'll have to play with a 4-4-2 formation against Standard Liège to compensate for his absence on our striking line. Guys, I expect you to familiarize yourselves with a fast-paced counter-pressing game before Thursday since we'll have fewer numbers in the midfield than usual. Reserve strikers should also work extra hard to fill Nicki's shoes on Thursday. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

"Then, let's get this training session started right away," Coach Johansen said with a smile.

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Zachary drove home feeling spent after training in the evening. He had opted to activate the 1.2 g gravity on his body during the entire session. As a result, the training had taken a toll on his body, causing him to feel like he'd just finished racing against Usain Bolt.

He even felt like letting loose and taking a nap on the floor when he was halfway up the stairs to his apartment on the sixth floor. But with his iron will, he persevered and slowly trekked to his apartment at a snail's pace.

"DING"

The notification sound of the system rang within his mind just as he'd stepped into his apartment. It was like music to his ears, rousing him from his state of exhaustion in a matter of seconds.

"Congratulations," the system AI's apathetic voice sounded the next moment before he could react. "The user has managed to complete a hidden system mission by advancing his body-control attribute to the S- grading without the help of any elixirs from the system. As a result, the system has awarded the user 5,000 Juju-points and a one-month dosage of an A-graded physical-conditioning-elixir to stabilize the user's new S-graded attribute. For further details, the user can check the system interface.. Congratulations, once again."

Chapter 289 - Learning A New Skill

A serene sensation of quiet contentment spread through Zachary's entire being as he had finally managed to upgrade another of his core attributes to the legendary S-grading.

"System," he said, throwing his gym bag beside the door. "Please bring up the hidden mission completion message right away." He added while moving forward and stepping into his living room.

"DING"

"Command received," the AI replied. "The hidden-mission completion message will be coming up on the interface right away."

"Great!"

Zachary switched on the light in the living room and poured himself a glass of orange juice before settling on one of his sofas. Without further ado, he focused on the translucent crystal-like display that had just materialized before him.

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#4 new messages

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CONGRATULATIONS

-> The user has managed to complete a hidden system mission by upgrading a core attribute to the S grade without relying on a system elixir. The user's Balance and Coordination (Body-Control) fitness stat is now at the S- grading.

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-> Mission Rewards

1) 5000 Juju-points

2) A one-month dosage of an A-grade Physical-Conditioning-Elixir.

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#### -> Mission Summary

\*Analysis: You have managed to bypass a great bottleneck by upgrading your Balance and Coordination attribute to the S- grade through sheer hard work. You have, once again, jumped over the greatest divide that separates the excellent from the ordinary players. You are well on your way to becoming a great among footballers. Congratulations.

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#### -> Bonus Rewards

As a bonus for your hard work, you have earned a monthly dosage of an A-grade physical-conditioning-elixer. It will help you stabilize your body control at the S-grading.

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Advancing the Balance and Coordination attribute to the S-grading is just the beginning. You still have a long way to match the skills of any player that has ever made it to the list of players with the potential to become the G.O.A.T. So, please continue working hard.

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Another wave of happiness assaulted Zachary's entire being after he'd read through the mission completion message and confirmed that he'd made yet another breakthrough. At long last, he'd managed to push one of the most crucial attributes in football to the S-grading. At that moment, he was on cloud nine since he knew well that upgrading his body control would do wonders for his career.

Body control mostly entailed the player's ability to move their body fluidly to optimize balance and coordination. Thus, a lack of coordination meant weaker skills, poorer passing techniques, slower change of direction, and worse body-on-body performances. On the other hand, a player could do wonders and learn any deft skills, whether step-overs, headers, or feints, as long as he possessed a high level of body control.

It was that crucial.

For instance, Lionel Messi, the Argentine and Barca legend, was a player with sublime coordination and body control. As a lethal ball wizard, he often took many small steps, creating the best and most optimum positions for himself and the ball while weaving through opponents. At every crucial moment when on the attack, the phenomenal South American would be utilizing his arms to balance himself — while his legs and feet moved in precise directions. For that reason, he could effortlessly control the ball, effectively dribble past opponents like a slippery snake in the grass, and even set up fantastic plays from all angles.

Football was like second nature to the Argentine simply because of his insanely high level of body control.

