

Greatest 341

Chapter 341 A Busy Schedule of a Few Days

Zachary didn't return to Trondheim together with the team the following morning. Instead, he boarded a flight directly from Turin to Zurich after requesting permission to travel from the Rosenborg management.

He arrived in Zurich about four hours later and took a cab straight from the airport to the hospital to check on his grandma. City traffic was surprisingly light that afternoon, with only a few public automobiles on the airport road. So, he managed to make it to his destination in less than thirty minutes.

After entering the hospital, he quickly learned that his grandma was asleep and couldn't meet him right away. So, he could only press down his impatience and head to the canteen to discuss some pressing issues with Emily while waiting for his grandma to wake up.

"By the way, congratulations upon winning the match yesterday," Emily said right after they had settled at a corner table in the hospital's canteen. "You were phenomenal during the game. A hattrick against Juventus! You really have no idea how happy I am for you."

"Thanks, Emily," Zachary replied, beaming. "However, our job is far from done. We still have to face an enraged group of Juventus players next week. We'll need to play like never before if we wish to hold on to our advantage and qualify for the quarter-finals. Otherwise, if we relax even for a moment, those Italians will destroy us."

Zachary understood the terror of big clubs, especially in European tournaments. He'd already witnessed teams like Liverpool, Barcelona, and AS Roma overturn a more than three-goal deficit during the second leg before qualifying for the next round.

So, he wasn't about to become complacent by thinking that he'd already eliminated Juventus from the Europa League with a score difference of just two goals. He needed to approach the game as if both teams were on square one if he wished to help his team achieve the desired result.

"I'm sure your coaches know what is at stake," Emily said, shaking her head. "Since the job is already half done, thanks to your hattrick, they should be able to organize tactics that will allow you guys to qualify. Let's hope they do a good job as I really want to see you play in the quarter-finals."

"Let's hope so," Zachary intoned, narrowing his eyes slightly. "So, how's everything here? Is the old lady recovering well? What are the doctors saying?"

Emily smiled. "Her recovery is progressing well, and her surgical wound is healing without any issues. Also, the doctors confirmed that there were no more tumor cells in her brain after putting her through more imaging tests. They're only waiting to conduct a biopsy about a month later to screen for the tumor's chance of recurrence. They'll release her after that."

"That's a relief," Zachary said. "I guess I also need to plan for her transfer to Norway. I don't want to leave her in Zurich alone when she's recovering."

"That's a good idea," Emily said, nodding. "As long as the doctors give the go-ahead, we can transfer her to a medical center in Trondheim so that she can be near you. But that will have to be a month later after the biopsy. For now, it's better to leave her in the rehabilitation center here, where the neurosurgeons can constantly keep an eye on her."

"Okay, let's do that. Anything that can aid the old lady's recovery is okay with me."

There were a few seconds of silence at their table before Emily said: "By the way, I have some good news."

Zachary's heart skipped a beat. "Tell me. I'm listening."

"The Nike representative called me today morning. They notified me that they sent money to your bank account. You should receive it in a maximum of three days."

A tremor went through Zachary's mind as his hopes soared. "How much did they send?"

Emily smiled mysteriously before saying, "600,000 Euros. That's the entire annual payment for your first year in the endorsement deal."

"Eh!" Zachary was startled. "Aren't they supposed to be paying a fraction of the total sum first?"

Emily sighed. "With the way you've been playing over the past few weeks, I'm not surprised by how quickly they paid all the money. Otherwise, if they'd waited for you to put up a few more incredible displays during the upcoming games, I would've tossed away their offer and bargained for more money."

"You can do that?"

"Yes, I can," Emily replied confidently. "You need to understand that they are getting a bigger bargain out of this endorsement deal than we initially expected. You were a player famous only in Norway a month back when we negotiated the contract. However, after your performances against Fiorentina and Juventus, you've acquired a good measure of fame around the globe. So, the Nike people are getting more benefits than they're paying for simply because your name brand as a footballer is already reaching a larger audience."

"I see," Zachary said. "But we don't have to negotiate a new deal right away. We can wait for about a year before asking for more benefits. That'll help us maintain a good working relationship with them."

"Don't worry. I understand," Emily nodded. "By the way, how long are you staying in Zurich this time around?"

"The coach needs me back in training on Sunday afternoon," he replied. "So, if everything is fine with my grandma, I'll say my goodbyes to Zurich tomorrow at around midday."

"Good plan," Emily said. "We should travel together as I also have to conclude the business with Nike in Trondheim. As for your grandma, we'll leave her in the care of the nurses for the time being. Your aunt, Marie, will also remain here to support her through recovery. Is that okay?"

"That's fine, Emily," Zachary replied right away. "Thanks for helping me out all these days. Without you, I would have suffered while organizing her treatment."

"Don't mention it," Emily beamed. "I have already arranged for your aunt's stay here in Zurich. She and Doctor Sanders will be our primary contacts in the hospital. So, we'll be able to know everything going on with your grandma even when we're far away in Trondheim. We can then slowly plan for her transfer to Norway when the doctors give us the go-ahead."

"No problem," Zachary readily agreed.

In the evening, Zachary spent an hour visiting his grandma before talking to her doctors at length to understand her condition. When he ensured that she was recovering well, he completely relaxed. A wave of relief swept over him like a spring breeze as he put his anxious heart down.

The following day, he followed his plans and said his goodbyes to his grandma early in the morning. Then, he talked for a few hours with his aunt, Marie, and urged her to look after the old lady. After ensuring that all the arrangements were in order, he boarded an afternoon flight with Emily, and the two of them traveled back to Trondheim.

Over the following few days, Zachary immersed himself in training once again. He was always the first and the last to leave the training ground as he tried his utmost to improve his abilities, even just slightly, before the second leg match. He even continued practicing the step-over juju since he wished to push it to over 100% mastery and ingrain the skill into his body and soul.

During the match against Juventus, he'd realized that he could combine some elements of his skills to form his own unique dribbling style that could be lethal to even world-class defenders. For instance, if he merged the elastico-dribble, the step-over juju, the Zinedine-touch magic, the Marseille-turn, and the Cruyff-turn into one fast-flowing style, no opponent would be able to touch his shoes as long as he had the ball at his feet. He would turn into a ball wizard that would terrify all competitors that chanced upon him.

However, he understood that he needed to instill all the techniques deep into his bones before creating his own style. He would first have to be able to perform the moves by reflex before he could think of merging them. And that required him to practice the skills repeatedly — thousands of times until they were second nature to him.

Since he was a man with a mission, he put more hours into practice and ignored everything else. However, his personal training didn't hinder him from attending the team sessions. He was always in high gear when he joined Coach Johansen's sessions to prepare for the second leg game against Juventus. And if the coaches asked him to do something during practice, he would not hesitate as long as it was beneficial for his career. He even studied the tactics with the coaches to understand how best

to handle the opponents during the game. He was determined since he yearned to eliminate Juventus from the Europa League.

The days flashed by quickly as Zachary and his teammates trained hard and prepared for the game. Most were so focused, and before they knew it, it was the morning of Thursday, March 20, 2014. It was finally the day when Rosenborg would face off against Juventus at Lerkendal in the second leg of the Europa League's round of sixteen.

Chapter 342 Coaches Taking Center Stage

Trondheim was a relatively quiet city that was always devoid of any chaos. However, on that Thursday evening, the excitement that came with the Europa League match between Rosenborg and Juventus shredded apart the peace and calm of this Nordic metropolis.

By 5:00 PM, the overenthusiastic Norwegian fans had already crowded the streets leading to Lerkendal. They'd all craned their necks, waiting for an opportunity to catch a glimpse of Juventus' team bus. They were eager to witness the majesty of some of the biggest names in football that were about to face off against their local team.

And finally, their efforts paid off after waiting for another fifteen minutes under the setting sun. The large white and black Juventus bus could be seen around the corner as it slowly made its way to Lerkendal.

A few Juventus players, including Pogba, Vidal, and Tévez, occasionally popped their heads out of the bus windows to wave at the fans, causing the excitement and crowd mania on the streets to soar to unprecedented levels. The police had to step in to control the enthusiastic supporters. Otherwise, they would have rushed forward to request autographs from the football stars. They were that passionate about football.

Olav Brusveen, the TV2 Sporten reporter, narrowed his eyes slightly after witnessing the commotion around him. "These fans have already betrayed the team even before the start of the match," he said to his colleague. "Look at them. They are all over the Juventus bus, cheering for the opponents instead of booing them. What's wrong with these home fans?"

Dag Asbjørn, his colleague for more than five years, chuckled after hearing his fusses. "You don't need to worry about the fan's commitment to Rosenborg here in Trondheim. They're just a little excited to see the famous Juventus players arriving in their city. But let the clock hand point to 7:00 PM, and the match starts — you'll feel their devotion to their home team. They'll cheer with all their hearts while also booing the Italians."

"Let's hope so," Olav said, his brows still creased. "However, with everything at stake, they shouldn't be showing a welcoming attitude to Juventus. They should instead make them feel uncomfortable starting from now. That way, the opponents won't be able to settle down and play good football later."

Dag Asbjørn shook his head slightly. "Do you actually think that booing the Juventus players will hinder them from playing good football? We only have to hope that our players perform well again during the match. Otherwise, we might still drop out of the Europa League even with the three-away-goal advantage."

"There's Zachary," Olav reminded.

"Yes, there's Zachary," Dag concurred. "But he still won't be able to carry the team alone as long as his teammates don't do their part. By the way, I just found out that he has been facing a tough challenge over the past few weeks."

"You mean Zachary?" Olav's eyes flickered with a trace of surprise as he turned toward his colleague. "He just scored a hatrick against Juventus last week. What challenges could he be facing?"

Dag looked around before stepping closer and whispering, "I just heard from a reliable source that a very close relative of his has spent some weeks in an intensive care unit in Zurich."

"A close relative!?" Olav was startled. "How close a relative? And why is it that we haven't heard anything about this?"

"I heard that it's his grandma," Dag replied. "She's an old lady who took care of him since he was young. His agent should have kept the whole incident quiet."

"Oh!" Olav said, losing interest. "If the agent wants to keep it quiet, we should probably just let the whole issue be. We shouldn't dig deep into it."

Dag shook his head. "My views on the issue are different. I feel that this is a story worth reporting. So, I'll continue digging into its details until I get worthwhile material for publishing."

