

Greatest 431

Chapter 431: Pre-Season Schedule Kingsley Coman, Juventus' 19-year-old recruit from PSG, was the first to step on the hilarious excuse of a stage that was a chair positioned in the middle of the room. The young French footballer outdid himself by performing P. Diddy's classic hit - Bad Boys for Life. His lyrical flow was spot on — as if he had practiced the rap song several times beforehand. He even elicited a wave of thunderous applause from his new teammates when he left the stage.

Then, it was Patrice Evra's turn to sing. The other Frenchman stepped on stage and introduced himself before getting into the groove. He sang Marvin Gaye's Let's Get it on and strained his voice to hit all the high notes. Naturally, his sorry excuse of an attempt to sing elicited frenzied waves of laughter from the other Juventus players.

After Patrice Evra, it was Roberto Pereyra's turn to perform. The man freshly signed by Juventus from Udinese sang a Spanish song that sounded uninteresting and totally alien to Zachary. But surprisingly, the other Juventus players seemed impressed by the song. They applauded the player as he stepped off the stage and returned to his seat.

The next on stage was Morata, who produced a somewhat acceptable performance of another Spanish hit single before returning to his seat. And then finally, it was Zachary's turn to step on stage. It was the time for Juventus' most expensive signing that summer to go through the initiation ceremony.

"Can I really sing anything?" Zachary asked after standing atop the stage that was the chair positioned in the middle of the room. He had already come to terms with his circumstances and wasn't nervous.

"You can sing any song of your own choosing," Pogba replied in English. "Just do your best."

"Okay, here we go." Zachary smiled and breathed in deeply to prepare himself, and a tune from his childhood slowly emerged from the deep confines of his mind. Without delay, he faced the crowd of his new teammates and started singing, "Baa Baa black sheep! Have you any wool? Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full. One for the master, one for the dame, and one for the little boy, who lives down the lane..."

His deep voice reverberated across the room, grating and scratching upon the ears of his new teammates. He repeated the catchy rhyme, not once or twice but a dozen times, and only stopped when he realized that the rest of the Juventus players were looking at him with strange expressions.

"That was the only song I could remember," he said, smiling and stepping off the stage. "Thank you all for listening."

In response, all the players remained silent while continuing to gaze at him with weird expressions. A few seconds passed, and suddenly, someone within the crowd started laughing. Then another followed — and soon, all the players in the room were doubling over with laughter. They laughed so hard and didn't stop even when Zachary settled back in his seat.

"Seriously, Zachary!" Pogba finally spoke after the waves of laughter died down. "What was that? Was it a song? We can't allow this."

"But, you all agreed that I can sing any song of my own choosing," Zachary argued, glancing at the Frenchman. "Are you trying to go back on your words by declaring that I haven't completed the ritual?"

"Don't mind Pogba," Buffon chimed in to save the situation. "He's just making trouble. Since you have already sung for your teammates, you're now fully initiated as a Juventus player. Welcome to Juventus, once again."

"Thanks," Zachary said, letting out a breath. He didn't wish to ever step on stage to sing again. Otherwise, he might become the joke of the entire footballing community in Europe with his poor excuse of a singing voice.

With the matter settled, Buffon said a few more welcoming remarks to Zachary and the other new signings before allowing the coaches to take center stage. Finally, after going through all the foolery, the time to discuss the main themes of the meeting had arrived. And, of course, Zachary was excited as he was about to attend his first tactical gathering at his new club.

"On behalf of the coaching staff, I would also like to welcome all the new players to this great club," Maurizio Trombetta, the assistant head coach in charge of the first team, spoke in English after stepping forward. "We'll do everything possible to ensure that we make you feel at home during your tenure at Juventus. But I also wish to remind you that we only utilize Italian during meetings at this club. As you should have realized, the coaches and most of your teammates speak only Italian. So, I urge you to start learning the Italian language as soon as possible if you wish to fit into this football community. Is that clear, my friends who have just arrived in Turin and don't speak Italian?" He swept his gaze over Zachary, Patrice Evra, Kingsley Coman, and Álvaro Morata, the new Juventus recruits.

"We understand, coach," Zachary and the other three responded, more or less in unison.

"Excellent," Coach Trombetta said. "For today's meeting, we'll still utilize Italian. But afterward, you four can approach me, and I'll explain the entire content of the meeting to you. Okay?"

"Okay," Zachary and the other three responded.