"System," Zachary mumbled, leaning back into the sofa after perusing through the contents of the interface. "Please, bring up my fitness data right away."

"DING"

"Command received," the AI's apathetic voice sounded in his mind the next instant. "The user's fitness data will be coming up on the interface right away."

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\*USER STATS

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->Physical Fitness (Av. Rating: S-)

Body Control (Balance and Coordination) : S-

Agility: A+

Strength: A+

Stamina: S-

Endurance Points: 4943/18,000 (S-)

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"My overall physical fitness has also finally broken through to the S- grading!"

Zachary's eyes glittered as he studied the contents displayed on the near-transparent bluish interface. After his latest breakthrough, his overall fitness had progressed from the A+ to the S- grade. His only fitness attributes still stuck at the A+ grade at that moment were agility and strength.

However, he was hopeful that he could raise those two attributes to the S-grading before the start of the following season, especially after consuming an A-graded vitality-enhancing-elixir. And as long as everything went as planned after that, he would turn into a monster on the pitch, with a brand new style that could dazzle fans and terrify opponents.

"Time to learn some new skills," Zachary mumbled, rubbing his hands in anticipation. With his body control breaking through to the S-grading, he possessed the qualifications to learn some new G.O.A.T Skills from the system shop. So, he could hardly contain his excitement at that moment.

"System!" He said. "I would like to purchase some new skills from the shop."

"DING"

"Command received," the AI replied. "Data loading, please wait a moment."

Zachary waited with bated breath as the contents of the interface gradually morphed into the six familiar glittering skill cards depicting various famous footballers handling the ball. Soon, his sight zeroed in on the two skills that he could learn at that moment.

They were both skills that only had a single learning requirement of an S- grade level of body control, which Zachary could meet at that moment.

One was the Zinedine Touch Magic, a skill that enabled a player to master the art of zone control and possess heightened critical ability during crucial moments. With mastery of the Zinedine Touch Magic, a player would also gain top-level passing skills in all ranges and attain proficiency in exploding with insane dribbling skills. For a midfielder, it was a rare God-sent skill since it could singlehandedly push the skills of any player to a world-class level.

The second was the CR7 Aerial finishing Juju — a skill tailored for expert positioning and heading accuracy within and outside the box. It was an incredible world-class skill, suitable for strikers as almost nothing could stop a player with such a skill from scoring if a teasing cross floated into the box.

Zachary's eyes glittered as he studied the contents of the interface. He'd, of course, long decided on the skills he wanted to learn, as it had already been a day since the latest system upgrade. So, without deliberating for long, he turned his eyes away from the CR7 Aerial finishing Juju since he wasn't a center forward but an attacking midfielder. He then quickly tapped the Zinedine Touch Magic skill card that was third in position on all the cards floating on the interface.

"DING"

The system notification sound reverberated in his mind as soon as his finger made contact with the crystal-like translucent interface. Within an instant, the five other cards shimmered slightly before

disappearing from the interface, leaving only the card depicting the image of Zinedine Zidane handling the ball.

"The user has chosen to purchase the Zinedine Touch Magic Juju from the system shop," the AI's voice rang in his mind after a moment. "The system will have to deduct 4,000 Juju-points from the user's stock after confirmation of the purchase."

"Does the user still wish to purchase the Zinedine Touch Magic Juju?"

Zachary had already carefully assessed all his options. He understood that the Zinedine Touch Magic was the most befitting skill for the current stage of his career.

With a single touch, he could rush past opponents, and with a single pass, he could destroy world-class defenses. If he combined the skill with the Zinedine-Pirlo-Mental-Juju, he could even do more wonders and become a nightmare for opponents on the pitch. He would almost be like the second-coming of Zizou.

Initially, he'd planned to master the Robinho-step over juju first. However, circumstances changed when his body control abruptly soared to the S- grade. He hadn't met the requirements to master the step-over technique yet — but possessed those to master Zinedine's legendary touch magic technique. So, how could he dilly-dally any longer? He would only consider the step-over juju after his agility had risen to the S-grading.

"System," he said, tone steadfast. "I would like to confirm the purchase of the Zinedine-Touch-Magic Juju. Please go ahead and confirm the purchase."