"Suit yourself." Olav shrugged. "However, I'm not interested in the story. I'll stick to reporting sports for the moment and leave the players' personal lives out of my articles."

"Why do you seem scared? It's not like you'll be reporting wrong information. Moreover, as sports journalists, we're entitled to report to the public any incident that might affect the player's performance on the pitch."

Olav just shook his head and returned his attention to the receding crowd on the street. "I think we should head over to the stadium as the match will be starting in roughly one and a half hours. I don't want to miss the warm-up of the teams. As for Zachary's personal issues, let's leave them alone for the moment."

"Okay."

When only thirty minutes remained until 7:00 PM, the scheduled time for kick-off, the Rosenborg players returned to the dressing room after their pre-match warm-up. They were a little too quiet, at least more than usual, as they settled down on the benches to start making their final preparations for the game.

Coach Johansen immediately judged that they were nervous. For a team playing in a low-tier league like Rosenborg, most of the players had limited experience facing off against big teams in Europe. Thus, most of them must have been experiencing many doubts in their minds as the kick-off drew closer. They were probably worried about making mistakes and losing the game, especially since they weren't that confident that they would keep Juventus at bay during the entire 90 minutes of the second leg match.

Coach Johansen immediately clapped his hands to attract the players' attention. "Why do you guys seem more listless than usual? Are you that afraid of Juventus?"

All the players in the dressing room halted what they were doing and pivoted their attention onto the coach.

"Is anyone scared of Juventus?" He asked again, "If you are, please raise your hand."

Of course, none of the players raised their hands as that was too shameful. They couldn't risk admitting that they were cowards, especially in the presence of their peers.

"I'm glad that none of us is afraid of Juventus," the coach continued in a smooth, steady voice. "We already defeated them by three goals to one during the first leg. So, if we play at our best, we can crush them again and eliminate them from the Europa League. I have no doubt about this."

"But first, we have to understand that aside from our physicality, one of our most crucial assets to us athletes is our mental ability. We must expect things of ourselves before we can accomplish them. That means we have to believe that we can win before we actually win. Are you guys with me?" He bellowed, clapping his hands.

"Yes, coach," the players replied with zest. They'd already straightened their backs as their eyes brimmed with battle intensity. Their pre-match anxiety had lessened to some extent.

Coach Johansen swept his gaze across the room before continuing. "Guys, we're already halfway to our goal of qualifying for the quarter-finals. But what we need in this game is confidence more than anything else. As the saying goes, the difference between the impossible and the possible lies in a person's determination. So, let's not overestimate our opponents and underestimate ourselves. Let's execute our game plan and play our own game without fear or anxiety. Let's go into the pitch and achieve victory. Are you guys with me?"

"Yes, coach."

"Good," Coach Johansen said, glancing at his watch. "As you are all aware, the game plan is the same as that of last week. We play with a 4-5-1 formation focused on defense. We'll constantly play with ten men behind the ball and defend as a team to ensure that the Italian giants don't break through our formation. Whenever there's a chance, we'll launch counterattacks to search for goals. Our game plan is as simple as that. Are you guys with me?"

"Yes, coach."

"I'm glad we're on the same page," Coach Johansen said, his voice lowering slightly. He then assigned some individual roles to a few of his players, including Zachary, before sending them to the pitch for the game.

In the visitors' dressing room, Coach Antonio Conte was also in the middle of delivering his pre-match briefing. His tone was somber, and his expression grave as he paced the entire length of the room while expressing his requirements to his chosen field players.

"Just a few more things before we head into the field," he said. "We're a powerful team. We have all the quality and depth needed to beat any other team in Europe. But what will matter in this game is our attitude. The way we approach the game will determine whether we win or have to bow out of the Europa League."

"So, every one of you has to be aggressive during every minute of the game. We have to play with urgency and the desire to score, especially whenever we're on the attack. Our aim is to score two or more goals during the first half."

"But even though our main aim is on attacking, we can't ignore the defense. We have to use high pressing tactics to force their defenders to panic, and we especially have to mark Zachary Bemba, their playmaker. We can't relax as I don't want to see what happened to us last week happening to us again. I don't want to see him breaking through our ranks with ease during today's game."

"Claudio, Pogba, Vidal! Marking and closing down Zachary will be a shared responsibility among you three. If he breaks past one of you, another should be readily available to cover the space and stop him from progressing with a threatening run through our formation. As long as we stop him from making any impact during this game, our job will be half done."

The coach then slowly moved towards the tactical board in front of the room before continuing. "My final reminder is to remain patient and calm whenever we have the ball. Even though we aim to score two or more goals during the first half, we must not rush things."

He started to draw some formation plays on the tactical board as he spoke swiftly in Italian. "We have to utilize our 3-5-2 formation to move the ball around steadily so as to stretch them. We'll not just move it through the center but also from side to side while also engaging the wings to tire them out."

"We keep working at them using first tempo football, and when the space finally opens up between the lines, we take action. We launch the attack suddenly and swiftly and ensure that we take the chance and score. Tévez, Osvaldo, and the rest of you, who might get a chance in front of the goal! All you guys have to be very efficient while taking our chances. Don't waste opportunities because they'll come back to bite us as the game progresses."

Coach Conte observed his players for a moment and glanced at his watch. "It's almost time for kick-off," he said. "Finalize your preparations and head to the pitch. Don't make stupid mistakes. Play as a team, and help each other during every minute of the game. I want us two goals ahead of Rosenborg by halftime. It's my final assignment for each and every one of you. Got it?"

"Yes, coach," the Juventus players yelled back, more or less in sync. Their eyes were brimming with extreme battle intent. It was as if they wanted to destroy Rosenborg and erase it from the face of the Earth. They desired to have their revenge, and they would do their utmost to have it that very night.

Chapter 343 The Real Prowess of Juventus

The referee blew the whistle at exactly 7:00 PM to signal the start of the game. The cheers in Lerkendal Stadion immediately hit a crescendo as Nicki Nielsen kicked off the proceedings on the pitch with a pass back into the midfield.

Takumi Minamino received Nicki's pass at the border of the defensive third before flicking the ball to Thomas Partey, Rosenborg's holding midfielder. The latter then passed it to Zachary, who immediately turned around and kicked it to Yerry Mina, the center-back ever-present in the backfield.

With those few passes, the Rosenborg players immediately set the tempo. Their football flowed like water as they exchanged short passes between the defenders and the holding midfielders within the defensive third. They even hoarded all the possession and prevented the Juventus players from touching the ball even once during the first three minutes.

The absurd match situation compelled the home fans to cheer like madmen as their local team demonstrated their prowess against the Italian giants. They were too excited as their team seemed capable of thrashing the opponents again at that moment. Some fans might have even let their imagination run wild, thinking Rosenborg would repeat the previous week's feat and win by more than two goals.

However, just suddenly, Coach Conte's roar resounded across the noisy stadium, breaking the cheerful atmosphere around the home fans. "What the fuck are you guys doing? We said we high-press. Why aren't you guys..."

The tactician continued roaring in Italian for the next few minutes. He was so intense as he paced around the tactical area while shouting specific on-pitch instructions to his players. And fortunately, his efforts seemed to pay off after a few minutes.

The Juventus players on the field immediately rushed into Rosenborg's half like a swarm. They started employing high-pressing tactics against Rosenborg players, who were still enjoying a long spell of possession at the back.

The Troll kids started panicking due to the immense pressure exerted by the Italian giants. As a result, they could only choose to pass the ball to Zachary, their playmaker, hoping that he could create a miracle with the ball.

When Zachary received the ball, he controlled it deftly while skipping past Claudio Marchisio, the midfielder who'd been marking him. He then burst forth with speed as he rushed through the middle heading towards the other side of the pitch like a whirlwind.

But just as he was striding past the centerline, two more opponents boxed him in. That time around, Paul Pogba and Vidal were the players stepping forward to stop his run. Their approach was so adept and well-timed. They didn't leave any space for him to keep going without losing the ball.

Zachary had no way to maneuver around the two roadblocks. So, he could only slow down before passing the ball into the right-wing, where Tobias Mikkelsen was lurking.

Tobias, Rosenborg's right-winger, controlled the ball with ease before trying to skip past Mauricio Isla, the Juventus left-midfielder. However, the latter slid in all guns blazing and tackled the ball off his feet.

Mauricio quickly picked himself from the ground before threading a grounded pass toward the center circle to find Pirlo, the always deep-lying playmaker.

Pirlo controlled the ball with a simple touch while sweeping his gaze across the pitch. Before any opponent could close him down, he drew his leg back and unleashed a lofted pass towards the other side of the field.

The long-range pass was like a guided missile. It made a perfect parabola over the defenders before dipping fast and landing in front of Daniel Osvaldo, one of Juventus' forwards.

The center forward had been lurking in front of the box, just in-between the center-backs, waiting for an opportunity. So, he reacted immediately and pounced on the bouncing ball with all the haste he could muster. He got to it before any of the defenders could close him down and immediately squared an explicit pass to Carlos Tévez, his counterpart on striking for that day.

Carlos Tévez was like a predator on the hunt as he lunged at Osvaldo's pass. He controlled the ball mid-sprint before continuing forward like the wind and stepping into the box. He then rounded the keeper and rifled the ball into the back of the net from an acute angle.

A wave of silence soon descended upon the whole Lerkendal as the striker picked up the ball before running across the pitch and placing it on top of the center spot. He hadn't even celebrated the goal as he wished for the game to restart as soon as possible.

Rosenborg BK 0 (3) : Juventus FC 1 (2)

In the 10th minute, the Italian giants had managed to break down Rosenborg's defense and scored their first goal in the second leg of the Europa League's round of sixteen. Overall, Rosenborg still had an aggregate score of three goals, while Juventus now had two. So, if the Italian giants happened to score

two more times, they would have a numerical advantage over Rosenborg in goals and be the ones to qualify at the end of the night.

After contemplating the dire circumstances of his team, Coach Johansen's expression turned grave. He didn't blame his players for the goal conceded as it was a moment of brilliance from Pirlo that provided an opportunity for the Italian giants. He was just incensed by the whole progress of the game.

"We need to find a way to contain Andrea Pirlo," Trond Henriksen, his assistant, suddenly suggested from beside him. "We need to ensure that he doesn't do any more damage to us with his long-range passes."

"I understand," the coach said before stepping towards the touchline.

"Nicki!" He yelled at the top of his voice the next moment. "Part of your role during this match is to mark Pirlo whenever we don't have the possession. Keep an eye on him and make sure he does not make any more dangerous passes toward our box. Please, don't forget as this is a crucial factor we need to address if we wish to win the game..."

The coach continued yelling out a few more instructions and even asked Zachary to return to a defensive midfield role to stabilize the situation. He only stopped shouting when he ensured that his players had gotten his message.

The match soon restarted with the referee's whistle.

Armed with the boost of confidence from scoring the goal, the Juventus players upped their game and launched more fierce attacks on Rosenborg. They employed both short and mid-range passes to move the ball from side to side as they tried their best to create another goal-scoring opportunity. They even hoarded more than 70% of the possession as the game headed into the late stages of the first half.

However, the Rosenborg players defended well for the rest of the first half. They played as if their lives were on the line and thwarted all Juventus' attempts to create another goal-scoring opportunity.

Even the often-attack-minded midfielders, like Zachary and Takumi Minamino, played defensive roles. They won aerial and ground duels several times to ensure that Juventus didn't score for the rest of the first half.

However, after the start of the second half, things slowly turned south for Rosenborg. The Juventus players played with more intensity and aggressiveness as they switched to wing play tactics to break down the opposition.

Whenever one of the Juventus midfielders, such as Pogba or Vidal, would get the ball, he would immediately pass it into the wing. The wing players would then break through using either dribbling or one-twos before crossing the ball into the box. The two forwards would then lunge at the cross and try to score from inside the area.

They soon gained momentum with the tactic and launched even more terrifying attacks on Rosenborg's box. Gradually, they whittled down Rosenborg's resistance and eventually created a clear goal-scoring opportunity during the 78th minute.

Arturo Vidal intercepted a poorly-cleared ball close to the boundary of the final third. He brought it down with his chest before passing it to Pogba, his counterpart in midfield.

Pogba immediately controlled the ball with a deft touch before skipping past Thomas Partey, Rosenborg's defensive midfielder. He then fed the ball into the wing, where Mauricio Isla lurked like a thief.

Mauricio instantly burst forth with speed and controlled the ball mid-sprint on the right flank. The midfielder then fed it past Mikael Dorsin, Rosenborg's left-back, and beat him for pace. Before long, he unleashed a killer cross that soared towards the box like a ballistic missile.

It was another tense moment for Rosenborg. Coach Johansen felt his mind sink into a quagmire of agitation as he watched Daniel Osvaldo rise into the air to meet the ball. And when the striker planted a header into the back of the net, the coach punched the ground repeatedly to let out his frustration.

Rosenborg BK 0 (3) : Juventus FC 2 (3)

In the 79th minute, Juventus had managed to score the second goal and tied the aggregate score against Rosenborg. If the Italian giants could net one more goal, they would be the team qualifying for the quarter-finals with a 3:4 aggregate score. However, if Rosenborg could defend well until the end of the night, then they would be the ones to qualify on the away-goal rule. Any of the teams had a fair chance of qualifying for the quarter-final.

Chapter 344 True Brilliance and Effectiveness

Daniel Osvaldo didn't celebrate the goal. He just picked the ball from the back of the net and sprinted back towards the center. He ran like the wind across the green and quickly placed the ball on top of the center spot.

The striker was eager to restart the match as Juventus was still at a disadvantage due to the away-goal rule. If they didn't score another goal within the next few minutes, they would be the ones bowing out of the Europa League at the end of the night.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle a few seconds later and motioned for the Rosenborg players to restart the game. Nicki Nielsen once again kicked off the game by passing the ball back into his midfield.

Thomas Partey received it and immediately kicked it into the wings towards Mikael Dorsin, Rosenborg's left-back. Mikael also hastily flicked it over to Takumi Minamino, who'd just run into space in midfield.

But by then, the Juventus players had already surged into Rosenborg's half like a swarm of locusts. They quickly marked all the Rosenborg players and closed off all passing angles, making it hard for the Troll Kids to pass the ball.

Takumi Minamino held on to the ball for a few more seconds, seemingly looking for an outlet for it. However, all his teammates were already tightly marked. His eyes reflexively passed over Zachary's position the next moment. But the playmaker had it even worse, with two bodyguards constantly keeping an eye on him. He was the player receiving the most 'care' from the opponents.

Takumi could only release a long-range pass into the wings, hoping to find Alexander Söderlund, the Rosenborg winger who'd just made a daring off-ball run through the left flank. However, Alexander couldn't connect with his pass, and the ball went out of play for a throw-in.

The Juventus players took the throw-in very quickly. Giorgio Chiellini fetched the ball from the sidelines and immediately threw it to Leonardo Bonucci, his counterpart in defense.

Leonardo controlled the ball deftly and threaded an instant pass to Paul Pogba in the middle. The latter received it and skipped over a challenge from Zachary. The Frenchman then passed the ball into the wings to find Mauricio Isla, the right midfielder.

Mauricio Isla burst forth with speed and dribbled past Mikael Dorsin. He beat the defender for pace, and when the passing angle opened up, he flicked the ball to Arturo Vidal, who was running in sync with him through the middle.

The two Juventus men exchanged a couple of exquisite one-two's as they continued zeroing in on Rosenborg's goal-like two whirlwinds. Before long, they were already in the final third, and the ball naturally came back to Arturo Vidal.

Arturo immediately played the ball to Pogba, who'd also moved forward to attack. The latter controlled it well before chipping it over the defense to find Carlos Tévez, who'd run into space just outside the left edge of the box.

Carlos Tévez controlled the ball skillfully with an outstretched boot. Before any of the Rosenborg players could close him down, he unleashed a deadly cross that soared into the box and skimmed across the mouth of the goal like an arrow.

Daniel Osvaldo and the just-arriving Pogba jumped up to meet the incoming cross near the far post. Their imposing shapes in the air were enough to cause shudders within most of the Rosenborg fans present in the stadium.

However, Daniel Årland, the Rosenborg keeper, was alert and a step ahead of the two Juventus men. He timed his leap perfectly and came out on top in the aerial battle. He successfully punched the ball away to save Rosenborg from conceding another goal during the 83rd minute.

However, the hearts of most of the fans were still in their throats as the danger was still at large for Rosenborg. That was because the punched ball hadn't moved far. Instead, it had soared through the air before landing in front of the box where Arturo Vidal was lurking.

Alarm bells went off within Zachary's mind when he saw Arturo Vidal lunging at the bouncing ball. At that very instant, there was nothing he could do to stop the Juventus midfielder since he'd chosen not to defend during that wave of attack from the opponents. He could only watch from near the center circle as Arturo Vidal drew his leg back and smashed the ball towards the goal after its second bounce.

But fortunately, his racing heart settled down the next instant when he saw Eric Bailly, Rosenborg's young defender, throw himself at the ball. The Ivorian dived in without fear and used his head to block the heavy shot that was clearly bound for goal.

The deflected ball then zoomed away from Rosenborg's box before dipping towards the left side of the box. Thomas Partey, the Rosenborg defensive midfielder, didn't let it bounce. He timed it perfectly and kicked it far and away to avert the dangerous situation.

Audible sighs of relief arose from the stands as Rosenborg had survived another dangerous situation. But those sighs of relief soon turned into excited cheers as Zachary chased after the just-cleared ball soaring high up in the air.

Since nearly all the Juventus midfielders, including Pogba and Vidal, had moved forward to attack, Zachary had gotten a rare moment of opportunity. If he could get to the ball, maybe he would create a chance for his team to cement their place in the Europa League's next round. So, he'd gotten into action without hesitation.

Heart racing fast like a predator's on the hunt; he sprinted from near the circle to the left flank in a mere few seconds. He caught up with the ball just as it was about to move out of play and controlled it on the stretch. Before any of the opponents could close him down, he brought it down and turned around to face Juventus' goal.

His ears picked up Coach Conte's roars from the sidelines. But since he didn't understand Italian, all the words sounded like gibberish to him. He just closed off all his senses to the outside and burst forth with speed through the left flank.

Claudio Marchisio, the Juventus midfielder who'd stayed back in defense when the others were attacking, soon came forward to stop his run. The midfielder opened his arms wide as if he was playing defense in basketball while his narrowed eyes followed Zachary's movements closely.

However, Zachary didn't lose his composure even after the midfielder had blocked his path. He dug his boot below the ball and looped it just barely over the approaching defender's head, almost without slowing down. Before the man could discern what was going on, Zachary circumvented him with another instantaneous burst of speed from the right.

The counter was on, and soon, his long strides were once again eating up more yards of space as he raced towards Juventus' goal like a cheetah in the wild.

Giorgio Chiellini, one of the Juventus defenders, was the next opponent that stepped forward to stop him. But Zachary only executed a couple of side steps before losing the defender. His footwork was just too potent as the defender couldn't even get a chance to tackle him due to his trickery.

Adrenaline soon flooded Zachary's systems as he cut into the pitch and approached the box from the left flank like a raging tsunami. He looked up once, and his incredible spatial awareness instantly registered everything within the box.

There were still two Juventus defenders that could potentially block his path if he attempted to score by himself. But he didn't panic as he also noticed that he had support in the form of Nicki Nielsen. The striker was approaching fast and was about to step into the eighteen-yard box.

Several thoughts flashed through Zachary's head within an instant. But they didn't cause him to slow down. He kept dribbling the ball forward to draw in the defenders, and when they reacted and approached his position, he acted on instinct.

He executed a couple of side steps with the intent to confuse the defenders for a few more seconds. Then, when he noticed that Nicki had gotten into the perfect position within the box, he flicked the ball to him.

His pass was simple and on point. The ball just flashed through the narrow space in-between the two defenders before halting in the path of the sprinting Nicki.

And, of course, the ever-reliable center forward didn't disappoint. Nicki connected with the pin-point pass with the side of his boot, smashing the ball past the keeper's despairing dive to score Rosenberg's first goal for the night.

The center forward then rushed towards Zachary to celebrate while shouting at the top of his voice. He was grinning from ear to ear as he spread his arms out and gave the teammate, who'd provided the assist for his goal, a bear hug. The rest of the Rosenberg players soon joined them and started singing and chanting like madmen.

Rosenborg BK 1 (4) : Juventus 2 (3)

The excitement was in the air as Rosenberg had just overtaken Juventus when considering the aggregate score. The cheers reverberated across the stadium for minutes as the home fans celebrated their team's effort.

"What an effective style of play from Rosenberg," the commentator's voice sounded a moment later. "They've accomplished an incredible feat with only a single counter and a single shot on target. They've scored the long-awaited goal during the 85th minute and are now ahead of Juventus by an aggregate score of four goals to three. If they can defend well and prevent the Italian giants from getting a goal back, they'll be the team qualifying for this season's Europa League quarterfinals."

Chapter 345 Impact of Substitutions

Coach Antonio Conte looked at the Rosenberg players, celebrating on the pitch, and shook his head. He was experiencing four capital Ds at that moment.

He was discontented, disoriented, disappointed, and even disconnected from reality. He couldn't help it. The game situation had run out of hand.

He didn't blame Pogba and Vidal for going forward to attack since he'd encouraged them to do just that whenever they spotted an opportunity. He was just exasperated by how Zachary Bemba, Rosenberg's playmaker, was able to be in a position to punish his team at the opportune moment.

When his players had relaxed for a bit and left him alone, he immediately retaliated against them with a perfect counter. His timing, vision, and on-pitch analysis were really annoying.

Moreover, the young man was damn clinical, just like a cyborg purposely designed for football. He could make the best decision when in the final third.

For instance, he'd chosen to pass the ball to his teammate instead of going for the goal himself. Had he gone for the latter option, maybe the experienced Juventus defenders would have had the chance to stop him and prevent the goal.

Lightning-fast thoughts flashed through Coach Conte's head as the Rosenberg players celebrated their goal. He considered for a moment before glancing at his watch and turning towards his bench players.

"Fernando! Stephan!" He said, alternating his gaze back and forth between the two players.

"Yes, coach," they replied, almost in sync, while jumping up from their seats.

"Start warming up," Coach Conte said, tone commanding. "I want you on the pitch in two minutes."

"Yes, coach."

Coach Johansen had been keeping a close eye on Coach Conte's actions. After noticing the Italian tactician prepping Fernando Llorente and Stephan Lichtsteiner as potential substitutes, his eyes narrowed slightly.

He'd done his research before the game. He was well aware of the immensely high threat level of the two substitutes, especially if he couldn't get his tactics right.

Fernando Llorente was a tall, large, and physically powerful player. He was the perfect target-man in the center of his team's attacking line since the main traits of his style of play included heading ability and strength in the air. As long as he was present in the box, he would add more pressure to Rosenborg's fragile defense.

As for Stephan Lichtsteiner, he was like a Ferrari on the wing. He was a dynamic, hard-working, consistent, and versatile defender, capable of playing anywhere along the right flank. He was also a tactically intelligent player who could constantly make energetic runs on the wings before unleashing dangerous crosses into the box. If he partnered up with Fernando Llorente, the two of them would pose an enormous threat to Rosenborg, especially in the last minutes of gameplay when the stamina of starting players was already wearing thin.

Coach Johansen turned his gaze away from Juventus' side of the technical area while evaluating possible countermeasures against his opponent's substitutions.

He considered substituting-in two more defenders to fully 'park the bus' and defend Mourinho-style for the remaining few minutes. But after thinking through the idea for a few seconds, he pushed it out of his mind.

More defenders didn't necessarily mean an impenetrable defense. Instead, the extra two men in the backline might bring about confusion during the tense moments.

Furthermore, adding defenders would encourage Juventus to relax at the back due to the limited number of attack-minded players in Rosenborg's squad. The Juventus players would then grow more confident and launch more fierce attacks that could potentially result in another goal.

Coach Johansen's mind was in overdrive as he continued considering countermeasures. After a few more seconds, just as the game was restarting, he turned towards Paul Kasongo and Karl Toko Ekambi — the two young players already warming up on the sidelines.

"Kasongo and Ekambi," he said, clapping his hands.

"Yes, coach," they replied, halting their warm-up and quickly stepping towards him. Their eyes brimmed with anticipation and expectation as they looked at the coach the next moment.

"Listen closely, you two," Coach Johansen said. "In a bit, you'll enter the game in place of our two starting wingers. Since you'll be having fresh legs, I need you to work harder than ever. Make sure that the Juventus flank players don't break through the wings. We only have about three minutes remaining to the ninety. There will possibly be three more minutes of added time, and the game will end. During those last few minutes, you two must remain on your toes to ensure that we don't concede, especially from a cross delivered from the wings. Are you with me?"

"Yes, coach."

"Kasongo!" The coach turned towards the short man. "I especially want you to mark that Juventus substitute - Stephan Lichtsteiner. Be on him full time, and don't let him make any dangerous runs into our half. That's my assignment for you. Okay?"

"I get it, coach," Kasongo replied, nodding like a hen pecking grain. His eyes were brimming with fire as if he couldn't wait to enter the pitch.

"Okay, prepare to go in," the coach said, patting the backs of the two players. "I expect good things from you. Let's hope that we'll celebrate our qualification for the quarter-finals together in about seven minutes."

"Coach, we'll try our best."

Juventus was once again on the attack. They passed the ball from player to player at a high tempo as they tried to create a goal-scoring opportunity. Finally, the ball ended at Vidal's feet close to the border of the final third.

Arturo Vidal skipped past Takumi Minamino with a simple deft touch before threading the ball to Paul Pogba, who was in a narrow pocket of unmarked space in front of the box.

Pogba controlled the ball perfectly before executing a well-timed Marseille turn to free himself from the opponents surrounding him. Before any foes could close him down, he unleashed a killer shot towards the goal from the edge of the eighteen-yard box.

However, all his efforts were fruitless as Yerry Mina threw himself in front of the shot the next moment. The tall Colombian blocked the ball with an outstretched boot, sending it back from whence it had come.

Takumi Minamino quickly got to the loose ball before kicking it far and away — to the outside of the pitch with a well-timed clearance. Rosenborg had finally managed to survive yet another wave of attack from the ferocious Juventus.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle and awarded a throw-in to Juventus.

The Juventus players were about to take the throw-in quickly. However, the referee motioned for them to stop and pointed toward the sidelines. He then signaled the fourth official to make the substitutions.

Very quickly, Fernando Llorente and Stephan Lichtsteiner came on for Carlos Tévez and Mauricio Isla, respectively. Then, on the side of Rosenborg, the two young players - Paul Kasongo and Karl Toko Ekambi, came on in place of Tobias Mikkelsen and Alexander S?derlund.

After the four substitutions, the game immediately restarted with Juventus' throw-in. Stephan Lichtsteiner, the substitute, took the throw-in. He ran to the touchline and threw the ball to Paul Pogba, who had opened himself up close to the right flank.

Pogba immediately flicked the ball back to him with a single touch before running into space.

Stephan Lichtsteiner controlled the return ball well. He then took a few strides and threaded the ball back to Pogba. The latter received it and passed it to Andrea Pirlo, who'd just escaped Nicki Nielsen's harassment.

Pirlo received it on the sprint before unleashing a lofted pass towards the wing to find Stephan Lichtsteiner again.

Stephan Lichtsteiner, the substitute dubbed as 'The Swiss Express' by the fans and press alike, brought the ball under control with a deft touch. He instantaneously burst forth with speed as he raced along the touchline like the wind.

However, he didn't make it far before running into a terrifying blockade by Paul Kasongo. The short man slid in wholesale and swept the ball together with the sprinting Juventus man off his feet.

"Aaahhh!"

Stephan Lichtsteiner cried out as he went to the ground. He started rolling around on the green while holding his ankle. He seemed to be in a lot of pain.

FWEEEEEEE

The whistle sounded the next moment as if on cue. The referee immediately rushed to the scene and checked on Stephan Lichtsteiner's condition. He then motioned for the Juventus medics to come onto the pitch before showing a yellow card to Paul Kasongo.

Coach Johansen could only shake his head as he watched the proceedings on the pitch. He was really speechless and didn't know whether to scold or compliment Kasongo for his eagerness.

He'd tasked Paul Kasongo with keeping an eye on Stephan due to his incredible stamina and pace. But the young man was clearly too excited and had committed a dangerous foul right after stepping onto the pitch.

"Guys!" The coach started yelling at the top of his voice. "Lay an offside trap and make sure that you mark each and every opponent..."

Coach Johansen could already see Andrea Pirlo standing over the ball close to the touchline on the left flank. So, he continued shouting out his instructions until his players had enforced them on the pitch. He didn't want to concede a goal right before the end of the game.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee finally blew the whistle and motioned for Pirlo to take the free-kick after the medics finalized their first aid treatment on Stephan Lichtsteiner.

Andrea Pirlo immediately took a few steps back while observing the situation in front of Rosenborg's box. He then made an angled run towards the ball before unleashing a curling cross towards the rear of Rosenborg's backline.

It was another dangerous moment for Rosenborg, and Coach Johansen's heart leaped into his throat for the umpteenth time that evening. He watched with bated breath as the ball reached its highest point and started dipping towards the line of players before Rosenborg's box. Then, he shuddered despite himself as he watched Fernando Llorente, the tall Juventus center forward, step away from the line of players to meet Pirlo's teasing cross.

Fernando timed his run well in-between the defenders before heading the ball and sending it darting towards the goal like a bullet. Before the Rosenborg keeper could react, the ball was already nestling into the back of the net.

Rosenborg BK 1 (4) : Juventus FC 3 (4)

A soft smile manifested on Coach Conte's face for the first time that evening as he watched his players celebrating the goal. In the 91st minute, with only three minutes of injury time remaining, they'd finally managed to bag their third goal for the night through Fernando Llorente, the substitute forward. They'd, at long last, completed a perfect comeback over the two legs and tied the aggregate score with Rosenborg. As a result, they wouldn't have to bow out of the Europa League after regular time.

Chapter 346 Parking the Bus

After the goal celebrations, the game resumed. Juventus continued attacking in full swing, all guns blazing. They launched a fierce offensive in the remaining minutes of injury time as they searched for that one goal that would immediately take them through to the quarter-finals of the Europa League.

However, the Rosenborg players remained steadfast and uncompromising in defense. They remained tactically disciplined and ensured that the Italian giants would not create more opportunities at goal.

The time passed by quickly, and finally, the referee blew the whistle after six minutes of injury time. The score was still 3:1 in favor of Juventus for the night. But since Rosenborg had also previously won 3:1 in Turin, the overall aggregate score was a tie of 4:4. And since there was no clear winner at the end of regular time, the game would be heading into thirty-minute overtime.

There was only a five-minute break before the start of the thirty-minute overtime. The members of the technical staff of both teams had taken center stage. They were doing their best to prep their respective players for the extra thirty minutes of football.

The Rosenborg players had already settled down in a circle on one side of the pitch. They continued to chug down water as they received therapeutic massages from the skilled Rosenborg medics and assistant coaches. All the while, they were also listening to Coach Johansen's pre-overtime briefing.

"Our first and foremost priority is to avoid conceding a goal within the thirty minutes of overtime," the coach said, pacing back and forth in the middle of the circle. "So, most of the time, we'll all have to stay in defense and deny space for Juventus' attacking players to create opportunities."

"Marking will need to be tight in our defensive third since we don't want to allow any opponent to break through into our box. Our defensive width will also have to be narrow, and if we can't stop a player, we bring him down long before he can step into our box. Our aim is to frustrate our opponents and limit them to long-ranged chances by playing nine or ten men in front of the ball."

"As for you, Nicki," the coach continued, turning towards the center forward, "You'll have to keep a close eye on their deep-lying playmaker - Andrea Pirlo. Don't let him escape from you and unleash those long-range passes that are very dangerous to our defense. And also, beware that he can dribble if there's a need. So, you need to be on your toes and ensure that he doesn't elude you. If you miss the ball while marking him, don't also miss the leg. Okay?"

"Yes, coach," Nicki replied, nodding.

The coach finally turned towards Zachary. "Zachary, you have an extra role," he said, "We'll rely on you to initiate the counterattack whenever there's an opportunity. Be swift in transition from defense to attack and ensure that you're efficient. Kasongo and Ekambi! You will aid Zachary on that front. However, if the attack fails, all three of you have to fall back into defense at your fastest speeds as our primary aim is defending. Are we together?"

"Yes, coach."

The coach glanced at his watch. "It's almost time. Get ready to go back on the pitch. Remember, tactical discipline and hard work are the two most important keys necessary to achieve the desired result from this game. If we play as a team, we'll easily overcome Juventus."

On the other side of the pitch, Coach Conte was also finalizing his pre-overtime briefing. "We'll attack from the first minute with a high tempo and ensure that we don't allow the opponents a moment of rest. We'll also play with urgency and release more crosses and through-passes into the box for Osvaldo and Fernando. We don't want to drag this game for too long. We need to score a goal within the first fifteen minutes of overtime. Got it?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied.

"Vidal and Claudio!" The coach turned towards the two midfielders. "I don't care what you do, but make sure that Zachary Bemba doesn't launch another successful counter against us. He is the only variable in the entire Rosenborg who might actually be able to prevent us from winning this game."

"So, you guys have to be constantly on your toes. If you can't stop him, don't be scared to pull his shirt or something. We're already in overtime. There's nothing a yellow card can do to us. Okay?"

"Yes, coach."

The thirty-minute overtime finally restarted after the five-minute intermission. Juventus kicked off the ball that time around and immediately launched a fierce attack on Rosenborg.

Vidal received the ball close to the center circle before passing it to Pogba, who'd just run into space. The latter immediately flicked it to Andrea Pirlo — the deep-lying playmaker positioned just a few yards behind him.

Before Pirlo could control the ball, Nicki Nielsen was upon him, harassing him to prevent him from unleashing any killer passes towards Rosenborg's box.

However, Pirlo turned away from the center forward with a single deft touch before dribbling the ball towards the other side of the pitch. He quickly covered a distance of more than five yards through the middle before looping the ball over the defense to find Stephan Lichtsteiner on the right flank.

Stephan Lichtsteiner, the attacking wing-back who'd come on as a substitute, controlled the ball well. He took off instantaneously, racing towards the other side of the pitch like a Ferrari on a formula one race track.

Kasongo tried to stop his run a moment later. However, the wing-back was surprisingly agile and broke past him with a burst of speed. Stephan continued racing with the ball through the wing before releasing a curling cross towards the box.

Both Fernando Llorente and Daniel Osvaldo immediately rose up to meet the ball within the box. But fortunately for Rosenborg, Yerry Mina was in a position to check their jumps.

The tall Columbian pushed off the ground before heading the ball away to safety. He'd saved Rosenborg from conceding a goal in the second minute of overtime.

Be that as it may, Juventus didn't lose all their attacking ferocity and aggressiveness due to a single missed opportunity. They continued storming Rosenborg's box with crosses, grounded through-passes, and long-range aerial balls. They pulled out all the stops to score and secure their place in the quarter-finals.

However, their efforts bore no fruits due to Rosenborg's determination and tactical discipline.

The Troll Kids defended deep in their half, tackling and intercepting balls like their lives were on the line. They didn't just park the bus in those minutes of overtime. Instead, they literally brought a Norwegian Air Shuttle plane and parked it in front of their goal to prevent Juventus from scoring.

With nine or ten men constantly between the ball and the goal, they forced Juventus to resort to long-range shots and high crosses over the defense. But those couldn't bring much of a threat to Rosenborg.

The Troll Kids always outnumbered the Italian giants within their defensive third due to the ultra-defensive tactics. So, Rosenborg was constantly at an advantage when clearing the high crosses and blocking the long-range shots. As a result, they limited Juventus to only a few attempts on target throughout the first twenty-five minutes of overtime.

Zachary was growing more anxious as the match approached the end of the 30 minutes of overtime. He was tense since he didn't want the game to head into penalties.

He didn't like the whole prospect of leaving his team's fate to a process that relied mainly on luck rather than actual footballing skill. So, he started working harder than ever to win the ball back and launch a counter.

He was like a tireless maniac in the defensive midfield as he constantly ran at opponents and tried to intercept balls. And finally, his attempts paid off in the 28th minute, with only two minutes remaining to the end of overtime.

After receiving a pass from Vidal, Paul Pogba tried to dribble past Zachary at the border of the defensive third. With flamboyant footsteps, the Frenchman faked going right before stopping suddenly. He then changed his center of gravity before trying to break through the other direction with a burst of speed.

But Zachary was having none of his nonsense. He immediately slid in and tackled the ball off his feet with an outstretched boot. Before the Juventus man could realize what was happening, he was already tumbling to the green.

"Ref! Foul!"

Pogba cried out and raised his arms as the tackled ball rolled towards Thomas Partey, Rosenberg's defensive midfielder. But the referee just ignored Pogba and motioned for play to continue.

Thomas Partey immediately returned the ball to Zachary, who'd just picked himself up from the ground.

Zachary received it and quickly flicked it towards the wing to find Karl Toko Ekambi, who'd just made a daring run towards Juventus' half.

Ekambi controlled the ball mid-sprint before feeding it past Martín Cáceres, one of Juventus' center backs. He beat the defender for pace and then squared a beauty of a pass to Nicki Nielsen, who'd opened himself up in the middle of the pitch.

Nicki connected with the pin-point pass and immediately skipped past a challenge by Leonardo Bonucci with a simple deft touch. He then kicked the ball to his left—into Zachary's sprinting path the next moment.

Zachary didn't even bother to slow down to control the ball. Instead, he met it with his boot on the sprint and fed it past Giorgio Chiellini, the only remaining Juventus defender. Before long, he was running into yards of free space, clearly bound for the goal without any obstructions.

His long strides were like the rims of a moving bike as his lungs labored to take in rapid breaths of air to support his intensive burning of energy. His vision soon became hazy as he approached the goal at breakneck speed. He was obviously running out of stamina, especially after playing more than 120 minutes of highly-competitive football.

But he persisted and kept going through the sheer willpower, supported by his conviction to win and take his team to the quarter-finals. He unearthed one burst of remaining energy from within himself before side-stepping past the keeper and shooting the ball into the back of the net.

Chapter 347 Game Management

Rosenborg BK 2 (5) : Juventus FC 3 (4)

Silence reigned supreme throughout the entire stadium for a second or two. All spectators seemed to be stunned speechless by Roseborg's swift and fierce counterattack.

Boom!

Then, the next moment, a mega explosion of cheers went off in the stands, shaking the entire Lerkendal Stadion to its very core. The Rosenborg supporters immediately rose from their seats and sang at the top of their voices like madmen when Zachary raised his arms to celebrate the goal right inside Juventus' box.

"Goaaaaal! Zachary! *Clap*Clap* Rosenborg! Oyeeeeee..."

The raucous and disorderly voices chanting different phrases blended together with the loud clapping and drumming to institute a beautiful wild symphony. For the next one minute or so, it rang around Lerkendal as the fans celebrated Zachary's goal, which had just pushed the aggregate score to 5:4 in favor of Rosenborg. Since their team was on the cusp of qualifying for the quarter-finals, they couldn't control their emotions.

"What a beautiful counter!" Kjell Roar, the commentator for the day, yelled after the cheers started dying down. "My heart is still racing as the counter keeps replaying within my mind as if on rewind."

"Yes, it was really a fierce and swift counter," Erik Hoftun, the in-house pundit for that match, chipped in. "There were only 13 to 14 seconds between when Zachary dispossessed Pogba and when he put the ball into the back of the net. There wasn't a second wasted in-between. What a counter! The Rosenborg fans will remember it for years if the goal can take them through to the quarter-finals."

"The goal itself takes Zachary's tally against Juventus to four goals," Kjell Roar said. "He scored a hatrick against them in Turin. Now he has netted another goal here at Lerkendal on top of providing an assist for the other. He's like the bane of the Italian giants."

Erik Hoftun chuckled. "I think that he is a disaster for every team in the Europa League. Of late, he has managed to punish every opponent he has faced. Be it Fiorentina, Red Bull Salzburg, or Standard Liege — he has already scored against them all."

"He sure is a terrifying attacker these days," Kjell Roar chimed in with an audible sigh. "Let's take you back to the proceedings on the field as the match is about to restart."

Coach Johansen chose to make a substitution as his players celebrated the goal. His intent was to waste a few more seconds and ensure that Juventus wouldn't get the time to organize another offensive during the remaining two or so minutes of overtime.

"Cristian Gamboa!" He said, turning towards the bench. "Prepare quickly. I want you on the pitch before the game restarts."

"Aye, coach," Cristian replied.

Coach Johansen nodded before returning his attention to the field of play. He was in a good mood. Zachary had pleasantly surprised him by scoring in the second last minute of overtime. As a result, the fixture no longer required penalties to determine the winner. As long as his players could continue

defending well and survive the remaining two or three minutes, then it would be Rosenberg qualifying for the quarter-finals of the Europa League at the end of the grueling night.

After celebrating the goal, the Rosenberg players returned to their half at a leisurely pace. They started taking up their on-pitch starting positions to ready themselves for the restart of the game without any sense of urgency. They wanted to waste more time, especially since they were already ahead by a goal when considering the aggregate score.

Then, just as they'd finished organizing themselves and the game was finally about to restart, the linesman raised his flag and motioned for a substitution. The fourth official followed that up with the action of putting up his board to indicate that Takumi Minamino, the Rosenberg number-22, was being subbed out.

Takumi Minamino exchanged high fives with a few of his teammates before starting his leisurely trek toward the touchline. His pace was relatively slow since he was also waving to the enthusiastic home fans.

The Juventus players couldn't tolerate Rosenberg's blatant attempts at wasting time. Giorgio Chiellini, the vice-captain of the Italian giants, soon rushed towards the referee and started complaining. Antonio Conte was also already yelling at the fourth official on the sidelines, probably telling him to do something about Rosenberg's unsportsmanlike behavior.

With all the pressure mounting, the referee could only choose to rush toward Takumi Minamino and caution him.

However, Takumi was a step ahead. The Japanese midfielder immediately ran out of the pitch and settled on the bench before the referee could catch up.

The referee, however, didn't give up. He chased Takumi down and showed him a yellow card right after he'd just settled on the bench.

But the action itself irritated the Juventus players and coaching staff as the referee had just wasted more time. And they ensured that he understood how they felt through more complaints.

The referee could only shake his head and smile ruefully before returning to the center and blowing the whistle to restart the game.

After a good three minutes of celebrations and other interruptions, the game had finally restarted. Juventus kicked off the game and was soon on the attack once again.

The Juventus players exchanged a few short passes through the middle, searching for a goal-scoring opportunity. Finally, the ball naturally came to Andrea Pirlo, the deep-lying playmaker.

Pirlo immediately skipped past Nicki Nielsen's challenge before threading a pass to Pogba. The latter received the ball and passed it to Vidal, who'd just run into the space ahead.

Vidal controlled it with a sense of urgency before kicking it toward the right-wing to find Stephan Lichtsteiner, the highly-mobile wing-back.

Stephan Lichtsteiner brought it down with his chest before trying to make a diagonal run towards Rosenborg's box. But he soon ran into Kasongo's blockade and could only choose to pass it back into the middle to Vidal.

Vidal only took a single touch to circumvent past Thomas Partey on the left side of the border of the final third. Before any other opponent could close him down, he looped the ball over the defense and into the box.

Fernando Llorente immediately leaped high to meet the cross within the box. He battled Yerry Mina, the Rosenborg center-back, for aerial superiority before planting a header towards goal from around the penalty spot.

TENSION!

The hearts of most of the spectators had already leaped into their throats. They shifted uncomfortably in their seats while watching the ball darting towards the top corner. But the next moment, they relaxed when they saw the Rosenborg keeper leap high and snatch the ball out of the air.

With a well-timed acrobatic dive, Daniel Þrlund, the Rosenborg keeper, had saved Rosenborg from conceding a goal in the 33rd minute of overtime. The keeper then lay flat on the ground for about ten seconds with the ball firmly held in his hands.

"Ref!" Coach Johansen yelled out loud. "The thirty minutes of overtime are already over. Are we going to play for a week or a month before you remember to blow the final whistle?"

However, the referee paid no heed to his complaints and quickly motioned for Daniel Þrlund to restart the game.

Daniel Þrlund, however, didn't restart the game right away. He let a few seconds flash by before throwing the ball to Mikael Dorsin, Rosenborg's left-back.

Mikael controlled it well and immediately passed it to Thomas Partey, who also flicked it to Zachary.

However, the Juventus players had already flooded Rosenborg's half and marked all spaces and passing angles when Zachary received the ball. He could only choose to pass the ball long and high to Nicki Nielsen, the center forward.

Nicki Nielsen controlled the ball with his chest on the right flank. But instead of racing with it towards the goal, he dribbled it towards the corner flag. He halted right before the corner arc before making himself big to shield it from the Juventus players.

The next second, the Juventus players were upon him, trying to tackle the ball from his feet. However, Nicki Nielsen remained strong and stood his ground. He even spread his arms wide to prevent the opponents from getting to the ball.

His intention to waste more time gained applause from the tense home fans. But at the same time, he also infuriated the Juventus players trying to win the ball back.

After a few seconds of tussling before the corner flag, Vidal couldn't take it anymore. The midfielder raised his leg high and shoved Nicki Nielsen out of play with a kick to the butt.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle and rushed to the scene. He showed a yellow card to Vidal before awarding a free-kick to Rosenborg.

Zachary chose to take the free-kick short as he didn't wish to give Juventus an opportunity to attack during the last minute of the game. He passed it to Nicki, and the latter immediately dribbled it to the corner flag again.

The Juventus players swarmed toward him the next moment to tackle the ball from his feet. However, the referee's whistle sounded the next moment, bringing the proceedings for the night to a stop. The game had finally ended after 35 minutes of overtime.

BOOM!

The cheers immediately hit a crescendo an instant later as the Rosenborg players began running around the pitch to celebrate their victory. They had finally accomplished an almost impossible feat by eliminating Juventus, the Italian giant, from the Europa League after more than 120 minutes of gameplay. As a result, they could hardly contain their delight.

Chapter 348 Surging Fame

Coach Conte wasn't in a good mood after the game. He shook hands with Coach Johansen before immediately marching towards the tunnel. He walked quickly and, before long, arrived at the area designated for the press.

"Antonio," the reporter said right after the Italian tactician stepped before the cameras. "Quite simply, how does this Europa League result leave you feeling?"

"Disappointed, of course," Conte replied. "We're out of the Europa League in the round of sixteen. For a big team like Juventus, such a result is unacceptable."

"What's your assessment of Juventus' performance over the two legs?" The same reporter asked.

Coach Conte shook his head as a rueful smile outlined his face. "We underestimated a dangerous player and allowed him to punish us during the two legs. Starting from the moment when he forced a penalty out of Buffon during the first leg, I knew that things would be very complicated. I tried to do damage control during the first leg, but we still lost 3:1 due to the numerical disadvantage."

"During the second leg," the coach continued, his English heavily tinged with an Italian accent, "We started slow. But we recovered quickly and picked up the tempo after a few minutes. Our efforts paid off, and we scored two goals during the 10th and the 79th minutes of the game."

"But very quickly, we grew confident and forgot about the immense threat that was Zachary Bemba, the Rosenberg number-8. He successfully hit us on a counter the first time, and we replied with a goal of our own, forcing the game into extra time."

"During extra time, we attacked and pressured the opponents as we searched for the goal. Rosenberg defended well and neutralized our momentum with tactical discipline and determination. As for us, we again grew arrogant and sloppy — and forgot about Zachary, and he hit us on a counter in the final minute of overtime."

"To sum it up," the coach said, shaking his head. "We didn't lose to the Rosenberg team or its tactics over the two legs. Instead, we lost to one player - Zachary Bemba."

The following day, Coach Conte's interview was trending on most European sports blogs and even YouTube. During the morning hours, it was even more popular than the Juventus versus Rosenberg official UEFA match highlight video.

Over time, the netizens got curious about the Zachary Bemba mentioned by Coach Antonio Conte during the interview. They soon started browsing the web for information about the player in question. And, of course, the first and foremost result of their searches was the YouTube match highlight video showing Zachary destroying Juventus during the two legs of the Europa League's round of sixteen.

A relatively unknown YouTuber named 'True-BallMagnet' had edited the match highlight video into a ten-minute clip. He had even added visual and sound effects to make the highlights more entertaining.

When the netizens watched the video, they would hear catchy phrases like 'Oh, wow! Look. Look at this!' at the moment when Zachary sidestepped past Arturo Vidal or any other Juventus players. There were even clips of Sir Alex Ferguson dropping his chewing gum and Pep Guardiola holding his head in stunned surprise when Zachary forced the penalty out of Buffon.

The ten-minute video captured the attention of netizens around the world, who even became more curious about Zachary. They searched for more information about him, and soon his name became a trending topic.

Zachary's past match-highlight videos quickly hiked by 10,000s of views as netizens from all around the world continued watching them repeatedly. His social media accounts also experienced a surge of activity.

Kristin was seated on the kitchen table in her apartment located in Stj?rdalsveien as she looked at the surging activity on Zachary's Twitter account. The afternoon sun rays constantly seeped into the room through the window to illuminate her pretty face, outlined by an expression of stunned surprise.

As Zachary's publicity secretary, her roles included managing his social media accounts. She monitored them on a daily basis and occasionally posted videos, pictures, and any other info that could boost his public image.

Early in the morning, when she'd just woken up that day, she'd checked on the social media accounts like usual. She'd soon noticed Zachary's Twitter and Instagram followers exploding in numbers. From the 500,000s, the digits soared all the way to 800,000s in a few hours.

And when the clock hand had just pointed to the two o'clock mark in the afternoon, Zachary's Twitter followers had bypassed the one million mark. As for his Instagram account, it had already achieved a following of 850,000. He was already the number-one trending person in Norway, and his Twitter popularity had long overtaken that of famous names, such as Magnus Carlsen and Vicky Vette.

Kristin was excited as she studied the numbers on her laptop. She hurriedly called Emily, Zachary's agent, to give her the good news.

"Hello, Kristin," Emily's vibrant voice sounded from the other side of the line when the call connected. "What's up?"

"Hi, Emily," she replied, breathing in deeply. "Have you noticed how Zachary's popularity has exploded on the web after yesterday's game?"

"I was in a meeting the whole morning and didn't check the web," Emily replied. "But I'm guessing that he should be the trending topic in Norway. With the way he played during yesterday's game, I wouldn't be surprised."

"Bingo!" Kristin said excitedly. "There's a person who posted a well-edited video of his highlights against Juventus on YouTube yesterday night. The video has already gained 100,000s of views within less than a day. Additionally, his followers on Twitter have already bypassed the one million mark."

"What!" Emily sounded surprised from the other end of the line. "His Twitter followers have already bypassed the one-million mark?"

"Yes," Kristin confirmed, glancing at her laptop screen. "To be specific, he now has 1,000,078 followers. Moreover, they continue to increase as we speak now."

"Damn it!" Emily mumbled from the other end of the line. "The Nike people pulled one over me."

"Sorry!" Kristin said. "Could you repeat that?"

"Don't mind my rumblings," Emily hurriedly replied. "I'm just regretting a deal I recently concluded. Anyways! You said that there's a person who edited Zachary's video well and posted it on YouTube."

"That's correct," Kristin confirmed.

"Is there a way to contact the person?" Emily inquired.

"Why?"

"I want to put together a team of professionals to manage miscellaneous issues for Zachary in the future," Emily replied. "One such professional will be a videographer/photographer who will work with you - the publicity secretary. That's why I'm thinking of contacting the YouTuber who posted the video to see if he fits the role and whether he's interested in working with us."

"I see," Kristin said. "I'll check for Instagram and Facebook links on the channel page. If there are any links, I'll message the person through the two platforms."

"Good," Emily said. "If you manage to get in touch with the YouTuber, contact me immediately. Then, we can assess him together and see if he fits the role."

"Okay," Kristin readily agreed. "What about Zachary? Should I inform him about his surging web popularity?"

"I don't think there's a need for now." Emily sighed audibly. "Zachary might not care for such issues at the moment. He traveled straight to Zurich to see his grandma today morning. We can wait until he returns to Trondheim before giving him the news."

"Okay, then."

After a hectic day of bureaucratic meetings with the club management, Coach Johansen finally returned to his office to catch up with his work. He couldn't relax as he had to put together training plans and tactics for Rosenborg's upcoming matches.

His next opponent in the two legs of the Europa League's quarter-final stage was Olympique Lyon. His team, Rosenborg, would first play at an away ground against the famous French club thirteen days later, on April 3rd, 2014.

Aside from that, there was also the upcoming new season of Norwegian football commencing nine days later. Rosenborg would face off against Viking FK at home on March 29th as an opener for their 2014 Tippeligaen season.

The two matches that were only four days apart were already giving Coach Johansen pressure. His priority was, of course, the Europa League match. But he still wanted to win both games by relying on the depth of his squad.

He planned to use mostly the second team for the game against Viking and reserve the first team players for the match against Lyon in France. Thus, to achieve results from both fixtures, he needed to pull out all the stops and put together appropriate tactics and game plans that suited the two groups of players.

So, even though he'd just eliminated Juventus the previous day, he couldn't relax. He had to spend his evenings in the office, making the best preparations to enable his team to achieve the desired results from the two games.

"What's in the news today?"

Coach Johansen settled in his office chair and opened his laptop. Out of habit, he chose to first browse the sports news before starting his work. When he finished watching Coach Conte's post-match interview a few minutes later, he could help but smile.

The Italian tactician was only half right during the interview. He seemed to have forgotten that the win over the two legs couldn't have been possible without the contribution of all the Rosenborg players. By maintaining tactical discipline and defending as a team, they managed to survive the onslaughts of Juventus during the second leg.

Coach Johansen shook his head and continued browsing the news. He continued reading the articles for the next few minutes until a catchy headline attracted his attention. His eyes narrowed as he started reading the article.

"As the saying goes," the article read, "If you can't defeat an opponent, bring him over to your side. According to a reliable source within the club, Juventus are just about to take the first step toward signing Zachary Bemba during the upcoming summer transfer window. After the 19-year-old demolished them and forced them to bow out of the Europa League, they have set into motion major plans to acquire his services before the start of the next Serie A season..."

Coach Johansen didn't continue reading. He sighed and leaned back into his chair before mumbling, "We've finally got to this."

Since Zachary was a phenomenal talent, he understood that he would leave the club sooner or later. As the academy coach, who witnessed his growth from the very start, he was obviously happy for him. But as a Rosenborg manager, he, of course, wanted to keep him at the club for a little longer.

"Let's wait and see," he thought. "I'll go with whatever top management decides."

Chapter 349 Money!!

After spending two days in Zurich with his recovering grandma, Zachary returned to Trondheim. His plane touched down on the runway of Værnes Airport at noon, and he quickly went through the arrival procedures before picking up his luggage and exiting the airport.

Most of the people he bypassed couldn't recognize him, especially since he'd donned a big cap that concealed a large part of his face. He walked quickly with his suitcase in tow, and before long, he made it to one of the airport's parking spaces. He was there to board a taxi cab back to his apartment.

"Good afternoon," he said to the middle-aged driver after jumping into the back seat of a random taxi cab. "Take me to Stjerdalsveien."

"That will be 580 NOK," the middle-aged driver replied while turning and shifting slightly in the driver's seat to face Zachary. Then, he seemed to do a double-take as his eyes widened. "Wait! You're Zachary Bemba. Aren't you?"

Zachary smiled ruefully, eyeing the driver. He was a chubby man with round cheeks and broad shoulders. "How did you recognize me with this huge cap covering a large part of my face?" He asked.

The driver chuckled, stroking his bearded chin. "A few things gave you away. For one, your voice and your exotic accent when speaking Norwegian. There's also your tall build and that unique afro of yours spreading out from under the cap."

"You can even recognize my voice?"

The driver grinned, patting his chest exaggeratedly. "I'm a staunch supporter of Rosenborg and a huge fan of yours. I have heard your voice many times during interviews with the press. I can recognize it immediately as long as you speak."

"Really?" Zachary was skeptical.

Zachary was a fan of the two greats - Ronaldinho and Zinedine, and occasionally watched their interviews for motivation. But he was sure that he wouldn't recognize the two players just from their voices. So, the driver before him must have a strong memory, or he should be just speaking nonsense.

"To be honest, I wasn't certain when I heard your voice," the driver finally admitted. "But when I assessed you closely and noticed the tracksuit beneath your jacket, I knew it was you. Man! You don't know how glad I'm to have you in my cab. My colleagues will be super jealous when I tell them that I drove the one and only Zachary Bemba today afternoon. Is it possible to sign an autograph for me?"

"No problem. I'll sign for you." Zachary replied, nodding.

"Great." The driver immediately fished a marker and a white Rosenborg jersey from his glove compartment. Moreover, it was Zachary's new number-8 jersey. "Can you please make the autograph as big as possible?" He asked almost with puppy eyes.

"No problem." Zachary smiled and received the jersey. He immediately signed his name on the back of the jersey using big letters. He then returned it to the driver.

"Thanks a lot," the driver said, grinning from ear to ear. He received that shirt and looked at the autograph in black ink as if it was the most valuable treasure in the world. "I'm so happy. I won't charge you for this trip as you have done me a great favor. Fasten your seatbelt, and I will drive you to Stj?rdalsveien right away."

Zachary shook his head. "Seriously! You don't have to waive the taxi cab fee due to the autograph..."

"But, I insist," the driver said, starting the car. "My colleagues and even bosses would be on my case if they knew that I charged the one and only Zachary Bemba for a thirty-two-kilometer trip. Please sit back and enjoy the ride. Don't stress about the fee."

Zachary could only smile helplessly and shake his head when he noticed the car moving. He left the driver to his own devices and leaned back into his seat before fastening his seat belt.

Soon, they were already on the highway, and the driver started speaking again. "So, Zachary! Do you think we can win against Lyon and qualify for the semi-finals of the Europa League?"

"I believe we can, and we will," Zachary replied. "Remember that we just overcame Juventus. The confidence among the players is overflowing. We'll therefore go into the match looking only for a win."

"I'm also confident that you can win if you play at your best," the driver replied as he steered the car around a corner. "Lyon has been performing poorly over the past few months and is just fifth on the League One table. But you have to be wary of their two strikers - Alexandre Lacazette and Bafétimbi Gomis. The two have each already scored more than fifteen goals this season. There's also that tough defender of theirs called Samuel Umtiti."

"Don't worry," Zachary said, smiling. "I'm sure that the coach is already considering all those factors. By the way, I'm surprised that you know a lot about Lyon. Do you also follow the League One?"

The driver chuckled without taking his eyes off the road. "That's not the case," he said. "Aside from driving the taxi cab, I'm also a YouTuber during my free time. So, I'm always aware of the info of most top teams around the world."

"I see," Zachary said, nodding.

"You should check out my channel if you get some time," the driver continued. "It's entirely about football."

"What's the name of your channel?" Zachary asked, glancing out of the car window.

"True Ball Magnet," the driver hastily replied. "There's a dash between true and ball, and there's no space between ball and magnet. Also, the first letter of each word is capitalized. That's the name of the channel."

"True-BallMagnet," Zachary confirmed. "I got it. Don't worry. I'll check it out. If I find the content appropriate, I'll post the link to your channel on my Twitter. But to be on the safer side, it's better that you write your channel's name down for me. That will ensure that I don't forget about it when I reach home."

"Great," the driver replied excitedly. "I'll write the channel's name down when we get to our destination. Thanks a lot."

"No problem," Zachary said.

Just then, he felt his phone vibrating within his pocket. He hurriedly fished it out before unlocking it and glancing at the screen. His heartbeat quickened when he noticed that he'd just received a notification from his bank.

DNB

Dear Customer, Your account ending 4567 has been credited with NOK 4,788,000. Your new available balance is NOK 14,279,357.

Zachary felt a surge of excitement swell through him after skimming through the notification. The money from the Nike endorsement deal had finally arrived in his account after some delays caused by Norway's strict verification and taxation process. With the money, he could finally set his investment plans in motion.

Over the past year, he'd mostly been living off his match bonuses. He'd managed to save more than 9 million Norwegian Kroner from his club salary and the income from the Audi endorsement deal. After receiving the 4.8 Million NOK from Nike, he finally had a more than 14 million NOK bank balance.

If he deducted Emily's share, which was only ten percent of the funds from Nike, and some more emergency money to take care of his grandma, he would still remain with roughly 13 million NOK in his account. The amount was approximately equal to 1.5 million Euros, which was enough starting capital for him to invest.

Since he was sure of the future, he planned to buy shares in Tesla Inc. with the whole amount of 1.5 million Euros as soon as possible. He would then wait for seven years before selling and gaining slightly more than 36 million Euros from the investment. That was easy money as far as he was concerned.

Just then, the driver's voice interrupted Zachary's thought process. "Where exactly in Stj?rdalsveien are you going?"

Zachary quickly gave him directions — and before long, they arrived at his apartment building.

The driver wrote down his YouTube channel name and contact information on a piece of paper before handing it to Zachary.

Zachary received it and shoved it in his pocket. He then said his goodbyes to the driver before carrying his luggage and ascending the stairs to his apartment. Since the traveling had worn him out, he was looking forward to taking a warm shower before diving into his bed for a long sleep.

The following morning, Zachary headed to Lerkendal to attend the team training. As usual, he was early and the first on the pitch. He immediately decided to put in a few minutes of agility and dribbling drills before the coaches arrived.

After setting up the cones, he worked tirelessly with the ball without caring about anything else. Step-overs, shuttle runs, etcetera — he carefully performed the exercises, trying his best to go a step further at honing his skills. He couldn't relax as he was still attempting to merge his skills into a single style by starting from the basics. So, he didn't stop even when his teammates began arriving on the training ground.

FWEEEEEEE

Just as he'd stepped up the pace, the sound of a whistle broke his concentration. He stopped his training and glanced around. He immediately realized that the coaches had already arrived, and they seemed to be signaling all the players to move to the tactics room right away.

After a few inquiries, he learned that there was a pre-training meeting that morning. So, he concluded his session before following the rest of his teammates to the tactics room.

Chapter 350 The Mighty Second Team

"Good morning to you all," Coach Johansen said when all the Rosenborg players had taken up their seats in the tactics room. An easy, relaxed smile outlined his face as he stepped in front of the room to address the players. He seemed to be in a good mood.

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

The coach nodded and glanced around. His gaze paused on Zachary the next moment. He grinned and said, "You're back?"

"Yes, I'm back," Zachary replied with a smile. "I returned yesterday afternoon."

"How is she?"

"She's recovering well. She should be able to leave the hospital in about a month's time."

It was already common knowledge among the Rosenborg players that Zachary's grandma was in a hospital in Zurich. He had already informed all his teammates since he wanted them to understand why he'd missed several training sessions over the past few weeks. So, he didn't mind talking about the issue in front of all the players within the tactics room.

"That's great news," Coach Johansen said, smiling, after hearing his response. "We're all happy for you."

"Thanks."

After the coach finished speaking, his teammates congratulated him and voiced their well-wishes over the next few seconds. Zachary, of course, accepted them all and replied politely before settling back in his seat.

"Okay, okay," the coach suddenly said. "Settle down, and let's move on to official business."

The players immediately returned to their seats.

Coach Johansen swept his gaze across the room before nodding and continuing. "We have two upcoming games that will require us to exert ourselves over the next few days. First, we'll play against Viking in our Tippeligaen season opener scheduled for six days later here at Lerkendal. Then, four days after that, we'll travel to France to face off against Olympique Lyon in the quarter-finals of the Europa League."

"For the Tippeligaen game against Viking FK, I have decided to give a chance to members of the second team. When putting together the squad for the match, I'll consider all the reserve players who perform well during training over the next few days."

"But that doesn't mean that I'm giving up on the game. We're a big team in Norway. We should be able to put up fair competition against any opponents, even with our third team. So, I expect no less than a win against Viking. Are we together?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied enthusiastically.

Coach Johansen smiled. "As for the game against Lyon, I'll mainly select the squad from the usual regulars who performed well against Juventus. But if a reserve player is to put up a spectacular performance against Viking, I'll also automatically consider him for the squad..."

The coach then went over the training plans for the next few minutes before dismissing the players back to the training ground.

A few minutes later, the preparations for the two upcoming matches started in full swing. The coaches immediately divided the players into two training camps.

The first included the regulars like Nicki Nielsen, Thomas Partey, Yerry Mina, Takumi Minamino, Eric Bailly, Zachary Bamba, etcetera. The training camp's main focus was to prepare for the Europa game against Lyon, scheduled for ten days later.

The second training camp included the second-stringers like John Chibuike, Mix Diskerud, Paul Kasongo, Paul Otterson, William Troost-Ekong, Kendrick Otterson, Jonas Svensson, Ole Selnø, etcetera. The aim of the camp was to prepare for the Tippeligaen game against Viking, scheduled for six days later.

Coach Johansen took up the reins of the first camp, while Trond Henriksen, the assistant head coach, concentrated on the second camp's preparations. They soon put the players through strict conditioning to instill match tactics into their heads. They were overly stern and didn't allow anyone to slack off during training.

The following days became increasingly hectic as the Rosenborg players and technical staff prepared for the upcoming two matches. With everyone busy, the atmosphere around the team grew more solemn – and soon, it was Saturday, March 29th, 2014.

The day for the Tippeligaen season-opening match between Rosenborg and Viking had finally arrived.

The weather was not the best that day. The temperatures were abnormally low while the drizzling started in the morning and didn't stop even in the afternoon.

Nonetheless, the poor weather didn't stop the excited Rosenborg fans from swarming toward Lerkendal to watch the game. By 3:30 PM, when thirty minutes remained before kick-off, the stadium was already almost at maximum capacity.

The Rosenborg fans seemed not to mind the cold weather. They sang and cheered at the top of their voices as they waited to witness another incredible performance from their home team.

However, the festive atmosphere within the stands came to an abrupt halt when the starting line-ups for the day came out on the big screen.

"Starting in goal for Rosenborg is Kendrick Otterson," the commentator's voice resounded across the stadium. "The center-backs are William Troost-Ekong and Stefan Strandberg. The wing-backs are Cristian Gamboa on the right flank and Jørgen Skjelvik on the left. The three midfielders are Mix Diskerud, Ole Selnæs, and Mike Jensen. And the three forwards to complete Rosenborg's 4-3-3 formation are Paul Kasongo, Riku Riski, and John Chibuike."

No sooner had the commentator finished announcing the Rosenborg starting players than a wave of chaotic and dissatisfied chattering swept through the stands.

"Where is Zachary?" One fan asked with narrowed eyes. "Is he injured?"

"Don't jinx us, man," another fan replied. "Don't you see him on the bench? Maybe, the coach has decided to allow him to rest. He should be reserving him for the Europa League quarter-final match against Lyon."

"Does the coach want to give up on the Tippeligaen to focus on the Europa League? But that's a bit ridiculous. I've seen players in top teams all around Europe playing the weekend domestic league matches before appearing for the UEFA games during midweek. Why can't Coach Johansen do the same?"

"Who knows?" Another fan said, shrugging. "Damn! I was looking forward to watching Zachary's magic again. But I guess I'll have to go another four days without seeing him play. What a bummer!"

The fans seemed baffled by Coach Johansen's choice of players for the day. They couldn't understand why the coach had fielded a line-up of unknowns and benched all the star players for the season's opening match. And slowly, their moods sank into the abyss of desperation as they speculated that he might have given up on the game.

Their taut nerves only loosened when the game started a few minutes later. They soon started cheering like usual as the Rosenborg players on the field launched unending waves of attacks against Viking FK. Before long, Rosenborg totally controlled the game and dictated the tempo.

And then the floodgates opened during the 10th minute with a goal from Paul Kasongo. After connecting with a pin-point long-range pass from Ole Seln?s at the edge of the box, he skipped past a Viking center-back and then rifled a left-footed shot into the bottom right corner to score Rosenborg's 1st goal.

After the goal, the Rosenborg players didn't relax in the slightest. They continued pushing forward and ripping apart Viking's defense with wing-play tactics until they created another goal-scoring opportunity nine minutes later.

That time around, the goal came through a corner kick. William Troost-Ekong outjumped the rest of the players in the box to connect with the teasing corner ball from Ole Seln?s. He angled his head slightly to plant a header into the top right corner from around the penalty spot.

The rest of the first half was uneventful, at least in terms of goals. Rosenborg continued attacking relentlessly, with the wingers and midfielders unleashing crosses and grounded through-passes into the box. However, the Viking defense held on for dear life and prevented the Troll Kids from scoring the third goal before halftime.

When the second half started, the game situation changed swiftly and abruptly. The Viking players launched a counterattack during the 48th minute and caught Rosenborg unawares. They cut through Rosenborg's defense like a knife slicing through butter before scoring their first goal for the day.

Rosenborg BK 2 : Viking FK 1

On the sidelines, Coach Johansen glanced at the score on the stadium's jumbotron with narrowed eyes. He was a bit apprehensive, especially since only one goal was still separating his team from the opponents. But after a moment of consideration, he still decided to wait instead of making an immediate substitution.

And his patience was finally rewarded in the 65th minute. After a failed Viking corner kick, the Rosenborg players hit back with a sudden counterattack.

Mike Jensen collected the loose ball at the edge of the box and immediately passed it to Ole Seln?s. The latter controlled it well before unleashing a lofted pass into the left wing to find Paul Kasongo.

Paul Kasongo exploded with speed and raced towards the other side of the pitch in mere seconds. A Viking defender soon came to close him down. However, the highly agile Rosenborg winger threaded the ball back to the sprinting Ole Seln?s in the middle.

Ole Seln?s received it and immediately switched gameplay to the right-wing to find Riku Riski with a lofted pass over an approaching opponent.

Riku Riski controlled it mid-sprint and immediately passed to John Chibuike, the Rosenborg center forward.

The cheers in the stadium hit a crescendo as John Chibuike skipped past a center back with a deft touch before chipping the ball past the outstretched fingertips of the Viking keeper.

Rosenborg BK 3 : Viking FK 1

After scoring the third goal, the Rosenborg players played more conservatively. They focused more on defense and prevented Viking from creating other goal-scoring opportunities for the rest of the game. And finally, the game ended 3:1 in favor of Rosenborg after four minutes of added time.

Nicki Nielsen turned his attention from the game after hearing the final whistle. He sighed and stood up before saying to no one in particular, "These guys are quite something. If we're not careful, they might bench us anytime."

"You're right," Mikael echoed as he also stood up to head towards the tunnel. "In particular, the performances of Ole Selnæs and Paul Kasongo have surprised me. The coach will start taking them seriously from now on."

Zachary listened to his teammates conversing but chose not to comment. He was also surprised by the performance of the second team. But he wasn't worried that any of the reserves would snatch his number.

Instead, he was delighted by the fact that his team had grown to a level where it could thrash domestic league opponents with the second-stringers. He was more at ease since the highly-skilled players in reserve would allow the coach to rotate players more often to ensure that the team became more competitive on many fronts.