"Good." Coach Trombetta smiled and turned his gaze away. He then faced Coach Allegri and started spitting out rapid Italian words that Zachary couldn't understand. He spoke for about three minutes before stepping back and taking his seat.

It was then that Massimiliano Allegri stepped forward. The newly appointed head coach of Juventus didn't voice any English words like his counterpart. Instead, he began vocalizing rapid Italian sentences while pacing back and forth around the room. He only completed his 'alien' speech about thirty minutes later when Zachary was almost dying of boredom. And without further ado, he dismissed his players to the training ground to commence practice.

At that moment, while most players were exiting the room, Zachary and the other three new signings who couldn't speak Italian hurriedly stood up and approached Coach Trombetta. Naturally, they wanted the trainer to explain the content of the meeting to them.

"You guys are quick to get here!" Coach Trombetta said after noticing them. "That's excellent. Let's sit in the corner and begin right away."

Without saying more needless words, the coach led the way to a table in the far corner of the tactics room. The four players, including Zachary, matched his step and soon settled on the seats opposite his.

"How is your first day at Juventus so far?" The coach asked after leaning back in his seat.

"A bit vexing as we can't understand anything," Patrice Evra was the first to respond.

"Everything at the club is interesting," Kingsley Coman was the next to reply. "The language barrier is the only issue."

"I also find everything refreshing except the language barrier issue," Zachary took the cue and responded.

"What about you, Álvaro?" Coach Trombetta chimed in again while looking at the only Spaniard in the group.

"Well," Morata said, "I'm only waiting for the training and the matches. All the rest of the activities, including the meetings, don't really interest me much."

"You've spoken like a true footballer." The assistant coach laughed. "But meetings are also important, especially if we want to get our tactics right on the field of play."

"True," Morata agreed before going silent again.

Coach Trombetta smiled and planted his elbows on the table. "Let's move on to the content of the meeting. In brief, there were three points that Coach Allegri talked about today. First, he introduced his vision for the club. He said he wanted all his players to be flexible, disciplined, and hard-working, whether on or off the field. He mentioned how he wished to win many domestic trophies and hopefully the Champions League during his tenure as the Juventus coach. He also urged all players to do their best and work with him to realize those lofty goals."

"Secondly, Coach Allegri explained the objectives of the upcoming pre-season tour of Asia and Australia. He repeatedly mentioned how he wanted to use the pre-season matches to straighten out his tactics and help his players attain top match fitness. He also advised the players to utilize the tour to build great team chemistry with teammates. And that way, they would find it easy to play matchless football and destroy all the other opponents when the Serie A season commenced."

"Thirdly," Coach Trombetta continued, "Allegri also described the team's training objectives for the next four days. He wants all players to concentrate on honing their physical fitness before the pre-season tour. Thus, all players will have to put a hundred percent effort into the gym sessions while also taking the time to go through drills, like agilities and cone work, with the intent to build fitness. And, of course,

that means there will be limited or no ball work over the next four days. That summarizes the entire content of the meeting."

"Thanks for translating, coach," Evra immediately said. "But one thing I didn't get is the pre-season schedule. When are we departing for Asia and Australia? And which teams will we be facing during the tour? Can you shed some light on that?"

"Sure." Coach Trombetta nodded and fished a piece of paper from his shirt's pocket. "We plan to set off from Turin on Saturday. That's five days from now, on August 2nd. As for the schedule of the pre-season matches, you can take a look at it yourselves." He passed the paper to Patrice Evra, who perused its contents for a few seconds before passing it over to Zachary.

Zachary received the paper and focused on the contents. Without delay, his eyes started taking in the entire pre-season schedule of Juventus.

*Scheduled Friendlies During the Pre-season Tour:

-> August 6th, 2014: Indonesia Super League All-Stars vs. Juventus (Match Venue: Gelora Bung Karno Stadium, Jakarta, Indonesia)

-> August 10th, 2014: Australia & New Zealand A-League All-Stars vs. Juventus (Match Venue: ANZ Stadium, Sydney, Australia)

-> August 13th, 2014: Newcastle Jets vs. Juventus (Match Venue: Princes Park Stadium, Carlton, Australia)

-> August 16th, 2014: LionsXII & S-League Internationals Select vs. Juventus (Match Venue: Singapore National Stadium, Kallang, Singapore)

*TIM Trophy (Round-Robin, three teams) Pre-season Matches:

-> August 23rd, 2014: Juventus vs. AC Milan (Match Venue: Mapei Stadium, Reggio Emilia, Italy)

-> August 23rd, 2014: Juventus vs. Sassuolo (Match Venue: Mapei Stadium, Reggio Emilia, Italy)

Chapter 432: Big Money, Plans, and Concerns
After memorizing Juventus' pre-season schedule, Zachary passed the paper on to Álvaro Morata, his new Spanish teammate. He then glanced at Coach Trombetta and asked, "Coach! How come there are two games scheduled on August 23rd? Could there be a mistake in the scheduling?"

Coach Trombetta smiled knowingly and said, "Don't worry. There's no mistake. We're simply following the unusual scheduling of the TIM Trophy. It has always featured three teams competing against each other in a single-day round-robin battle. The fortunate thing is that the matches last only forty-five minutes. So, you don't have to worry about over-exhausting yourself even if you play two consecutive games."

"Oh, I see," Zachary said, finally seeing the light. "Thanks for the clarification."

"You're welcome," Coach Trombetta said and turned his gaze away from Zachary. "Are there any more questions?"

All four players remained silent. They clearly didn't require any more clarifications about the content of the just-concluded meeting or the pre-season tour.

"Well, then," Coach Trombetta intoned, standing up. "Since there are no more questions, it's time for you to head to the pitch and join the rest of your teammates for training. But please don't forget that the theme for the next four days is achieving top physical fitness. You have to work hard in that area to impress the coaches. Understood?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied.

"Okay, let's hurry and head to the pitch," the assistant coach said. "Otherwise, Coach Allegri will start fuming if we spend more time than necessary here. And believe me; you wouldn't want to face an angry Allegri at the beginning of the season."

The four players laughed after hearing that. They quickly followed the assistant coach out of the almost empty tactics room and walked towards the training turfs. They were obviously ready to commence the first training with their new club.

Over the next few days, Zachary didn't dare squander any time, especially since the start of the season was fast approaching. Aside from his language classes, he ignored almost everything and got busy training with his new teammates. He worked harder than ever and went through all the team drills like his life depended on it.

When his coaches signaled him to run, he would run like a good boy. When they would tell him to lift weights or execute abdominal crutches in the gym, he would get into action and perform all the exercises without complaint. He was the true-blue portrayal of an obedient and hardworking character, especially since he wanted to impress his new bosses. And nothing, including the language barrier, could distract him from achieving his goals.

As the days passed, Zachary realized that one's knowledge of the Italian language didn't matter that much on the training ground. Without even understanding what the coaches were saying, he could still follow the examples of his teammates and perform all exercises without committing mistakes. And if he really needed anything translated, he would seek out Coach Trombetta or international teammates, like Paul Pogba, who had a good command of Italian, to help him out.

As if in a flash, the four days elapsed, and August 1st finally arrived. It was finally the eve of the day when the entire Juventus team would set off for the pre-season tour of Asia and Australia.

The atmosphere around the team was teeming with enthusiasm when the training ended that day. Most players talked excitedly with their colleagues as they left the training ground in the evening. They were obviously looking forward to the trip to Asia and Australia after spending four days training intensively.

"Zachary!"

Suddenly, Zachary, who was in the middle of a conversation with Patrice Evra while traversing the hallways of the training center, heard a shout from behind him. He immediately turned around and realized that Coach Trombetta was waving at him from a distance.

"Excuse me," Zachary said to Evra in French. "I guess I have to go. Coach Trombetta wants to meet me."

"Okay, good luck," Evra said, smiling. "See you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow," Zachary responded and then retraced his steps to meet with Coach Trombetta.

"I'm glad I managed to catch you before you left," the coach said after Zachary stood before him.

"What's up?" Zachary immediately asked, glancing at the coach. Since he had grown familiar with the trainer, he no longer addressed him with honorifics.

"Well," Coach Trombetta said, "The head coach tasked me with asking you about your match fitness. How do you feel after training with us for four days? Do you think you're back to the top of your game?"

"Not yet," Zachary replied with a sigh. "I have done everything possible to regain my match fitness over the past four days, but I'm yet to achieve the desired results. I need about three to four weeks to get back into tip-top shape."

"Okay, then." Coach Trombetta nodded. "But you don't need to worry about the match fitness problem before the start of the season. The matches won't be that demanding. Moreover, playing matches during the pre-season tour will help to get you back into top condition as soon as possible."

"I hope so," Zachary said as thoughts about his current football technique stats flashed through his mind. The previous night, he'd checked the system interface and realized that only his ball control was back to the S+ grading. As for the rest of the technique stats, including dribbling skills, passing accuracy, and body control, they were all still a grade below what was supposed to be their peak due to him consuming the S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir a few days ago.

"Okay, then, Zachary," Coach Trombetta said, still smiling. "Remember that we're departing tomorrow at nine in the morning. So, you must at least be here by 8:30 AM. Don't be late."

"I understand, coach," Zachary said. "See you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow, and enjoy your evening," the coach responded with a smile before turning and walking away.

Zachary also didn't drag his feet. He whirled around and continued walking through the hallways. In about a minute, he exited the building and headed toward the parking lot, where he found Angelo Mattiello, his interpreter/guide/driver, waiting for him.

"You're here," Angelo said, stepping out of his Citroën. "How was your day?"

"As hectic as usual," Zachary replied.

"That's understandable since the team is preparing for the new season," Angelo said. "What's next on your schedule? Should I drive you to your hotel now, or do you wish to pass by the language school first?"

"Let's head to the hotel," Zachary said and threw his gym bag into the vehicle's back seat. "We're setting off for the pre-season tour tomorrow early in the morning. So, I have a lot of things to prepare."

"Okay, then," Angelo naturally concurred. "Enter the car, and let's go."

Zachary nodded and settled in the back seat of Angelo's Citroën before closing the door. Just then, as he was still in the middle of making himself comfortable, he felt his phone vibrate for a brief moment within his trouser pocket. By reflex, he fished it out, then unlocked it before glancing at the screen.

"Eh!" Zachary couldn't believe his eyes the next moment. His heartbeat quickened, and he decided to read the text message he'd just received once again.

INTESA SANPAOLO

Dear Customer, Your account ending 5432 has been credited with EUR 15,000,000. Your new account balance is EUR 15,403,000. Thank you for banking with us.

After rereading the text message, Zachary finally confirmed that he had just received the first 15 million Euros promised to him by Juventus. After spending ten days in Turin, he had finally received the first portion of his 32 million signing bonus money. He couldn't contain his excitement, especially since it was the first time receiving such a colossal amount of cash in his two lives.

"Is anything wrong?" Angelo asked from the driving seat while glancing at him through the rearview mirror. It seemed like the guide had already noticed his agitation.

"No, no," Zachary replied, grinning. "Everything is just fine. Let's set off and head to the hotel."

"Okay, fasten your seat belt," Angelo agreed and started the car. Before long, he eased it out of the parking lot and exited the training center before joining the main streets of Turin.

As for Zachary, who was in the back seat, he was still basking in the excitement of receiving his first 15 million from Juventus. But that wasn't for long. He breathed in and forced himself to calm down by watching the passing scenery outside the car window. Soon, his mind entered overdrive mode and started formulating plans of how best to utilize his newfound fortune.

Firstly, he wanted to buy a good house in a good neighborhood in Turin. Secondly, he also wished to make a few more investments in the stock market by relying on his knowledge of the future and the guidance of his financial adviser. He planned to invest a million or two in companies that were sure to multiply his money in the years to come.

Lastly, he also wanted to jump on the cryptocurrency bandwagon. After returning from the pre-season tour, he intended to make a calculated risk and splash about 10 million Euros on Bitcoin. Then, when he received another big check from Juventus and his endorsers, he would also invest in Ethereum, which would be launched the following year in 2015. What would follow would be him waiting a few years before harvesting hundreds of millions or even billions of Euros at the start of the next decade. That was his master plan to get rich while continuing his career as a football player.

Meanwhile, Maurizio Trombetta, the assistant coach, who had just talked to Zachary, stepped into Coach Allegri's spacious office. He settled down in one of the chairs and waited for the head coach to finish what he was doing on his laptop.

"You talked to him?" Allegri finally looked up from his laptop and asked in Italian after a few seconds.

"Yes, I did," Maurizio replied.

"So, what was his response?"

"He still claims that he's not yet back to a hundred percent condition," Maurizio said. "He hinted about needing between three to four weeks to attain full match fitness."

"Oh!" Allegri nodded. He remained silent for a few seconds as if considering something before asking again, "After spending four days observing him, what is your impression of him?"

"Very hard working and very serious about his career," Maurizio replied immediately. "I've only seen a few players as intense and passionate as him during training. I don't think a player with his attitude can lie about his match fitness."

"I also feel the same way," Coach Allegri said, nodding. "Players know their bodies best. They are even better than the best medicals at understanding the condition of their bodies. So, I'm quite inclined to believe him and consider the fact that he's still struggling with his fitness."

"True." Maurizio leaned back into his seat. "So, do we wait for him to attain full fitness before putting him on the pitch? Or do we utilize him during the pre-season matches?"

"We will utilize him," Coach Allegri said, "But only sparingly. We can give him 10 to 15 minutes of playing time for every match during the pre-season tour. That will allow him to get into shape quicker."

"True," Maurizio concurred. "That will also safeguard him from getting strained and injured before the start of the Serie A season. But how do we deal with the board and the chairman? They have warned us that they want to see their 70-plus million investment playing as many games as possible during the pre-season. They claim that that will allow him to build a large fanbase as soon as possible."

"Just ignore the board," Coach Allegri said in a dismissive manner. "It's always good to listen to the player's concerns instead. Since he says he's not back to full fitness, we give him a little time to recover. That way, we can make him feel more at home at the club, and he will be able to put all his heart out on the pitch when he finally makes his full debut."

"I understand," Maurizio said.

Chapter 433: Pre-Season Tour StartsAs planned, the Juventus team, including the players, coaches, and technical staff, boarded a chartered plane the following morning and set off on their journey to Jakarta, Indonesia, to kick-start their pre-season tour of Asia and Australia. Their flight was without mishaps, and they arrived in the Indonesian capital fifteen and a half hours later, just past midnight.

After greeting their Indonesian fans, who had eagerly been waiting for them at the airport gates even that late in the night, they took a bus to the Ritz-Carlton Jakarta Hotel. They checked into the hotel forty minutes later and had a late dinner together as a team before heading to their rooms to rest for the night.

The following day, they were up by nine o'clock and had their breakfast at the hotel's restaurant. Then, they held a brief team tactical meeting before boarding the team bus and heading to the Patriot Bekasi Stadium. Under the escort of the local police, they got there without any mishaps and spent the entire day training there.

For the first time as a Juventus player, Zachary finally experienced the profoundness of Juventus' training. And within three days, he comprehended how brilliantly the Italians conducted their team drills to prepare for matches.

Of course, the players would start off their training with dynamic warm-up sessions like they had done back in Turin. Then, based on the pre-arranged schedule, they would go through gym sessions or technique and agility field exercises later in the morning. Finally, in the afternoon, they would undergo tactical drills, like various competitive possession rondos, react-and-defend drills, or attacking and passing pattern exercises to master the football aspects related to game strategy.

Over the three days of training at the Patriot Bekasi Stadium, Zachary realized that the Juventus coaches always emphasized the tactical side of the game. They were always earnest and intense during those sessions and didn't allow players to slack off. As a result, even experienced players, like Pirlo and Tévez, had to be good boys and go through the exercises without complaint. Otherwise, they could find themselves in the head coach's bad books and miss out on the chance of making the starting line-up for the first few games of the upcoming Serie A season.

While experiencing the refreshing feeling of training in an Asian city for the first time, the passing of time was swift for most Juventus players, including Zachary. Before long, August 6th, the day when they would play their first pre-season friendly during their tour of Asia and Australia, arrived. And even though most of them were yet to attain full match fitness, they put their training on hold. They turned their focus to their match against the Indonesian Super League All-Stars, scheduled for later that day at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Of course, as a new player claiming to be dealing with fitness issues, Zachary didn't make Coach Massimiliano Allegri's starting line-up. Instead, he watched a large part of the game from the dugout and witnessed his new teammates destroying the all-stars select team of the Indonesian Super League.

After getting stunned by an early opening goal for the hosts, Juventus reacted within two minutes. Carlos Tévez, the Argentine striker, broke through the defense and forced a penalty out of the opposing center-back. And without any surprise, Andrea Pirlo, the experienced Maestro of Juventus, stepped forward and converted the spot kick to bring proceedings to level terms.

After the goal, the game became more one-sided as Juventus pressured the Indonesian Super League all-star team with an ever-increasing intensity. The Old Lady dominated the game in all areas and soon started creating clear chances. In a short while, the Italian giants built more and more momentum and forced the floodgates open. And soon, it began raining goals in the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium.

First, Fernando Llorente scored a hat-trick in the next half-hour of the game. Then, Sebastian Giovinco added another long-range shocker to ensure that the score was 5:1 in favor of Juventus by halftime. All the fans in the stadium couldn't hide their shock as it had taken only 40 minutes to decimate an all-star Indonesian Super League team. The visitors had clearly showcased the superiority of the Italian league over football competitions in other parts of the world in just a single half.

But could that have marked the end of Juventus' obliteration of the hosts? The answer was obviously a big NO.

After a slow start during the second half, Coach Allegri decided to shake up his team by subbing in a few big guns his club had just acquired. The Italian coach introduced Patrice Evra, the French defender, Kingsley Coman, a striker freshly signed from PSG, Álvaro Morata, the Spanish forward, and Zachary Bamba, his most expensive signing for the summer. He brought the four players into the game during the 75th minute and then sat down to relax without any worries weighing upon his mind.

The game restarted after the substitutes stepped onto the pitch, and as expected, Juventus immediately started dominating proceedings again. Without showing mercy, the Italian giants outplayed the Indonesian Super League all-star team and hoarded all the possession during the next few minutes.

Zachary, on his part, chose to play as a reliable teammate instead of going for startling and risky plays within the midfield. He just focused on the basics of receiving the ball and passing within the midfield to dominate possession.

Naturally, he wasn't the impressive Zachary from last season. But he still functioned as a solid, dependable central midfielder who wouldn't lose the ball due to his quick thinking and excellent passing. As a result, he elicited a sense of trust from his teammates in a short while. They started passing more and more to him, thus making him the control pivot in the absence of the substituted Andrea Pirlo.

But Zachary still didn't let all that get to his head. Since he was aware that he wasn't yet at his best, he avoided dribbling and continued passing the ball like a Maestro. And before long, during the 79th minute, his high spatial awareness worked wonders, and he managed to find Kingsley Coman with an outside-of-the-boot stunning and lofted pass over the defense. And that was all it took for him to create a scoring chance after spending only four minutes on the field.

Kingsley Coman was quite brilliant on that occasion. He expertly beat the opponent's defensive trap before meeting Zachary's overhead pass with an outstretched boot. Then, within a single motion, he smashed the ball past the keeper's outstretched hands to score Juventus' sixth goal for the night.

But that wasn't the end of Juventus' thrashing of the Indonesian all-star team that evening. Simone Pepe and Álvaro Morata, the Old Lady's other forwards, added a goal each in the 86th and 91st minute, respectively. Their late goals were the final nails in the coffin that sealed the Indonesian all-star team's fate of losing to Juventus by eight goals to one.

After the match, Emilia Vasquez, the ESPN presenter, invited a few pundits to her Sports Daily show to analyze Juventus' first game of their pre-season tour. Among the pundits was Charles Adams, a reputable journalist who had predicted that Zachary would flop at Juventus.

"Welcome back, viewers," Emilia Vasquez said, smiling at the cameras. "We've just watched Juventus' incredible performance against the Indonesian Super League all-star team. The Old Lady players scored eight goals against their first opponents of their pre-season tour. Charles! Let's start with you. What do you make of Juventus' performance today?"

"Well," Charles Adams said, "As a team, Juventus was as impressive as usual. Players like Andrea Pirlo, Fernando Llorente, Carlos Tévez, and Simone Pepe played incredibly well today. Their decision-making on the pitch was world-class, and that's why Juventus managed to destroy the Indonesian Super League all-star team within the first half."

"Let's talk about Juventus' new signings, especially the 19-year-old Zachary Bemba and the 19-year-old Kingsley Coman," Emilia Vasquez chimed in with a smile. "They linked up well within the 79th minute to score Juventus' sixth goal."

"Yeah, yeah," Charles Adams replied. "I have to admit that the two young men were quite impressive. In particular, Zachary performed beyond my expectations. His performance during his quarter an hour of game time was solid, and he even provided an assist. But even after all that, I'm sure most Juventus fans are not impressed by his display today."

"Please clarify," Emilia pressed.

"Well, let's first consider the fact that Juventus coughed out roughly 80 million Euros to sign Zachary Bemba," Charles Adams said. "I'm sure they were not trying to sign another midfielder that could pass the ball well. They already had Andrea Pirlo, Claudio Marchisio, and even Paul Pogba in the midfield to play that role. Instead, they spent all that money to sign Zachary Bemba to acquire their own version of Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo. In the worst circumstances, they expected to acquire their own Neymar or Luis Suárez."

"But what did we see during this game? We saw their roughly 80 million investment, playing like any other midfielder on the team. I admit that his performance was solid. But that was all there was to it. I didn't see him take risks by taking on defenders to create goal-scoring chances. He didn't even try to test the keeper once. Even Kingsley Coman, the much cheaper signing for Juventus, was more creative than him today. I really don't see how he'll handle the more competitive Italian league if he continues performing at such a level."

"Can I remind you that this is his first game for Juventus," Joshua Morales, another pundit, chipped in. "He has been out of the action for two months. Don't you think you're being too harsh on him by expecting him to perform at his best during his first game?"

"He was playing against much weaker opponents," Charles Adams stated. "He should have at least tried to dribble past an opponent or to take a shot at goal."

Joshua Morales sighed and shook his head in response. "There are many more pre-season matches to come," he said. "Let's wait and see. I'm sure that he will dazzle us with his skills before long. Mark my words."

"Okay, okay," Charles Adams said, his tone a bit aggressive. "Let's wait and see if he will live up to his roughly 80 million price tag."

Chapter 434: Busy and Intense ScheduleZachary saw the football pundits' critical comments about him in the news the following morning. He even watched the replay of Emilia Vasquez's Sports Daily show and heard all the negative remarks that Charles Adams, the sports journalist, had made about him.

He was obviously a bit surprised by the harsh appraisal of his previous day's performance by the journalist. But that was it. He neither lost his head nor felt discouraged, especially since he understood how to solve his match fitness issues and return to his peak in the shortest time possible.

He was sure that as long as he finished dealing with the side effects of the S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir, he would be able to shut the blubber mouths criticizing him with his prowess on the pitch. And knowing that fact allowed him to remain focused on his efforts to realize his short to mid-term goals without really minding the comments of a journalist who was probably trying to gain some attention on television.

His priority for the pre-season was still to try his best to fit into the new team. He hoped to continue putting up concrete and stable performances for Juventus by relying on his solid basics, such as passing and ball control skills.

Rather than rushing to gain some quick popularity among the fans and journalists by executing risky plays, he would aim to remain a reliable teammate who couldn't easily commit mistakes or lose the ball. Then, when he dealt with the side effects of the S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir, he would take his game to a higher level and start playing like a ball wizard. That was his plan to cement his place within the Juventus team.

With the right frame of mind, Zachary had no problems focusing on preparing for the upcoming pre-season friendlies. He joined Juventus' last training in Jakarta, Indonesia, and continued working as hard as ever on his fitness. And as usual, he forgot everything else and focused only on training until the team sessions ended late in the evening that Thursday.

The following day, on Friday, August 8th, all the Juventus players and staff boarded their chattered plane and traveled to Sydney, Australia, to kick-start the next phase of their pre-season tour.

They arrived in Sydney at ten in the evening, and with the help of some dedicated tour guides, they completed all procedures at the airport within minutes. Then, after greeting their fans waiting outside the airport, they took the prearranged team bus to the trendy neighborhood of Sydney Olympic Park and checked into the Ibis Hotel, which was strategically located less than a kilometer from the ANZ Stadium.

The hotel's facilities were at a five-star rating, allowing the players to relax and rest before delving back into preparations for their next pre-season friendly. As a result, they were all fresh and energetic when they trained at one of the football grounds near the ANZ stadium in Sydney the following day.

Under the supervision of Coach Allegri and his team of assistants, the Juventus squad covered all aspects of competitive football training, including fitness, ball handling, and team tactics, within three sessions spread over a brief period of a single day.

By the time they finished all the exercises, the sun was just about to sink below the horizon in the eastern skies of Sydney. They returned to the hotel and had a sumptuous dinner before heading to their respective rooms for the night.

Zachary, on his part, was ready to take a shower and enter bed after he returned to his hotel room. But right after he connected his phone to the hotel's Wi-Fi, he immediately received a WhatsApp video call from Camilla, his girlfriend in the other hemisphere, in Trondheim, Norway. Without any hesitation, he decided to put everything on hold and first accept the call.

Camilla's gorgeous face immediately appeared on the phone's screen when he pressed the accept button. She smiled and said, "Hello, dear! I haven't heard from you in four days! How are you, and how's everything?"

"Hello, Camilla," Zachary said, feeling guilty for ignoring his girlfriend for all those days. "Sorry about not calling you for the past four days. The pre-season tour is quite hectic. Aside from training with the team, I usually don't get time to do anything else. But I promise to do better from now on. I'll call you more often."

"That would be for the best," Camilla said, sighing. "You know that we're now thousands of miles apart. Communication is crucial if we want to keep our relationship going strong. We can't spend four days without talking to each other. Otherwise, we'll gradually grow apart as the months flash by."

"I understand," he said in an apologetic tone. "I'll do better from now on." He was aware that Camilla couldn't easily reach him through his phone during the pre-season tour. She would probably always find his number off due to challenges arising from the difference in network service providers from country to country. So, it was up to him to always call her and ensure they kept a connection, at least, until he returned to Italy.

Camilla's bright emerald-green eyes crinkled slightly at the corners as she smiled. "Let's push the irritating stuff to the side," she said. "How's your pre-season tour with Juventus? Are you enjoying your first trip to Asia and Australia?"

Zachary sighed, glancing straight into Camilla's eyes through the screen. "All I can say is that the tour is quite intense. Aside from match days, we train from morning to evening and even hold tactical meetings at the breakfast and dinner table. By the time we go to bed, we're already like tired dogs, only thinking about resting and preparing for the next day's training. It's that intense."

"Really?" Camilla's eyes widened. "Even you, a training madman, find the training schedule intense? Are you sure you're with a football team or did you unknowingly join some Special Forces military unit?"

Zachary chuckled at her efforts to make a joke. "My new teammates tell me that the schedule is only that hectic partly because a new coach has just taken the job. The other reason is that it's close to the beginning of the Serie A season. So, the club is doing everything possible to raise our fitness as quickly as possible. That's why we're playing matches every three days in different cities and countries while also finding the time to continue training together as a team."

"Oh, I see," Camilla said. "Does that mean that you didn't get a chance to tour the capital city of Indonesia?"

"There was no time for that," Zachary admitted. "We just trained and played a match in Jakarta before setting off for Australia. The coaches were strict and didn't allow us to move around."

"That quite a tough life," Camilla said, sighing. "So, you won't even take a few hours off and look at the sights in Sydney?"

"That's indeed the case," Zachary said, walking across the hotel room and settling on his bed. "Our schedule will remain intense until the end of August. For instance, we have to play three matches within the upcoming week. First, we play the Australia & New Zealand A-League All-Stars team tomorrow on Sunday. Then, on Wednesday, August 13th, we'll travel to Carlton, in the far south of Australia, and play against the Newcastle Jets. Finally, on Saturday, August 16th, we'll have to be in Kallang, Singapore, for our game against LionsXII & S-League Internationals Select. Those are three games within a short seven-day window. Factor in the time for training and traveling, and you can see how busy we are over the next week."

"But you must be having a blast since you like football," Camilla pressed. "How can that schedule faze the Zachary I know? I have a feeling that you're even fixing in a few more private training sessions within your already busy schedule. Isn't that so?"

Zachary laughed, choosing to ignore the question. "Enough about me," he said. "How're you doing? And how's life in Trondheim?"

"Everything is as before," she replied. "Just waking up, eating, working, and sleeping. Nothing interesting. I'm also already missing you."

"Oh," Zachary said, "I miss you too."

"Liar," Camilla replied jokingly. "If you miss me, why don't you call or text me more often?"

"Ahh..." Zachary was at a loss for what to say. He couldn't give the same old excuse of "I've been busy" since that would prove her point. He only sighed and shook his head in defeat.

Camilla chuckled on seeing his reaction. "By the way," she said, "All my friends and co-workers have been going on about Rosenborg's UEFA Super Cup game against Real Madrid. The ones aware that we're dating are always asking me why I didn't convince you to stay in Norway, at least until after the Super

Cup. They fear their team will lose miserably to Real Madrid, especially without you to hold the reins in the midfield."

Zachary sighed, recalling that Rosenberg's game against Real Madrid was on Tuesday night. His former teammates would face off against one of the strongest football clubs filled with incredible players, like Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale, Karim Benzema, Luka Modrić, and Toni Kroos. As far as he was concerned, Rosenberg would have to pull off something akin to a miracle to defeat such an assemblage of talent and class and win the game.

"Will you watch the game?" Zachary asked Camilla.

"Nope," Camilla readily replied. "I can't sleep late that day as I have a busy schedule on Wednesday."

"Eh!" