

Greatest 331

Chapter 331 Grandma's Treatment Plan

Zachary was surprised to find a familiar face waiting for him when he stepped out of the airport in Zurich. He immediately recognized that the person was Ryan Bellmore, the short racecar driver he'd met a few months back.

"Welcome to Zurich, Zachary!" The short guy said when Zachary stepped before him.

"Ryan, why are you here?"

"Of course, Emily sent me to fetch you," Ryan replied with a grin. "I know the entire city's layout since I have been here for four months. So, don't worry. I'll be able to get you to your destination."

Zachary beamed, shaking his head. "That isn't my concern. Aren't you supposed to be racing cars somewhere? When did you turn into a common driver?"

Ryan chuckled, brushing a hand through his hair. "I'm here on some other business. Do you remember what I said when we met back in Trondheim? When I'm not racing, I'm also a middleman of sorts. So, I spend a lot of time traveling to various European countries."

"I see," Zachary said, nodding. "Thanks for coming to fetch me. Shall we make a move on it? I wish to go to the hospital as soon as possible."

"Sure," Ryan said. "I'm sorry to hear about your grandma's case, by the way. I'm praying for her to get better quickly."

"Thanks," Zachary replied, slinging his travel bag over his shoulder.

"Emily has already booked you a hotel, and it's on the way to the hospital," Ryan said. "So, I suggest we first drop your things at your hotel. Otherwise, it'll be uncomfortable for you to move around with all that luggage."

"Fine," Zachary said. "Let's do as you say."

"Great. Follow me to the car."

Zachary immediately followed Ryan to his car, parked in one of the airport's parking spaces. He threw his luggage in the boot, and off they went, cruising through the streets of Zurich.

Since it was midday, traffic was a bit heavy. Ryan could only drive at moderate speed while sometimes taking longer routes to avoid the congestion. As a result, they only made it to the hotel after almost an hour before dropping off the luggage.

"It's already coming to 1:00 PM," Ryan said right after Zachary had just finished checking into the hotel. "Do you wish to have some lunch before continuing to the hospital?"

"I already had some food on the plane," Zachary replied, shaking his head. "So, I'm still okay. Let's head to the hospital. I can even have my meal at the canteen there if the need arises."

"Okay, then," Ryan said, smiling. "The hospital is less than a kilometer away from here. So, let's walk instead of driving and getting stuck in another traffic jam."

"That's fine with me," Zachary replied. "Let's go."

After deciding, they quickly pressed through the human traffic on the sidewalk and made it to the hospital in five minutes. They then called Emily, who fetched them from the gate.

"Good afternoon, Zachary," she said with a smile after approaching them at the hospital entrance. "How was your flight?"

"Okay, I guess," Zachary replied, smiling back. "How're you, and how's everything else?"

"I'm okay," Emily said. "Regarding everything else, can we find a place to sit before discussing?"

"That's fine," Zachary replied, nodding. "But, I also wish to see and talk to my grandma first. Is she awake?"

"Unfortunately, she's asleep," Emily said with a sigh. "And since the surgery is tomorrow early morning, the doctors don't want us to disturb her rest. So, you need to be patient and wait until she wakes."

"Okay, then," Zachary said. "Let's find somewhere to sit and talk for the moment. I'll see her later."

Emily nodded before turning to Ryan. "Thanks for helping out today. We shall discuss the other matter later."

"It's my pleasure helping out," he replied with a smile. "I have to go now, Zachary. But if you need any help here in Zurich, don't forget to call. Emily has my number."

Zachary smiled. "I also have your number, Ryan. Thanks for your help. I'll keep in touch. Let me first handle my grandma's matters."

Ryan nodded before walking away.

As he looked at his receding back, Zachary had some doubts. Switzerland was a country with strict policies against motorsport. Following the 1955 LeMans disaster, the Swiss government had banned all racing events with the exception of events held in a time trial format such as hill climbing. So, it was weird for a race car driver to settle in such a country.

"Did he put a hold on his car racing career?" Zachary asked Emily.

She shook her head in response. "He says that he's only taking a small break to look for money to support his career."

"Oh!" Zachary said, nodding. "Wouldn't it be easier to look for a sponsor or a racing team instead of financing himself?"

"Things aren't that simple," Emily said, sighing. "I've tried to help him find a sponsor, but, so far, all my efforts have been fruitless. That is because of the intense competition in the sport. There are many talented drivers but very few racing teams and sponsors."

Zachary nodded in understanding.

"Let's head inside," Emily abruptly changed the topic. "We'll have lunch at the canteen. Then, you can take a few minutes to visit your grandma. Hopefully, she'll be awake by then. After that, I'll introduce you to the surgeon handling your grandma's case. He will explain the treatment plan they've designed for her. Okay?"

"Sounds like a good plan," Zachary agreed. "Let's enter."

Everything went as planned. After having lunch with Emily and his aunt, they strode through the spotless hospital corridors and headed to his grandma's room for a visit.

Unsurprisingly and unfortunately, she was still in a deep sleep and didn't even hear them when they entered the room. So, they could only stand quietly by her hospital bed for minutes.

All the while, the worry buried deep inside Zachary was threatening to explode. He was really concerned as the old lady was in a more terrible condition than he had initially expected. She was thinner, her eyes sunken, and her face paler than he remembered. She seemed like a person who was on her last legs.

"Don't let appearances fool you," Emily whispered after stepping closer to him. "The doctors have assured us that she's stable. Due to the severe symptoms, the doctors often put her to sleep so that she doesn't have to suffer. That's the cause of her current condition."

Zachary nodded. "Let's go meet the doctors," he said. "I'm eager to hear the treatment plan they designed for my grandma."

"Okay, let's go."

They stepped out of the room quietly and trekked through the hospital corridors. Before long, they arrived at one of the doctor's offices. On a small white panel on the door were the words - "Dr. Brian Sanders - Resident Neurosurgeon" in black ink.

Emily knocked thrice on the door before standing to the side.

"Come in," a deep voice sounded from inside.

Their group then stepped through the doorway and entered the spacious office. On the walls were large charts and posters depicting diagrams of brain illnesses.

However, what caught Zachary's attention was the middle-aged man seated behind an L-shaped office table on the other side of the room. He had an average build, short black hair, and prominent blue eyes hidden behind a pair of large spectacles.

"It's a pleasure to have you here, ladies and gentlemen," the man said. "Please, sit."

"Thanks, doctor," Emily responded, taking a seat first. The rest followed suit after exchanging a few pleasantries with the doctor. What followed was an introduction session that took about two minutes before they finally touched on the main issue.

"So, Dr. Sanders," Zachary said, leaning back. "Could you go over the treatment plan for my grandma and what is required?"

Dr. Sanders nodded before pushing his spectacles up the bridge of his nose. "The treatment is actually pretty straightforward," he said. "We'll conduct a regular craniotomy before removing the abnormal mass of cells within her brain tomorrow at 8:00 AM."

"On your side, you don't have to do anything. Our nurses will be responsible for prepping the patient and ensuring that she gets to the theater."

"After the surgery," the doctor continued, "One of the surgeons will come to the waiting area and inform you about the outcome of the treatment procedure. As for the patient, she'll be moved to the Post Anesthesia Care Unit to recover for roughly two hours. After making sure that her condition is stable, we'll transfer her to the Neuro Intensive Care Unit, where you can see her again."

"A few days after the surgery, we'll conduct more tests to discern whether the treatment procedure managed to remove all the tumor cells. If the results are satisfactory, we'll discharge your grandma in about two weeks' time after the surgery."

"Doctor," Zachary said after a moment of contemplation. "What are the risks associated with this surgery?"

The doctor inhaled deeply before answering. "Of course, any surgical procedure is invasive. So, there's always a risk to the patient's life. It's especially so in the case of your grandma, who's far along in her years. However, don't worry. Our role as surgeons is to do our best to minimize those risks and make sure that the patient recovers."

"Oh!" Zachary inhaled deeply on hearing the response.

Chapter 332 On Tenterhooks

Zachary finally managed to talk to his grandma when she awoke later that evening. Her eyes and pale face gained some color when she noticed him beside the hospital bed, and she immediately started asking about his life, career, and plans.

Her mannerisms were just like he remembered. She was her typical self, forever worried about other people while forgetting herself. But, of course, that was why Zachary respected and admired her from the bottom of his heart.

Even though her voice was a bit hoarse due to the illness, it was as if it was music when it sounded in his ears. Like when he was still a child under her care, it assembled into Swahili words that comforted him and compelled him to forget his worries. His mood lightened, and he began answering all her questions with zest as he sat there by the hospital bed.

Minutes passed by quickly, as if in a flash, as he recounted his experiences to his grandma. He narrated some bits and pieces of the highlights from the matches he'd played during the past six months. He then talked about the goals he'd scored and ended his account by mentioning the trophies and individual awards he'd managed to win as a Rosenborg player.

"I'm really proud of you, Zachary," she said right after hearing his story. "With the way you're playing and scoring goals, you might soon become like Maradona or those great African players — Jay-Jay Okocha and Nwankwo Kanu. You might even surpass them."

Zachary could only smile in response after hearing his grandma's comment. Ever since he could remember, she'd always admired the three football players - Maradona, Okocha, and Kanu. As far as she was concerned, they were the best footballers ever to walk the earth. To her, they were at the top of the scale of greatness. So, he wasn't surprised when she mentioned them after hearing about his career.

"Football aside," his grandma continued after coughing slightly, "Did you finally commence your university studies?"

Zachary forced a smile. "Grandma! It's not like I don't wish to continue studying. However, I really don't have the time at the moment. I've to focus all my energy on my training if I wish to achieve great things during the course of my football career."

His grandma narrowed her eyes, shifting slightly on the bed.

"Don't worry, grandma," Zachary hurriedly said to soothe her. "I'll ensure to enroll in a University this year."