"Command confirmed..." The AI said.

"Checking skill's requirements before confirming the purchase..."

"The user possesses S-grade body control, which meets the basic requirements for learning the skill."

"DING"



"Congratulations. The system has now confirmed the skill purchase from the system shop."

"However," the AI continued. "The Zinedine-Touch-Magic Juju leans a bit too heavily towards utilizing the mental aspects of the game to execute brilliant plays during crucial moments. Thus, the user needs to experience a session of quantum mental conditioning to achieve initial mastery of the skill."

"Since the system will be transferring a lot of information into the user's mind, there will be a bit of discomfort as soon as the quantum conditioning begins. Knowing this, should the system still proceed?"

"Yes, please proceed with the mental conditioning," Zachary replied, making himself comfortable on the sofa to prepare for the quantum conditioning. He'd already gone through the process when he learned the Snipe-it like-Pirlo Juju. So, he wasn't all that worried about what was about to transpire.

"Loading required data and packages for the Zinedine Touch Magic Juju," the AI intoned. "The system will start the quantum mental conditioning in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0."

A sharp pain went through Zachary's consciousness the next moment, catching him almost off-guard. He shuddered almost abruptly, and then his vision went dark.

Soon, memories, including shards of foreign thoughts, all messy and chaotic, flooded his brain in a wild procession. At one moment, he saw himself handling the ball and performing a series of Marseille turns while skipping past several opponents in a foreign memory shard. At another moment, he saw himself control the ball immaculately with a single deft touch to loop it over an opponent before scoring from outside the 18-yard box.

Scenes of crucial football moments continued marching across his mind's eye, giving him a beyond-belief perspective of the game that he'd never deemed even possible. The feeling was truly wondrous.

But soon, an intense wave of dizziness flooded his brain, breaking his immersion into the memory shards. Before he could react, the entire world went black as he collapsed backward on the sofa.

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## Chapter 290 - To Liège, Belgium I

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Thursday, November 28, 2013.

Underneath the veil of a night sky aglow with bright city lights, a bus slowly came to a halt right outside the wide gates of Stade Maurice Dufrasne, the home ground of Standard Liège, located in Liège, Belgium.

Zachary and his teammates immediately alighted from the bus, only to come face to face with a group of excited fans waiting in front of the stadium.

The entrance into the stadium was in a state of complete chaos, with the fans trying their best to push forward with the intent of getting a peek at the arriving footballers. Those dressed in Rosenberg's black and white colors even started screaming out the names of Zachary and his teammates, like a group of kids that'd just chanced upon an ice cream truck. Their excitement was beyond what words could describe at that moment.

"How come there are so many Rosenberg fans waiting for us at the gates today, even when we're playing away in Belgium?" Zachary wondered out loud as he exited the bus and stepped into the chilly late autumn air. "It's as if we're playing a home game at Lerkendal! The situation here is quite abnormal!"

"Do you even need to ask why many of our fans are present today?" Mikael Dorsin, Rosenberg's assistant's captain, chimed in from in front of Zachary. "Aren't you the very same person who urged them to come during yesterday's pre-match interview? You even promised that we would win the match for sure as long as they came to support us. So, why are you surprised?"

"Oh!" Zachary exclaimed, smiling ruefully. He couldn't help but recall the previous day's pre-match interview with Olav Brusveen, the TV2 sports reporter. "Are my words that effective at mobilizing the fans? Maybe, I should apply for a transfer to Rosenberg's publicity and marketing department." He added in a joking manner while still glancing around at the group of rowdy fans.

"Maybe, you should try," Mikael replied with a chuckle. "With your fame and standing among the Rosenborg supporters, you would be the perfect recruit for the publicity team."

"Hehehe!" Eric Bailly chuckled from beside Zachary. "I'm trying to picture our boy, Zach, moving around Norway, marketing and selling my jersey as part of the publicity and marketing team. Wouldn't that be an incredible sight to behold?"

The rest of the Rosenborg players laughed at that, causing the whole atmosphere around the team to become more easygoing as they marched into the stadium under the protection of the security personnel. They soon left the rowdy fans far behind and continued conversing among themselves as they marched through the stadium tunnel.

They were pretty relaxed even though they were well aware that they had to win that day's match. It seemed like winning the Norwegian Cup a few days prior had boosted their confidence by a significant degree. So, they all marched with confidence, unbothered by their surroundings, even though they were in enemy territory.

"Guys, silence!" Coach Johansen shouted, clapping his hands right after Zachary and his teammates had stepped into the dressing room a few minutes later. "We only have forty-five minutes to the commencement of the game since it's already 6:15 PM, as I speak now. So, I'll only give you five minutes as preparation time before we head on to the field for our pre-match warm-up."

On hearing the coach's words, the Rosenborg players immediately quietened down before settling down on the benches around the dressing room. They all knew what was at stake. So, they cast everything else out of their minds and started preparing for the game with a hundred percent focus.

Concurrently far away in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The sun was about to sink below the horizon in the west when a Mitsubishi Pajero SUV slowly pulled up into one of the parking spaces at the headquarters of the Congolese Football Federation in Kinshasa. Without any bit of dilly-dallying, Coach Samson Damata, the plump-aged coach that'd helped arrange Zachary's move to Norway, alighted from the vehicle.

"Bonsoir, coach," an excited voice sounded from behind him immediately after. "Welcome to the headquarters of the Congolese Association Football Federation. It has been long ever since we last met, old friend."

Coach Damata couldn't help but do a doubletake on hearing the voice. He was surprised for a moment as the voice belonged to Maxans Omari, the president of DRC's football governing body - FECOFA. But that didn't stop him from immediately turning around and coming face to face with a well-kept middle-aged man dressed in a DRC national team jersey over a pair of jeans.

"Bonsoir, Monsieur Omari," Coach Damata hurriedly replied also in French while taking the president's hand for a firm handshake. "Yes, it has been long. But is it a coincidence that you met me here in the parking lot, or could you have been waiting for me?"

Mr. Maxans Omari smiled, taking a step forward and patting Coach Damata's shoulder. "I just got a heads up a few minutes ago from Coach Makouana that you would be arriving here shortly to watch Zachary's match with the other coaches. So, here I am, waiting for you as we have some business to discuss."

"Oh!" Coach Damata's heart skipped a beat. "You could have called me if you needed to discuss something important, Mr. President."

"I was indeed planning on giving you a call before the end of this week," the president said. "But then I got wind that you would be here today. So, here I am."

"So, what can I do for you, Mr. President?" Coach Damata said. "What would you need from a simple coach like me, who has no inkling about anything going on in the association?"

"A simple coach, I hear!" Mr. Omari suppressed a chuckle. "Coach Damata, you're as humorous as ever. Anyways, I need a bit of your help, coach."

"Oh, I guessed as much," Coach Damata said, taking a peek at his watch. "Can we talk as we walk to the activity room? I don't want to miss Rosenberg's Europa League match against Standard Liège that is starting in about thirty minutes."

"Me, too," the president said with a chuckle. "I also don't wish to miss Zachary's match today for anything in the world. So, let's do as you suggest and discuss while heading to the activity room."

Coach Damata grinned and nodded. "How is everything at the association, by the way?"

"Same old," the president sighed, shaking his head. "We're under constant pressure from the public due to the poor football infrastructure in most areas around the country and the corruption at all levels of football, especially among referees. Of recent, there's also a lack of interest in domestic league matches due to the tyranny of European Leagues. All in all, we're still facing the same old challenges, especially here in Kinshasa. You guys in Lubumbashi and your TP Mazembe are the only ones that are fast-growing out of those few problems."

"You're the FECOFA president," Coach Damata remarked with a smile. "Can't you do anything to tackle those challenges to some degree?"

The president sighed, shaking his head. "Leadership is not as simple as you think, my old friend. There are a lot of institutional challenges that are impeding me from implementing most of my plans within the association. For instance, I'd put forward a proposal to build a public football academy in Kinshasa a few months back. However, the budgetary committee outright rejected it even when the money was available. As an individual, I couldn't do much to push forward with the proposal after that setback."

Coach Damata nodded but remained silent since he didn't want to give his stance on DRC's football governing association.. Instead, he kept marching forward through the corridors of the FECOFA headquarters while waiting for the president to carry on and state the reason why he'd sought him out.