He didn't understand why his grandma always insisted that he had to attend university, even when she was well aware that he was doing well as a pro footballer. But to appease her, he figured that he could enroll in a university for an online program that wouldn't take much time.

"Let's first put studying and football aside," the old lady said, a small smile playing on her parched lips. "Haven't you met any girl that has impressed you yet? When do you plan to get married? I really can't wait to hold my great-grandkids in my hands."

"Eh!"

Zachary was a bit startled. He was just nineteen, with many youthful years to enjoy still ahead of him. So, how could he start thinking of getting married?

Even though he'd been dating Camilla for more than six months, the notion of marriage had not yet taken root in his mind. Since he had bitter experiences from his past life, he was hesitant. He didn't wish to rush into a life-long commitment only to live the rest of his years in sorrow.

"Well," his grandma asked again, her eyes filled with expectation.

"Not yet, grandma," he replied, sighing. "You just advised me to enroll in a university for a degree. So, how can you ask me to start looking for a wife? Don't you know that it's not good to get married while still in school?"

His grandma narrowed her eyes. "Now, you're going to use school as an excuse. People don't get married while still in university because they don't have money. However, if you have the money to support a family, why not get married?"

She sighed weakly. "Zachary! I'm telling you, your life would be more enjoyable and fulfilling if you could find a girl who cares about you and marry her when you're still young. She would support your growth in everything you do while keeping your life in line. You would be able to develop together as a couple without most worries."

Zachary could only purse his lips and smile at that. He couldn't bring himself to make any promises to his grandma on that very topic.

"Okay, let me stop teasing you," she said, raising her head slightly from the pillows.

Zachary got a scare. "Grandma! What are you doing? Please, lie back down." He hurriedly got up from his seat to support her.

"Don't worry," she said in a placating tone. "Now that I have talked to you, I feel fine. But there's something else I need to tell you."

"Don't worry about anything else," Zachary said while rearranging the pillows to elevate her head slightly. "We can talk more when you recover."

"This can't wait," she replied, shaking her head slightly. "Do you remember when you asked me about your biological mother back in Lubumbashi?"

Zachary nodded, settling back in his seat. She'd shown him a photograph of her mom and dad and a letter with their names. He'd forwarded the information to a private investigations firm and tasked their team with uncovering the whereabouts of his biological mom. But even after eight months, the detectives had not yet produced any results. As a result, he'd eventually given up hope and pushed the matter to the back of his mind.

"The thing is," his grandma said, inclining her head slightly on the pillow to face him, "I chose not to tell you some things about your mother when you previously asked about her." Her voice had a hint of helplessness.

Zachary's expression flickered slightly. But he chose to remain silent and wait for her to complete her account of things.

"To be honest," she continued, "I had already discovered her whereabouts from one of your father's diaries. However, I wasn't sure whether the two of you meeting each other would be a good thing. So, I kept the information to myself, hoping to protect you. But now that I'm in this state, I have to disclose all I know."

"You don't have to feel pressured to tell me anything, grandma," Zachary said with a sigh. "If you feel I shouldn't meet her, I'll follow your advice and forget her."

"That should be your choice, Zachary," she said, smiling weakly. "Her full name is Céleste Kouame, and she should be from a city called Yamoussoukro, located in C?te d'Ivoire. If you get time to travel back to Lubumbashi, check the left side of my metallic suitcase for your dad's diary. You should be able to find more information about her in there."

Zachary's heart palpitated slightly, but he forced it to calm down by inhaling deeply. "Thanks for telling me, grandma," he said. "For now, just focus on recovering and don't think about anything else."

She nodded in response before letting out a breath. It was then that the door creaked open, and a uniformed nurse marched into the room. "It's about time the patient gets some rest," she said, her tone professional. "So, can you say your goodbyes and step out of the room, please?"

Zachary nodded in assent. He then said a few encouraging words to his grandma before waving her goodbye and stepping out of the room. His heart was again in disarray after recalling that she would undergo surgery the following morning at eight. However, all he could do was wait and pray for her full recovery.

The next morning.

The dawn brought a new freshness, bathing the streets of Zurich City in golden light. However, Zachary was in no mood to enjoy the beautiful morning since he was already in the designated area at the University Hospital Zurich, waiting for the outcome of his grandma's surgery.

He could feel his heart hammering hard in his chest as he paced the entire length of the otherwise silent room. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't calm down while knowing that his grandma was on an operating table in a nearby theater. His thoughts were all over the place, and he felt like he should do some intense shuttle runs to cool his brain down.

"I think you should sit down for a bit, Zachary," Emily said from a nearby seat while glancing at him worriedly. "She has only been in the theater for four hours. So, there's one more hour of waiting to go."

"Your agent is right, Zachary," Marie, his aunt, echoed. "I believe that everything will be okay with grandma. So, please, calm down and sit down for a while."

Zachary nodded, stopping his pacing suddenly. He flashed Emily and his aunt a forced smile before settling down on another seat. He then counted from a hundred going backward a couple of times until he felt himself relaxing completely.

It was then that he managed to push the worries to the back of his mind. He then started to think about other things.

One important lesson he'd learned when dealing with his grandma's case was that his agent really had his back. She had traveled all the way from London to Lubumbashi immediately after hearing that his grandma was ill. She quickly arranged her transfer to Zurich to ensure that the old lady got proper medical care. As far as Zachary was concerned, she was the best agent in the world. So, he resolved to treat her even better in the future.

Many disorderly thoughts whirled through Zachary's mind as the minutes flashed by slowly. He even started considering whether to request his grandma to shift to Europe after she recovered. He could organize a residence for her and hire a couple of nurses to aid her during her recovery. And since she would be living nearby, he would be able to visit her often.

However, Zachary couldn't help but compel himself to forget the whole notion after recalling his grandma's character. He was sure that she would never shift from DR Congo, even if he got on his knees and begged. The old lady had chosen to stay in her homeland even when the country was experiencing savage wars. So, how could she up and shift due to some illness?

"The doctors are finally back," the voice of Emily sounded in his ears, suddenly breaking him out of his reverie.

"Already!?"

Zachary was startled and immediately glanced towards the entrance of the waiting lounge. He trembled despite himself when he noticed Dr. Brian Sanders walking through the doorway and approaching them.

The next moment he would know the outcome of his grandma's brain surgery. Was it good or bad? He had no idea as he was no prophet. However, he couldn't stop all the possibilities, whether good or bad, from flashing through his mind as he rose up to meet the surgeon in charge of his grandma's case.

Chapter 333 Squad Heading to Turin

"The surgery was a success," Dr. Brian Sanders said, smiling. "Mrs. Bemba is quite stable. We've even already moved her to the Post Anesthesia Care Unit."

Dr. Sander's voice was like a thunderclap in Zachary's ears. It reverberated within his mind for a few seconds, washing away all the anxiety and gloom accumulated over the past few days. His mind cleared as his mood lightened. He felt like he'd just bathed in a cool spring with mystical powers.

"This is great news," he heard Emily say while patting his shoulder. "Zachary, I'm really happy for you."

Zachary nodded and thanked her. He then nodded at his aunt in silent affirmation of overcoming a hurdle together before returning his attention to Dr. Sanders.

"Can we see her?" he asked with eyes filled with anticipation.

Dr. Sanders shook his head. "We still need to monitor Mrs. Bemba for three more hours in the Post Anesthesia Care Unit. We'll then move her to the Neuro Intensive Care Unit, where you can see her. So, you have to be patient a bit."

"Oh, okay," Zachary said, nodding. "Thanks a lot, doctor, for all your help."

"You're welcome," Dr. Sanders said, smiling. "I have to handle another case later in the day. So, let me say goodbye for now. If you need more information about the post-surgery requirements for your grandma, you can talk to the nurse clinician on duty."

"Okay, doctor," Zachary replied. "Thanks."

Dr. Sanders beamed and exchanged a few words with Emily before turning around and walking out of the waiting room. He also seemed to be in a good mood, probably due to the success of the surgical procedure.

Zachary turned his gaze from the receding back of the neurosurgeon before pulling Emily to the side. "Should we head to the nurse clinician's office to inquire about the post-surgery requirements?"

"We don't need to," Emily responded. "I already inquired about all issues related to your grandma's treatment. What she requires more than anything is adequate care to help her recover from the surgical wound. So, after the hospital discharges her, we'll move her to the post-surgery rehabilitation center."

"The rehabilitation center?" Zachary was in doubt. "Didn't the doctor say something about keeping her under observation for two weeks?"

"That's true," Emily replied. "But you need to understand that the center is also a facility in this hospital, and its purpose is to help patients recover from surgical wounds. So, the surgeons will continue to be involved in her care while in the rehabilitation center. They will also be constantly in contact with the facility to coordinate appointments and treatment after discharge."

"Then, we should really check her into this post-surgery rehabilitation center," Zachary agreed. "What about the hospital bills? Was the money I sent you enough?"

"Yes," Emily responded. "I haven't even used half of the money. So, you don't have to worry about the bills."

"Then, that's great," Zachary said. "Thanks again for having my back."

"Don't mention it," she replied. "When do you plan to return to Trondheim, by the way?"

"If all goes well, Sunday evening," Zachary responded. "That's when my travel window ends."

"That's a good plan," Emily said. "Since your grandma will be in the post-surgery rehabilitation center, you don't have to worry. The nurses there will take care of her and constantly monitor her condition. Your aunt can also help out. So, you can return your focus to football and choose to visit, maybe once in two weeks, to see how she's doing."

"Let's first see her progress in the next two days," Zachary said, sighing. "I'll make my plans after that."

Over the next two days, Zachary kept a close eye on his grandma's progress. He constantly interacted with the doctors in charge of her case and visited her during the morning and evening hours. And to his relief, he finally confirmed that she was getting better with every passing day.

The doctors had handled her case well, and her surgical wound had no issues. They were only waiting to conduct a few more tests after four days before confirming whether the treatment procedure had managed to remove all the tumor cells from her brain.

However, Zachary couldn't wait for the test results as his travel window ended on Sunday. So, even though he was reluctant to part, he still said his goodbyes to his grandma that evening. He then left all the other arrangements in the hands of Emily, his capable agent, before boarding a Scandinavian Airlines flight and returning to Trondheim.

The following morning.

Zachary woke up late. He was suffering from terrible jetlag and was still a bit sleepy since he'd only managed to go to bed at around 3:00 AM. So, he decided to call the coach and see if he could excuse him from that day's training.

"Hello, Zach," the Coach Johansen said after the phone call had connected.

"Hello, coach," Zachary replied. "How's your morning?"

"My morning is fine," he replied. "How's your grandma doing?"

"She's recovering well. The doctors say that her condition is stable. They only need to conduct a few more tests in three days to confirm whether the treatment managed to remove all the tumor cells."

"That's good to hear," the coach said. "And I believe she'll be fine. So, are you back in Trondheim?"

"Yes. I arrived at 3:00 AM this morning. As a result, I'm suffering from terrible jetlag. So, it's my humble request that you allow me to skip today's training."

"That's fine, Zachary," Coach Johansen responded after a short while. "However, make sure that you undergo a conditioning routine today evening. Since we have only three days to our Europa League game against Juventus, you need to maintain your fitness. Otherwise, you'll find it hard to perform like usual during that game."

"I'll do as you recommend, coach," Zachary replied. However, he wasn't too worried about his fitness since he had continued going through his yoga routine and stretching exercises even while in Zurich.

Moreover, he'd also just mastered the step-over skill, which would help him catch the opponents off guard. So, he was sure that he would be totally ready for the match against Juventus if he trained seriously for the next two days.

"You're also clueless about the tactics and game plan since you missed the previous four training sessions," the coach said after a short while. "So, you have a lot of work to do when you return to training tomorrow."

"Don't worry, coach," Zachary said. "I have always been a quick study when learning all matters related to football. So, as long as you go through the tactics for me once, I'll be able to master them."

"Then, that puts my heart at ease," Coach Johansen said. "Do your best to rest and recover today. We'll talk more tomorrow during training."

"Okay, thanks, coach. Have a good day."

"Have a good day, too."

After ending the call, Zachary let out a breath of relief. He'd been worried that he would underperform during that day's training due to his poor condition. But since the coach had allowed him another day of rest, he could finally relax and catch up with the sleep he had missed over the previous few days.

So, he threw his phone to the side and immediately dived back into bed. A few minutes later, he was already snoring and oblivious to everything around him.

Over the following two days, Zachary got busy. He immersed himself in training with the intent to push his match fitness to its highest state possible. As a result, he spent many hours sweating in the gym and running on the training ground.

When he wasn't doing physicals or partaking in the team training sessions, he would also find time to go over the tactics for the match with Coach Johansen. Additionally, he also started watching the past games of Juventus to understand their playing patterns and style.

Since he understood that Juventus was one of the giants of Europe, he was leaving no stone unturned. He even went over each player's previous match statistics to understand their threat levels, especially during crucial games.

The hours quickly turned into days as he prepared himself, and soon it was Wednesday morning. The day when the team would finally head to Turin for the match against Juventus had arrived.

The team held a two-hour light training session to refine the tactics and game plan one final time. When the clock hand just pointed to the ten o'clock mark in the morning, the coach ended the session and notified all the players to gather in the tactics room. It was finally the time to announce the match squad that would face off against Juventus the following evening.

"I won't waste time going over the tactics as we've been doing just that over the past two weeks," Coach Johansen said after the players had taken their seats. "Instead, I'll call out the players who managed to make the squad traveling to Turin today afternoon. Those who hear their names should prepare their bags right after this meeting ends. The set-off time from the Lerkendal parking lot is 2:00 PM."

"I'll begin with the starting line-up," the coach continued. "We have Daniel Ørland, Mikael Dorsin, Tore Reginiussen, Yerry Mina, Eric Bailly, Thomas Partey, Zachary Bemba, Takumi Minamino, Nicki Nielsen, Tobias Mikkelsen, and Alexander Sørderlund as our starting players."

"On the bench, we have Lund Hansen, William Troost-Ekong, Cristian Gamboa, Ole Selnø, Mike Jensen, Karl Toko Ekambi, and Paul Kasongo. Those are all the names of the players heading to Turin. You have three hours to prepare your bags."

Chapter 334 Europa League Match Day

Thursday, March 13, 2014.

Juventus Stadium, Turin, Italy.

The Rosenborg squad, which had arrived in Turin the previous day, stepped onto the pitch for the pre-match warm-up session when the clock hand pointed to the eight o'clock mark that evening.

Zachary had thought that he'd already experienced all there was to the passion of football fans after playing against Fiorentina in Florence a few weeks prior. But after stepping into the Juventus stadium, he immediately realized how wrong he'd been. He was startled since the fans were much more intense than their counterparts in Florence.

Even though an hour remained before kick-off, the stadium was already jam-packed. The Juventus fans, mostly donned in their team's black and white colors, had already occupied nearly all the seats available in the stands. Moreover, they were already cheering wildly and singing at the top of their voices as they watched their team go through a dynamic warm-up.

Even while warming up on the pitch, Zachary could hear their vibrant voices loud and clear. And even though he didn't understand Italian, he could still feel their passion and affection for their team when his ears picked up the chants.

However, those chants didn't induce any feelings of fear or tension within his psyche. Instead, his entire being was swelling with expectation as he readied himself to play against the Italian giants. Moreover, his anticipation had even helped him push the worry about his grandma to the back of his mind.

It had only been about a year since he'd made his debut as a pro player for Rosenborg. However, he'd already gotten a chance to play against one of the best teams in Europe. As a person who loved football with his everything, the match was the perfect God-sent opportunity. He could finally test his skills

against some of the best players in the world and see how he fared against them. So, why wouldn't he be excited?

"We're really in enemy territory," Kasongo remarked. He was going through the dynamic warm-up routine beside him while also stealing glances at the stands. "Look at them cheer for their team. It is as if they are cheering for an army going to war."

"That's the beauty of football," Zachary said while performing a static upper-back stretch. "The cheers are what make the match more exciting. The only pity is that very few Rosenborg fans are in the stands today evening. Otherwise, this match would have turned out epic."

Zachary had already surveyed the stands when he'd just stepped on the pitch. However, he'd noticed that only a few hundred Rosenborg fans had occupied a small portion of what should have been the visitor's section of the stands. Compared to the more than 35,000 Juventus supporters present, they were just like a drop in the ocean. Thus, they couldn't cause any ripple within the large stadium even if they shouted at the top of their voices.

"Guys," Coach Rolf Aas, the assistant coach in charge of fitness, suddenly yelled. "Add more energy. We need to finish this dynamic warm-up in fifteen minutes."

Zachary immediately added more intensity to his warm-up routine after hearing the assistant coach's impassioned shout. He went through the exercises at a much quicker pace than before until he was sweating buckets. However, he would occasionally cast his gaze towards the other side of the pitch to spy on the opponents.

All the famous Juventus players, including Paul Pogba, Arturo Vidal, Andrea Pirlo, Fernando Llorente, and Giorgio Chiellini, among others, were warming up on the other side of the pitch. Zachary could feel his heart tremble a bit just by glancing at them. However, he soon suppressed those unstable feelings within his mind and continued his warm-up.

On the other side of the field, the Juventus players had just taken a water break after going through a shuttle run session. Claudio Marchisio turned his gaze to the other half to examine the opponents. "That

tall black player with an afro is Zachary," he said to a few of his teammates beside him. "The coach has warned us several times to be wary of him."

Pogba shrugged. "He's a very talented player going by the videos and statistics. One of the assistants even mentioned that he has already scored nine goals and is the current top scorer in the Europa League. But all that doesn't concern me since I'm on the bench today."

"Don't worry, guys," Arturo Vidal said with a lopsided grin. "I'm full of energy today, especially since the coach had me rest on Sunday. He won't be able to do anything on my watch."

"You need to be on your toes, Arturo," Pirlo warned from the side. "Otherwise, it would be shameful if a nineteen-year-old kid outplayed you."

Some of the players laughed at that while Arturo, himself, narrowed his eyes. "I guess I don't need to waste my words convincing you people. You only need to wait, and I'll show you how I handle him on the pitch."

"Break over," the voice of one of the assistant coaches suddenly sounded. "Please, continue with the warm-up."

The Juventus players could only halt their conversation before immersing themselves in the dynamic warm-up exercises. They worked hard for the next few minutes until their coaches called them back to the dressing room for the pre-match tactical briefing.

A minute later, the Rosenborg players also returned to the dressing room. Since kick-off was just twenty minutes away, they hurriedly started changing into their all-black away match jerseys. Before long, they completed their preparations and settled on the benches around the dressing room to listen to coach Johansen's pre-match address.

"Guys," the coach began, a soft smile outlining his face. "It's finally time. We're about to step out of here and face off against Juventus in the Europa League's round of sixteen. And I believe I don't have to explain to you what'll happen if we don't pull out all our stops during the game."

"For the past two weeks, we've been going over the tactics for this game," he continued. "And as you're well aware, we'll be using the 4-5-1 formation, with four defenders, five midfielders, and one center-forward. The whole formation aims to ensure that we defend well while also being able to stifle Juventus' strong midfield."

"However, if any of us relaxes even for a minute during the game, the entire formation will crumble. Then, what will follow is us conceding. So, guys, I urge you to remain focused from the very first minute. Play simple football, be swift when closing down the opponents in our own half, and when you get chances, use them. If you remain true to those simple rules, we'll surely give the Italian giants a run for their money. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach," the players yelled back with zest.

Coach Johansen smiled, nodding. "One last thing before we go. We need to approach this match carefully and systematically to attain a good result. So, we'll divide the first half's 45 minutes into three smaller segments, each 15-minutes."

"In the first fifteen minutes, before the Juventus players settle down into their usual game tempo, we'll play boldly and attack more often. The focus of our game plan will remain on defending, yes — but whenever we get the chance, we launch a counterattack immediately and swiftly. So, I expect at least three effective counters from you in those first fifteen minutes. Are you with me, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

"Moving on," the coach continued. "During the second segment, we'll be more reserved. No matter the result—no matter whether we're a goal down or winning, we'll remain solid in defense from the 15th to the 30th minute. We'll play with ten men behind the ball and ensure that we don't concede a goal."

"When we move on to the last segment—from the 30th to the 45th minute, we'll start adapting to the situation. If we're a goal down, we'll become bolder and look for opportunities by relying on counters. However, if the score is still a tie—or if we're winning, we'll remain conservative and defend as if our lives depend on the game. Are you guys with me? Have you understood the entire plan?"

"Yes, coach," most players replied, nodding their heads.

However, Zachary was in doubt. So, he raised his arm and asked a question. "What do I do if I get a hard-to-resist counterattacking opportunity during the second segment? Do I let it pass because our entire focus is on defending?"

Coach Johansen took a few steps across the dressing room before answering. "If you're sure you won't lose the ball when you attack, you can launch the counter. However, if you are not at least 90% sure that you can break through the opponents, you better relax and stick to the game plan."

"One thing you need to understand is that Juventus usually raises their attacking momentum between the 15th and 30th minute. So, that's why we've got to be very careful during that segment."

Coach Johansen smiled slightly. "But for you, Zachary, you're playing a free role. You can determine how and when to attack depending on the situation on the pitch. So, to some extent, these arrangements are not for you—but the rest of your teammates. But, please remember to play smart and don't make amateur mistakes."

"Okay," Zachary replied. "I understand, coach."

"Good." Coach Johansen said, glancing at his watch. "It's about time. So, let's finish our preparations and head to the pitch. We'll make further detailed arrangements depending on the situation at halftime."

Chapter 335 Second-Minute Shocker

Emily was still in Zurich, helping Zachary organize his grandma's post-surgery treatment. So, she could only watch the Juventus versus Rosenborg match on the big screen within one of the hospital's many relaxation lounges.

Be that as it may, she wasn't too bored since she had company. With her was Zachary's aunt - Marie, the humorous Ryan Bellmore, the analytical Dr. Brian Sanders, and a group of roughly fifteen more medical personnel working the night shift that day.

"So, what do you think, Emily?" Ryan Bellmore suddenly whispered from beside her. "Do you believe that Zachary can push his worries about his grandma to the back of his mind and perform like usual?"

"He can, and he will," Emily replied confidently, her eyes never leaving the screen. "Zachary is a player who loves football with all his heart. So, he always seems to forget everything else whenever he steps onto the pitch for an official game. I believe he will be able to do the same during this match."

"I see," Ryan Bellmore nodded. "So, what do you think are Rosenberg's chances of winning this game? Be honest, and tell me what you think?"

"Well," Emily replied, sighing. "On paper, the Juventus squad is far more solid and a hell-lot more versatile. So, their chances of winning should be over 95%. However, we can't count Rosenberg out as there's still Zachary and the group of other impressive young players around him. The likes of Takumi Minamino, Thomas Partey, and Nicki Nielsen can all rise to the occasion. If they handle the match well, maybe, they might win. We have to wait and see."

Emily was being practical. But on the inside, she really hoped and yearned for Rosenberg to win that game, especially by relying on Zachary.

As a football agent, she had long understood that crucial matches, especially against big teams, were the best platforms for marketing budding football players. If a young footballer could go against a giant like Juventus and put up an incredible performance, his name would immediately sink deep and root itself within the minds of the entire football community around the globe. On the other hand, if the player couldn't rise to the occasion and play like usual against the much stronger opponent, then the rest of the world would never bother to remember his name. It was that simple.

So, Emily really hoped that Zachary would be the incredible version of a young player against Juventus that night. She wished to see him putting up a phenomenal performance that could dazzle the European Football community. That way, he could finally establish himself as a world-class player and pave the way for his future.

At that moment, the catchy Europa League anthem's tune sounded from the TV speakers, attracting Emily's attention once again. Like a spark igniting and blooming into a fire, the music immediately induced waves of excitement and anxiety within her mind.

"It's beginning," Ryan said excitedly.

Emily didn't reply but kept her gaze focused on the live broadcast of the match. The next moment, she smiled as she saw the match officials and players stepping onto the pitch and causing an explosion of cheers within the stadium. Her feelings couldn't help but fluctuate slightly when the camera zeroed in on Zachary, who was at the end of Rosenborg's line of players. He looked so imposing with his afro hairstyle that matched his tall physique.

"Zachary looks sharper in his new shirt number eight," Ryan, the self-appointed in-house commentator, suddenly remarked. "It's way better than that number-33 of his."

Emily smiled but chose not to respond. Her gaze was still on the screen as the players quickly lined up and exchanged the customary handshakes. Before long, they started taking their positions and what followed was the coin toss ceremony.

Per FIFA rules, the captains of the two teams had to partake in the coin toss ceremony under the supervision of the head referee before each game. The captain that won the coin flip would select the goal his team would play towards during the first half. On the other hand, the losing captain's team would get the opening kick-off.

It seemed that that time around, Gianluigi Buffon, the Juventus captain, won the coin toss since Rosenborg got the opportunity to kick off the game in the first half.

"Welcome to the live broadcast of this Europa League match between Juventus and Rosenborg," the commentator's mellifluous voice suddenly sounded from the TV speakers.

"As usual, Juventus are in their striped black and white jersey, while Rosenborg players are in their all-black away kits today. Both teams were impressive during the last stage of the Europa League."

"Juventus overwhelmed Trabzonspor with a 4:0 aggregate score, while Rosenborg barely edged past Fiorentina, the other Italian outfit, with an aggregate score of 3:2 to qualify for this round," the commentator continued, his voice smooth and fast-flowing. "And today night, the two teams will finally commence their battle for a spot in this season's Europa League quarter-finals. Will it be the mighty Juventus that comes out on top after this first leg? Or will Rosenborg, the underrated Norwegian team, shock Italy again? To find out the answer, stay tuned to ESPN. We'll be back shortly after the break."

After the ten-second break, the commentators utilized the few seconds before kick-off to introduce and analyze the team line-ups and formations. Antonio Conte, the Juventus coach, had fielded a 3-5-2 formation, seemingly with the intent to attack from the first minute. In goal for the Italian giants was the ever-reliable captain of the side - Gianluigi Buffon, while their defense comprised the three players - Leonardo Bonucci, Giorgio Chiellini, and Martín Cáceres. In their midfield were the five players - Andrea Pirlo, Arturo Vidal, Claudio Marchisio, Mauricio Isla, and Kwadwo Asamoah. And lastly, on their striking were the two phenomenal players - Carlos Tévez and Daniel Osvaldo.

As for Rosenborg, they'd fielded a 4-5-1 formation, with a line-up almost similar to the one that faced off against Fiorentina in Florence two weeks ago. Daniel Sletten was in goal, while the defense comprised the four players - Mikael Dorsin, Tore Reginiussen, Yerry Mina, and Eric Bailly. Then, the five players - Thomas Partey, Zachary Bemba, Takumi Minamino, Tobias Mikkelsen, and Alexander Sørderlund made up the midfield. And finally, on striking was the ever-reliable Nicki Nielsen.

Emily felt her unease grow after comparing the two line-ups. Once again, she had gotten to comprehend the fact that the two teams were entirely on different levels. Comparing the two teams was like pitting the strength of an elephant against the might of an ant. But she still hadn't lost faith as an ant could still put up a fight if it could manage to sink its sharp teeth into the elephant's delicate parts. So, it all depended on how the Rosenborg coach handled the game to exploit Juventus' few weaknesses.

Zachary stood right outside the center circle, waiting for the referee to blow the kick-off whistle. His blood was already boiling with excitement as he could hardly wait for the game to begin.

Be that as it may, his mind was abnormally calm since he'd unexpectedly entered into the 'zone' mental state even before the game could begin. As a result, his senses were already super hyper. He could even make out the minute movements of each player around him, even without focusing hard.

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Suddenly, the referee's whistle, signaling for the match to begin, sounded. Nicki Nielsen, Rosenborg's only center-forward, immediately flicked the ball to Zachary to kick start the Europa League's first leg clash between Juventus and Rosenborg.

Zachary received the ball right outside the center circle before turning around and flicking it towards Takumi Minamino, one of his counterparts in midfield.

Takumi also handled the ball with a sense of urgency and didn't dawdle. After a single touch, he flicked it towards Tobias Mikkelsen, Rosenborg's right-winger.

Tobias seemed eager to impress, especially since it was his first time making it into the squad in the new year. So, he exploded forth with speed along the right flank, smoothly skipping past Kwadwo Asamoah, Juventus' left midfielder. Before any opponents could close him down, he flicked the ball back to Takumi, the Rosenborg midfielder running in sync with him through the middle.

Takumi once again took a single touch before threading the ball to Zachary, who was, at that moment, already deep into the other half. And as a pleasant surprise, the pass was spot on, making it into Zachary's sprinting path before the opponents could surround him.

It was an opportune moment as Zachary's super hyper senses picked up the rare moment of laxity within the ranks of the Juventus side while receiving the ball. So, he immediately decided to take a gamble, especially since the theme of the first fifteen minutes was to attack boldly.

"Here goes nothing!"

Within anything but an instant, his S-graded agility exploded forth as he sprinted towards Juventus' box like mad. He was soon dribbling the ball through the middle, meandering past a couple of half-hearted challenges from the opponents.

However, he couldn't continue sprinting and breaking through the Juventus line-up with ease as if they didn't exist. Just as he was stepping past the boundary into the final third, he ran into the most-challenging roadblock in the form of Arturo Vidal - the midfielder dubbed La Piranha by the Italian press for his hard-tackling and aggressive, tenacious style of play.

But Zachary only slowed down a little to draw in the opponent. He didn't panic as his keen eyes kept on observing and drawing assessments from each and every minute movement made by the approaching opponent.

Then, just suddenly, Zachary stepped over the ball once, and Arturo, himself, reacted by leaning towards the right by a slight margin. The next second, Zachary executed another step-over, forcing the opponent to respond by shifting his center of gravity towards the left. And that was all the opportunity that Zachary needed.

He accelerated to his top speed and broke past the tenacious midfielder like the wind from the right. The next second, his long strides were again eating up yards of space like there was no tomorrow. It was then that he noticed the shooting angle opening up slightly. And, of course, he couldn't miss the opportunity.

Heart beating fast and hard with anticipation, he drew his leg all the way back like a bowstring, intending to smash the ball towards the goal. But the next moment, a shudder went through his entire being as he noticed a leg stretching out and blocking his shooting angle. That time around, Leonardo Bonucci, one of the Juventus center backs, was the player who'd closed him down.

"Whatever!"

Zachary decided within an instant to continue taking the shot. So, he mercilessly swung his leg hard and fast and smacked the ball with all his strength using the top of his boot. And as expected, the ball took a deflection off the defender's boot, causing an additional pang of anxiety to assault Zachary's psyche.

However, the next moment, his mood took a turn for the better as he realized that the deflection hadn't managed to change the ball's trajectory by a significant margin. Instead, it had added an additional spin and more height to the curling shot, forcing the ball to veer towards the far top right corner like a fast-spinning top. Before the Juventus keeper could react, it had already homed in fast into the back of the net.

SILENCE!

A wave of silence descended across the entire Juventus Stadium as both players and fans couldn't come to terms with what had just transpired. Most remained dazed for seconds as their minds tried to comprehend the second-minute shocker. However, all that had nothing to do with Zachary as he was already rushing towards the corner flag to celebrate Rosenborg's first goal.

Chapter 336 An Unexpected Occurrence

Coach Johansen's mood was still agitated as he followed the game from the technical area after the goal celebrations. Every time he remembered the run made by Zachary through the middle and his efficient side-stepping skills, his heart would palpitate. And when he recalled the goal itself, his lips would curl into a smile. He was simply like an excited kid who'd just received his favorite Christmas present.

However, he soon forced himself to calm down when he continued watching the game. As a coach, he understood that his players still had a lot of work to do if they wished to attain a result from the fixture.

Juventus was a team that grew stronger as they settled into the game. Thus, he wanted his players to do their best in the first fifteen minutes to widen the margin before the Italian giants raised their tempo and started attacking fiercely.

"Guys!" He yelled at the top of his voice after the ball went out of play for another Juventus throw-in. "Mark every opponent in our half. Don't let them receive the ball without any pressure. Zachary, Alexander, Tobias, and Nicki! Stay on your toes and be ready to counterattack at any time. We need another goal as soon as possible." His instructions were in Norwegian since he didn't want the nearby Antonio Conte to understand his words.

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The referee soon blew the whistle, signaling the Juventus players to take their throw-in. Mauricio Isla, Juventus' right-midfielder, took a few steps towards the touchline before throwing the ball to Andrea Pirlo.

For that game, Pirlo was, of course, playing as a deep-lying playmaker. So, he'd been occupying the positions close to the center circle in the other half, far away from Rosenborg's box. Yet, when he received the ball at that moment, it only took him a split second to spot a gap that could have taken other players a lifetime to notice. And before any Rosenborg players could close him down, he unleashed a hell-of-a-pass towards the other side, where Carlos Tévez was lurking.

In just a few seconds, the Italian playmaker had induced a switch in play and initiated a dangerous attack on Rosenborg's box by relying on his phenomenal passing skills. He was simply like a sniper who could puncture a hole into Rosenborg's defense from anywhere on the pitch, no matter the distance.

Coach Johansen's heart leaped to his throat as he watched the beast of a striker - Carlos Tévez connecting with Pirlo's pin-point pass close to the edge of the box. Before the Rosenborg players could react, the dangerous forward let loose a terrifying shot that zoomed towards the goal like a ballistic missile.

However, the next moment, Coach Johansen relaxed when he saw Daniel ?rlund, Rosenborg's keeper, rising to the occasion to punch the ball out of play. With a double-handed diving save, the keeper had denied Juventus a chance to score and equalize proceedings in the 11th minute.

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The referee immediately blew the whistle and pointed toward the corner flag.

"Nicki!" Coach Johansen shouted in Norwegian as the players were readying themselves for the corner kick. "Whenever we don't have the ball, make sure you mark that Andrea Pirlo tightly. Watch him closely, and don't allow him to unleash those long-range passes towards the box. Do you hear me?"

"Alright, coach," Nicki Nielsen yelled back, raising his thumb slightly to indicate that he'd gotten the message.

Coach Johansen nodded and then turned towards the other half. He immediately noticed Andrea Pirlo walking towards the corner flag to take the set-piece, and his mood sunk into the abyss of agitation again.

He'd already done his research before the game. So, he understood how good a set-piece taker the Italian Maestro was. Whether it was a corner or a free kick, Pirlo would find his intended target more times than not. He would either pick out a teammate with much ease or send the ball into the back of the net.

However, since it was a corner kick, Coach Johansen didn't have to worry about Pirlo scoring directly. His players only needed to mark the Juventus players in the box, and everything would turn out fine.

"Guys!" He started yelling again while clapping his hands. "Mark everyone in the box tightly. Takumi! Mark the space in front of our box. Don't allow the opponents to shoot any rebounds towards our goal after the corner..."

For the next few seconds, his words resounded across the field. He paced the entire length of the technical area as he tried to organize his team. He only stopped yelling after noticing that his players had understood his instructions and put them into effect.

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The referee suddenly blew the whistle after arranging the players of both teams in the box. Andrea Pirlo immediately floated the corner ball into the area, trying to find one of his teammates.

Since it was a dangerous moment for his team, Coach Johansen couldn't stop his heart from racing. He watched with bated breath as Daniel Osvaldo, the Juventus forward, rose into the air to meet the ball before planting a header towards the goal.

His edgy heart only returned to its rightful place within his chest when the ball hit a snag in the form of Yerry Mina the next moment. The tall Colombian had positioned himself well to block the effort. However, his block was just by reflex. So, the ball didn't travel far and dropped towards the edge of the box.

But Rosenborg was fortunate once again as Takumi Minamino was marking the space in front of the area. The Japanese guy intercepted the ball with ease before smashing it hurriedly towards the other side of the pitch with all his strength.

By reflex, Coach Johansen's eyes followed the ball's trajectory high up into the air for a moment. But the next instant, his peripheral vision picked out a silhouette in a pure-black jersey racing after the ball flying through the air.

"Eh!"

Coach Johansen was stunned and immediately turned his focus to the silhouette. His hopes sored immediately, especially after noticing that the player chasing after the ball was Zachary, with speed akin to that of a race car.

"Will he make it?" Coach Johansen wondered, his focus repeatedly alternating between Zachary's sprinting form and the ball high up in the air.

Suddenly, the ball reached its apex trajectory and soon began its sharp descent back to the ground. Its velocity suddenly increased during the drop under the earth's gravity. Before long, it was almost bouncing on the green in the center circle.

Anyone on the pitch expected one of the Juventus players to control it immediately and prevent it from bouncing. However, at that moment, there was a little bit of hesitancy among the Juventus players marking the centerline.

For a moment, the two players - Martín Cáceres and Claudio Marchisio both looked at each other, probably thinking that the other would handle the descending ball. But that moment of hesitation was all Zachary needed to cover another five or six yards.

The Rosenborg number-8 exploded forth with momentum and was soon upon the position of the descending ball. It was then that Claudio Marchisio reacted and went to tackle the ball, probably hoping to save the situation. However, his reaction was just a tad too late to defend against a highly-clinical player like Zachary.

Right at the moment when the Juventus midfielder's boot was making first contact with the ball, Zachary was upon him, all guns blazing like an assassin going in for a kill. The boy prodigy then immediately blocked the effort by the midfielder to clear the ball with an outstretched boot before taking off towards Juventus' box like the wind.

Coach Johansen immediately started the motion of raising his arms into the air as he watched his playmaker approaching the keeper at breakneck speed. The coach could feel his heart beating like a drum as Zachary executed a couple of side-steps, probably intending to confuse and evade the keeper before scoring.

However, just then, something unexpected happened. Gianluigi Buffon, the Juventus keeper, committed himself to a full dive to tackle the ball from Zachary's feet. But in so doing, he grabbed Zachary's left leg and brought him to the ground right inside the edge of the penalty box.

Maybe, it was due to Zachary's deft side-stepping skills or his swift speed — the experienced Juventus captain had just made a mistake and committed a last-man foul within the area. Moreover, he had committed that foul very early in the match, only during the 14th minute of gameplay.

The whole incident was unforeseen and not the least bit anticipated by Coach Johansen. So, he was at a loss for words for just a moment while his agitated mind processed the new information. But that was not for long.

"Foul! Penalty!" He suddenly shouted at the top of his lungs, intending to run to the fourth official.

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However, the referee was ahead of the coach with his decision. He immediately blew the whistle and pointed to the penalty spot. Yet, his actions didn't just stop there. He soon stepped towards Gianluigi Buffon and showed him a straight red card for committing a last-man foul and denying an attacking player a clear chance to score, especially within the box.

The Juventus players soon started surrounding the referee, probably to protest against the decision. However, he stayed true to his word and turned a deaf ear to their complaints. His decision was final, and he probably wouldn't change it for anything.

Chapter 337 Conte's Response

A soft smile outlined Zachary's face as he picked himself from the ground after watching the referee show a straight red card to the Juventus captain. He was well aware that the decision against the Italian giants was the best possible development for Rosenborg during the early stages of the match.

A few seconds prior, when he'd been one-on-one with the keeper, he'd not chosen a more efficient dribbling style to beat the keeper and score with ease. Instead, he'd executed a couple of flashy side-steps to irritate and force a reaction out of the Juventus captain. He'd wished and hoped that the keeper could make a mistake and foul him within the box.

And it seemed like the goddess of luck was really on Rosenborg's side during that match. Just as he was about to break past the keeper with a deft side-step, the man held his leg. Of course, Zachary immediately went to the ground, hoping to draw the attention and concern of the referee. What followed was pretty straightforward, with Juventus going a man down only during the 15th minute of gameplay.

"Nice play," Nicki said, patting Zachary's shoulder. "Man, that was some incredible run from our box to the centerline."

Zachary just smiled in response. At that moment, his attention was still on the Juventus players lodging their complaints to the referee. Did they really think they could force a referee to alter his decision? He was a bit amused by their actions. So, after watching for a while, he could only shake his head and turn his focus to the more vital issues.

"I'll take the penalty," he said to Nicki and a few other teammates that had just assembled around him.

"You won the penalty singlehandedly, man," Nicki said with a smile. "Unless you want to give it to me, your most-reliable counterpart, it's yours to take."

Zachary beamed, picking up the ball and placing it on the penalty spot. He didn't need to respond verbally as his actions clearly indicated his stand.

The penalty kick was of paramount importance for his team, Rosenberg. He couldn't trust anyone else to take it, aside from himself. His mind wouldn't be at ease even if Nicki, the ever-reliable Rosenberg striker, took up the responsibility.

After a few more minutes, the referee managed to soothe the angry Juventus players. He finally managed to send their captain out of the pitch and immediately started preparing for the penalty.

He organized the players, except the penalty taker, outside the box. But even after doing all that, the game couldn't restart as he was still waiting for Juventus to sub in a new keeper in place of their red-carded captain.

Antonio Conte was in a terrible mood as he hurried his assistants to prep the substitute goalkeeper. He'd repeatedly cautioned his players to be wary of the Zachary fellow. However, they'd ignored his warnings and let the man do as he pleased during the first fifteen minutes of gameplay. Because of their laxity, the team was in a very dire situation.

"How far with prepping the keeper?" He shouted at the goalkeeping coach.

"He's still dressing up," the goalkeeping coach replied. "However, we don't have time to take him through a proper warm-up. So, we'll immediately send him to the pitch after he has finished his preparations. And that should be in about two to three minutes."

"This is really a mess," Conte said, tightening his fists. He was angry and a bit tense. He understood that he needed to do something about the game situation and plan for damage control, especially for the rest of the first half. Otherwise, the opponents from a low-tier league might shame his team.

"Pogba," he said abruptly after noticing that the substitute keeper had yet to finalize his preparations.

"Yes, coach," Pogba replied immediately and rose from the bench.

"Come here for a moment," the coach intoned.

Pogba nodded and approached the coach's position with a slight swagger in his stride. He appeared confident and not the least bit affected by what was transpiring on the pitch.

Coach Conte creased his brows slightly. "I want you in the game as a sub for Carlos Tévez as soon as possible. Are you ready to play?"

"Of course, coach," Pogba replied with a lopsided grin. "I'm always ready to enter the pitch as long as you need me."

"Good," Coach Conte said, stealing a glance at the proceedings on the field of play. "Here are my instructions for you and the rest of the midfielders."

"I'm listening, coach." Pogba nodded and stepped closer.

"Since we already have a red card," the coach said, "we'll sacrifice all our striking force to strengthen the other aspects of our team during the rest of the game. Marco Storari will sub in for Osvaldo as our new keeper. As for you, you'll sub in for Carlos Tévez."

"However, my intention is not for you to play as a striker, even though you're subbing in for one. Instead, you'll join up with our five midfielders to strengthen our side in the middle."

"Additionally," the coach continued, "you'll play a free role and mark that Zachary fellow. Follow him wherever he goes for the rest of the game, and don't allow him to receive passes comfortably from his teammates. Do your utmost to frustrate him, and stop him from doing as he pleases in our half."

Conte sighed, shaking his head. "I would prefer that any other Rosenborg player retains the ball in our half, even when unmarked, rather than letting that fellow shame us again. I even believe that if we contain that fellow, then Rosenborg won't manage to score a goal for the rest of the game. That's even when we're a man down."

"So, as a contingency, tell both Arturo and Claudio to help you out whenever you feel that you don't have a chance of stopping him alone. They only need to defend the zones in our half where he would possibly run with the ball while you continue marking him closely. With that, we can blend both zonal and man-to-man marking strategies to prevent him from doing as he pleases."

Pogba nodded before narrowing his eyes. "What about the striking? If they manage to score the penalty, we'll be two goals down. Don't you think we should try to get at least one goal back as soon as possible?"

"Don't mix up issues, Pogba!" Conte's tone was sharp. "At the moment, what we need to do most is stabilize the game. The most vital issue for us is to ensure that we don't concede more goals before halftime. As long as we can accomplish that, we can organize more targeted strategies to create scoring chances during halftime. But if we continue being arrogant and play recklessly against Rosenborg, even when we're a man down, we might concede two or three more goals. Do you get my point?"

"I get you, coach," Pogba replied.

"Okay, then," Conte said. "Go and start warming up. I want you on the pitch in less than five minutes. And do not forget my instructions."

"Yes, coach," Pogba replied before stepping away to undergo his warm-up routine.

After a whole five minutes, Juventus finally brought on their substitute keeper. His name was Marco Storari — a player that Zachary had never heard of during his previous life. Be that as it may, he still decided to approach the penalty kick with caution. He didn't want to waste Rosenberg's rare chance of furthering the lead due to a moment of arrogance.

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The referee blew the whistle a moment later. Zachary immediately took a few steps back from the penalty spot while observing the substitute keeper, who'd just taken his place between the posts.

Zachary's mind was very sharp at that moment since he'd already activated the Dead-Ball-Specialist Juju. So, he could make out each and every motion made by the keeper.

For instance, he noticed that the keeper was leaning slightly to the left, which was a tell-tale sign of an intention to dive in the same direction. However, the keeper could also be baiting him to take a shot toward that side of the goal. So, he decided to shoot toward neither left nor right after a moment of consideration.

He immediately made a short, angled run towards the ball while still observing the keeper's actions. Then, he swung his leg down in one swift motion and unleashed an improvised version of a snapshot towards the roof of the goal.

As expected, the keeper couldn't save the penalty. He'd instead dived towards the right while the ball soared above him. He could only turn back dejectedly and watch the ball perfectly nestling into the back of the net after completing his dive.

Of course, all that had nothing to do with Zachary. He had already rushed towards the stadium's northeast corner, where the few Rosenborg fans were seated. He could hardly contain his excitement as he punched the air repeatedly before raising his arms above his head to celebrate the goal.

Everything seemed so surreal to him at that moment. He was facing off against Juventus, one of the best teams in Europe and the entire globe. Yet, he'd already scored twice to place his team in a very advantageous position. It was a dream come true as far as he was concerned.

Chapter 338 The Juventus Chairman's Directive

Zachary returned to his starting position right outside the center circle after celebrating the goal with the rest of his teammates. His eyes narrowed when he noticed Conte subbing in Paul Pogba for Carlos Tévez, who'd been playing as Juventus' second striker.

He was a bit unsettled since the substitution was quite disadvantageous to his side, Rosenborg, especially since they'd just gained the momentum after scoring two goals.

From the bits and pieces he could recall from his previous life, he was mindful of the fact that 'the Paul Pogba of Juventus' was a beast of a player. He'd given hell to numerous opponents due to his tactical genius and incredible skill set whenever he played in the midfield for the Italian giants. Moreover, he was also defensively able. He was good at intercepting passes and could prevail in aerial and ground duels to win possession back for his team. During his younger years, he was a phenomenal player for sure.

"Things are about to get more complicated," Zachary thought to himself while observing the Juventus players arranging themselves on the other side of the pitch.

Pogba was about to team up with the other remarkable players, such as Andrea Pirlo and Arturo Vidal, to assemble a six-man midfield for Juventus. Thus, Zachary and his teammates would find it hard to break through such a compact midfield even when they already had a numerical advantage due to the red card. What would follow would be the tempo slowing down and Juventus settling into the game. And if that happened, Rosenborg would find it hard to score any more goals during the rest of the game.

But that was not what Zachary wanted. He was well aware that the Italian giants could inflict terror on their opponents if they managed to prepare well and play at their best. So, he wasn't about to let the result of the Europa League's round of sixteen be decided during the second leg.

He wanted to squash and destroy Juventus during that game when they were a man down. Then, they would never dream of launching a comeback when they traveled to Lerkendal for the second leg fixture scheduled for the following week.

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The referee blew the whistle, and the game restarted after a few more seconds. As Zachary had feared, the Italian giants started playing more conservatively. Even with Pogba, a phenomenal attacking midfielder, present in their ranks, they still turtled up and rarely launched any attacks. Instead, they concentrated on playing with ten men behind the ball to deny Rosenborg from taking advantage of their numerical advantage and scoring the third goal.

Moreover, Zachary soon realized that three opposing midfielders were marking him. Pogba would follow him all over the midfield and block off the passing routes whenever his teammates showed intent to pass the ball to him. On the other hand, Arturo Vidal and Claudio Marchisio, the two other midfielders, would block his possible running routes from a distance. Their tactical discipline was really commendable, and they managed to execute the perfect zonal marking system that denied him any opportunities to dribble the ball through the middle.

As the first half progressed into the late stages, Zachary found it harder and harder to make an impact on the pitch. He had barely touched the ball ever since he scored the penalty. It was as if the Juventus players were giving the 'special care' only to him while letting the rest of his teammates possess the ball for as long as they wanted.

With Zachary, the playmaker, out of the picture, the rest of the Rosenborg players found it challenging to launch any meaningful attacks on Juventus during the rest of the first half. As a result, the score remained 0:2 in favor of Rosenborg when the players headed down the tunnel for halftime.

Among the people seated in the VIP booth at the very top of the Juventus Stadium were two gentlemen in black suits. Their expressions were grave as they watched the Juventus players walking down the tunnel for halftime.

"Say, Fabio," the more diminutive of the two men suddenly said while creasing his brows slightly. He was Andrea Agnelli, the chairman of the Juventus football club and a distinguished member of the renowned Agnelli family. "What's wrong with Conte's arrangements today? How come we're two goals down when facing a team from one of the lowest-tier leagues in Europe? Is Conte sleeping? What's going on?" He spoke rapidly in Italian without giving his counterpart a chance to respond to his questions.

"It might not be Conte's fault," Fabio Paratici, the sporting director of Juventus, answered, sighing. "That Zachary Bemba is a very talented and terrifying opponent. You must have realized that he's swift and decisive while on the attack. He managed to catch our players off guard and created the two goal-scoring opportunities almost out of the blue."

"Still, that's no excuse for us to be two goals down before halftime," Andrea said, shaking his head. "I'm not happy. First, we drop out of the Champions League after losing to Real Madrid and a small team like Galatasaray. And now, we're losing to an even weaker team and about to drop out of the Europa League. I'm really not happy."

"Relax and be patient," Fabio said in a placating manner. "There's still the second leg. We can surely overturn this deficit and win the leg if we prepare well."

"Hmmm!" Andrea shook his head slightly after hearing his colleague's words. "If they can surprise us and win against us when we're playing at home, don't you think that they might still do the same when we encounter them in Norway?"

Fabio, the sporting director, could only smile helplessly in response.

"Say, Fabio," the Juventus chairman continued after a few more seconds. "Don't you think we should bring in more skilled players to strengthen our side during the upcoming transfer window? I don't want to see the club performing this poorly during next season's European competitions."

Fabio's ears perked up slightly, and his expression turned somber. "We're already trying to get in touch with a few talented players from all around the world," he said. "We've already been in touch with the agents of Kingsley Coman, a young talented player currently playing for PSG. We've also initiated contact with Álvaro Morata, the Real Madrid man. Both players have a high chance of joining our ranks next season. They'll surely strengthen our striking force."

The chairman shook his head slightly after hearing his sporting director's response. "I think we should fire all the members of the scouting department for their incompetence," he said, tone sharp. "Fabio! You just mentioned that Zachary Bemba is a very gifted player. He has managed to singlehandedly destroy us with his sharpness and incredible skills during the first half. How come he's not on the list of priority players you wish to sign for next season? Are your scouting guys sleeping? What are they doing?"

A rueful smile immediately outlined the sporting director's face. "As you should know, we rarely focus on scouting talents from the Norwegian League. Moreover, we didn't catch him on our radar since we weren't looking for midfielders in the first place. We've got Pogba, Pirlo, Vidal, Claudio, and Isla, among other great midfielders, on our side. So, why would we go out of our way to search for another midfielder, especially from a low-tier league?"

Andrea sighed helplessly. "This is the problem of sports enthusiasts and retired athletes managing football. Sometimes, they look at the present and forget to plan for the future. If we had spotted this Zachary guy two or even one year ago, we would have bought him at an affordable price from Rosenborg. But after this game, his asking price will increase significantly. We really missed out."

"So, what are your instructions, Mr. Chairman?" The sporting director asked. "Should we go ahead and get in touch with his agent?"

"Yes, of course," Andrea hurriedly replied, seemingly exasperated. "Is there a need to ask? I can see this guy growing into a terrifying player who can compete with top stars like Pogba, Neymar, Cristiano, and Messi. So, why shouldn't we sign him? Please, do whatever it takes to acquire a verbal agreement from him as soon as possible."

"The way I see things," the sporting director said hesitantly, "he might be a bit expensive for us by the start of the upcoming transfer window."

"Really, Fabio!?" Andrea was surprised. "Money shouldn't be the least of our concerns when luring a player of such a caliber to our team. Instead, our focus should be on his attitude towards our side. As long as you notice that he has some interest in joining us, go in for the kill. Make him our priority target for the next transfer window and spend whatever you need to acquire his signature. I want to see him wearing the Juventus shirt next season."

"Okay, chairman."

Chapter 339 Game Progression

After the fifteen minutes of halftime, the game restarted. Juventus continued playing conservatively and defensively. They only committed players forward on a few occasions when they launched counterattacks. But when the attacks failed, they would immediately return to their half and defend Mourinho-style. Anyone watching the game could deduce their objective for the second half. They were obviously intending to stop Rosenberg from scoring another goal for the rest of the game.

However, Zachary couldn't let them be. He wished to capitalize on Rosenberg's numerical advantage to extend the lead during that first leg fixture. So, he started working harder than ever to free himself from his three bodyguards.

He understood that the opponents would exhaust themselves much more quickly since they had to cover more ground due to their numerical disadvantage. So, he was very patient in his approach while awaiting an opportunity. He didn't launch any sudden attacks but only continued making daring off-ball runs to keep his markers on their toes and exhaust them.

And finally, his hard work paid off very late during the 82nd minute. He suddenly made a run away from the midfield towards the right flank when he noticed Thomas Partey with the ball. With the well-timed sprint, he escaped from his three markers and was soon in the wing, where he immediately received the ball from Thomas Partey.

"Asamoah! Hurry and close him down quickly..." Coach Conte shouted as Zachary took the first step towards Juventus' box. His voice was full of agitation as he gave out rapid instructions to his players in Italian for the next few seconds.

However, the Juventus coach's yelling didn't faze Zachary one bit. He immediately drilled his boot under the ball and looped it over the incoming sliding tackle from Kwadwo Asamoah. Without allowing the opponents to shape up again, he burst through the right flank like an incarnation of Usain Bolt with the ball at his feet.

Before long, he ran into the blockade of Paul Pogba, who had surprisingly managed to catch up when he was skipping past Asamoah. But, of course, he skipped past the Frenchman with a couple of deft sidesteps before continuing towards the box. His footwork was dazzling as he made small but measured steps while keeping the ball close to his feet.

A few seconds later, he was already bearing down the box, and only a couple of defenders stood between him and the goal. When the angle opened up, he drew his leg back, intending to launch a missile of a shot at goal.

But just then, he felt a very firm and strong tug on his shirt. He immediately attempted to shrug off the person holding his shirt while continuing forward, but his foe didn't let go no matter what. So, he could only stop in his tracks before raising his arms to attract the referee's attention.

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The referee blew his whistle right away and ran to the scene. He immediately showed a yellow card to Arturo Vidal, the player who had pulled Zachary's shirt, before awarding Rosenborg a free-kick. And as a pleasant surprise, the free-kick position was only about twenty-five yards from the goal.

"Excellent!"

A soft smile outlined Zachary's face when he picked up the ball and started readying himself to take the set-piece. At long last, he'd gotten the perfect opportunity to have a go at Juventus' goal. He could hardly rein in his emotions at that moment.

Coach Johansen's heart was racing with anticipation as he watched Zachary preparing to take the free-kick. If his playmaker could score another goal, his job would be much easier during the second leg. He would only need to organize targeted defensive tactics to frustrate Juventus at Lerkendal the following week and win the fixture.

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The referee blew the whistle, breaking him out of his reverie. He immediately pivoted his gaze towards the area right outside Juventus' box. He noticed that the defensive wall was already in place while the Juventus keeper was on full attention between the posts. Everything was ready and only awaiting Zachary to take the set-piece.

Coach Johansen's tension levels scaled to unknown heights as he watched Zachary make the short angled run towards the ball. The boy prodigy then drew his leg back and unleashed a curling shot towards the goal. His technique was textbook perfect as the ball soared just over the wall before dipping slightly and homing into the top right corner.

SILENCE!

Coach Johansen's eyes widened as he stood there in the technical area, stunned as he watched his players rushing off to celebrate the goal. Wasn't that just too easy? Zachary made the whole free-kick taking-process seem like a walk in the park. A short angled run towards the ball and boom — the ball was in the back of the net. The keeper couldn't even react and stood motionless like a statue between the posts.

Emily jumped up to celebrate when she watched Zachary score the free-kick to extend Rosenborg's lead to three goals. In so doing, he'd also bagged a hattrick against a European football giant and cemented his name in the hearts and minds of football fans all around the globe.

Emily could hardly contain her excitement as Zachary's value would obviously skyrocket by a couple of a dozen million after the game. She could even picture top club sporting directors contacting her about her client in the near future. The future was worth looking forward to, especially with a phenomenal client like Zachary.

"It's starting again," Ryan said, attracting her attention.

Emily returned her focus to the large screen in front of the room. She noticed that the players had already taken their positions and were ready to restart the match.

"It's surely Zachary Bemba against Juventus," the commentator said, his voice loud and clear through the television speakers. "In the 82nd minute, the young Rosenborg number-8 scored the third goal for Rosenborg to complete his hattrick for the night. He has also put Rosenborg in an almost unassailable position by extending their lead to three goals. Can Rosenborg maintain a clean sheet and complete a perfect giant-killing? We'll know the answer in about eight..."

The commentator's voice continued resounding across the room as Emily followed the remaining few minutes of the game. She was a nervous wreck as she feared that Rosenborg might concede a last-minute goal or two. Then, their upcoming second leg fixture against a well-prepared Juventus would be much more nerve-racking and laden with difficulties.

However, her anxiety soon lessened when she noticed the match turning into a boring skirmish as both teams played defensive football and short aimless passes through the middle. Gradually, the seconds turned into minutes as the game proceeded into injury time without any of the teams launching a dangerous attack on the other.

"I think Rosenborg will win this game with a clean sheet," Ryan commented from beside Emily. "I don't see any hope of Juventus..."

Ryan stopped mid-sentence as a big switch in the play had just transpired on the screen. Andrea Pirlo, Juventus' deep-lying playmaker, had just unleashed a long-range lofted pass to find Pogba on the other side of the pitch.

Pogba controlled the ball perfectly before skipping past Thomas Partey, Rosenborg's defensive midfielder, with a simple deft touch. He then quickly flicked the ball to Arturo Vidal, who was running in sync with him through the middle.

Arturo controlled the ball with ease before threading it to Mauricio Isla. The latter took one touch on the ball before returning it to Arturo Vidal.

Arturo received it again and immediately skipped past Yerry Mina. Before anyone else could close him down, he squared the ball to Pogba, who had just arrived at the edge of the box.

Emily's mind palpitated with anxiety when she saw Pogba control the ball at the edge of the box. Without losing composure, the tall Frenchman drew his leg all the way back before smashing the ball towards the goal.

It was a tense moment. Emily reflexively shifted in her seat as she watched the ball curl past a couple of defenders, darting towards the inside of the far post like a missile. The Rosenborg keeper tried to stop its advance with a despairing dive but failed. It just flashed past his outstretched fingertips before homing into the back of the net.

"GOOAAAAL," the voice of the commentator rose up a notch. "Fast, simple, and effective — that's Juventus at their best for you. With a quick switch and a couple of passes, they broke through Rosenborg's defense and scored their first goal. The score is now Juventus 1 and Rosenborg 3, with less than two minutes remaining to the final whistle."

Emily could only sigh with helplessness as she watched Pogba pick the ball from the back of the net and place it in the center spot. She'd hoped that Rosenborg could maintain a three-goal advantage until the end of the match. However, they had still conceded a goal during injury time. She wasn't sure whether a two-goal cushion would be enough for Rosenborg to overcome a well-prepared Juventus during the second leg.

Chapter 340 Analysis

Coach Johansen could hardly contain his anxiety while following the game's last few minutes from the technical area. He watched with bated breath as the Juventus players launched more attacks, hoping to narrow down the score difference to a single goal before the final whistle sounded.

However, time and time again, the Rosenborg players maintained tactical discipline and defended incredibly well to keep the Italian giants at bay. They all packed themselves into the defense and ensured that none of the opponents made any more shots on goal until the final whistle sounded. They'd finally managed to beat Juventus by a score of 3:1 after a few tense minutes of added time.

"We have won," the coach shouted at the top of his lungs right after hearing the final whistle. He could hardly contain his delight as he ran onto the pitch to celebrate with his players.

The players and members of technical staff joined him, and they soon started running around the field like a bunch of madmen. They had emerged victorious after playing against Juventus, one of the football giants of Europe. So, there was no need to control themselves as they celebrated in front of the vexed and frustrated Turin fans.

In the far corner of the pitch, Andrea Pirlo was standing together with Vidal, Tévez, and Pogba as they watched the wild celebrations of the Rosenborg players. Their expressions were grave since they couldn't contain their bitterness after losing a game against a much weaker team.

"You guys don't need to feel down," Andrea Pirlo suddenly said. "There's still the second leg in Norway next week. As long as we prepare well and play at our best, we can overturn the deficit and wash away this shame. We only have to keep on believing that we can win, and then we'll be able to show them our prowess."

The eyes of both Pogba and Vidal sparkled with anticipation after hearing the experienced playmaker's words. Their gazes were immediately filled with yearning and battle intent as they continued observing the Rosenborg players still celebrating on the pitch.

"You're right, Andrea," Vidal said with a lopsided grin. "If we play at our best, we can surely squash Rosenborg next week. There's no need to worry. I believe that we can qualify."

"Of course, we'll win as long as Coach Conte names me as part of the starting line-up for next week," Pogba concurred in a joking manner. "I can't wait to show them the authentic Juventus style of football."

"However, that Rosenborg number-8, Zachary Bemba, is a pretty slippery fellow on the pitch," Tévez suddenly remarked. "He singlehandedly disciplined us during today's game. He might be able to do the same if we're not careful during the second leg."

"I agree," Andrea Pirlo concurred. "He's a very skilled player with impeccable vision and outstanding skills. As long as we give him a chance, he'll surely punish us. However, we also allowed him to shine by not marking him tightly during the first half. If we prepare targeted defensive tactics against him during the second leg, he won't be able to do anything."

Tévez suddenly turned towards Vidal. "Arturo! Do you still think you can mark him alone and stop him from doing anything during the second leg?"

Vidal narrowed his eyes slightly. "When I went up against him, I noticed that he's much quicker than he appears from a distance. If you make one wrong move or your reaction is a bit off when you're closing him down, he'll disappear from your vision the next moment. I don't get how he does it."

"I also felt the same when I went up against him," Pogba chimed in, frowning. "He doesn't appear to be a swift player, especially with his long legs. But when you look away for a moment, he's gone like the wind. He probably bases his dribbling moves on the reaction of the opponent. If you go left, he will go

right, and if you slide in, he'll jump over you. As Pirlo said, his vision is top class, especially during crucial moments. I wonder why he's wasting his time in Rosenborg."

"That's not for us to worry about," Vidal said, shaking his head. "Our only concern should be on how to stop him during the next leg. We might need to double-team him throughout the entire 90 minutes."

"Leave the tactics to Coach Conte," Pogba supplied with a smile. "He'll surely have a solution within the next few days. By the way, we need to return to the dressing room soon. Conte will roast us twice if we keep on avoiding him."

"I'm not ready to face the howls of an enraged Conte right after the game," Tévez said, smiling ruefully. "Let's wait for a few more minutes. He might cool down after a while."

"I doubt that."

After Coach Johansen finished celebrating with his players, he immediately headed to the area designated for the press. A smile constantly played upon his lips as he swaggered through the pitch like a king. He couldn't hide his emotions as he was still immersed in the joy of thrashing Juventus three goals to one.

However, the coach was alone since Zachary had refused to participate in the post-match interview. Instead, the young playmaker had immediately excused himself and returned to the dressing room after picking up his match ball. And since he'd claimed that he wanted to check on the condition of his grandma immediately, there was no way the coach could have stopped him.

"Welcome, Coach Johansen," one of the reporters said when he stepped before the cameras. "You have done it again and defeated another Italian team in Italy. Congratulations."

"Thank you," the coach replied.

"Well," the same reporter said. "Your team played really well and remained tactically disciplined throughout the 90 minutes of the game. And defensively, they were really super. But I guess the football fans don't want to hear us go into the tactics and Rosenborg's style of play. Rather, they should be yearning to listen to your analysis of Zachary Bemba's performance during the game. What are your thoughts, coach?"

Coach Johansen chuckled, shaking his head slightly. "My analysis of Zachary during this game is just a simple four-word sentence," he said. "He was just perfect."

"Can you elaborate?" The reporter queried.

"His reaction to unexpected situations on the pitch, his handling of the ball, his positioning, his decision-making during crucial moments — everything about him was perfect during today's game. I would give him a 10-out-of-10 score for today's performance."

"For instance, let's look at his first goal," the coach continued. "His run through the midfield was incredible and decisive before he finished with a curling shot from outside the eighteen. Then, the run that led to the penalty that resulted in the second goal was also unbelievable. He covered half the pitch in a few seconds before dispossessing the opponents and forcing the penalty out of the keeper."

"As for the third goal," Coach Johansen said with a chuckle, "I guess you don't need me to tell you how incredible it was. Zachary placed the ball perfectly into the top right corner, denying the keeper any chance to make a save. Even the most experienced free-kick takers in the world couldn't have done any better when at their best."

"Thanks for your analysis, Coach Johansen," the reporter said. "Tell us about Zachary's potential. Do you see him rising into a star that can dazzle the entire footballing world in the future?"

Coach Johansen smiled as he shook his head. "Zachary Bemba scored two goals against Fiorentina a few weeks back. He has now just scored a hatrick against Juventus. He's already the top scorer for the Europa League tournament. So, how much more dazzling do you want him to be at his age?"

The reporter laughed. "Let's put Zachary's performance to the side and talk about Rosenborg's second leg fixture against Juventus. Should we expect to see another commanding performance against Juventus next week? Do you believe that your team can win and qualify for the quarter-finals?"

"Of course, I believe we'll qualify," Coach Johansen replied confidently. "We have the advantage since we won and scored three goals away from home. So, we only need to prepare adequately and ensure that we are in good shape before the game. We can then show Juventus the spirit of Norwegian football when they come to Trondheim next week."

"I'll surely be looking forward to that game, Coach Johansen," the reporter said. "Thanks for staying behind to talk to us. And we wish you all the luck during the second leg of the round of sixteen. Have a good night."

"Thanks, and a good night to you too."

After completing the post-match interview, Coach Johansen stepped away from the cameras and headed toward the visitor's dressing room. Since he desired to win and qualify for the quarter-finals, he couldn't afford to waste any time. So, he planned to start intensive preparations for the second leg game against Juventus the following day.

As long as he did his job well as a coach, he didn't believe his players would fail to eliminate the Italian giants from the Europa League. He was optimistic, especially after factoring in the two-goal advantage from the first leg. He only needed to arrange targeted defensive tactics to frustrate the opponents, and then the chances of his team qualifying would be above 60%.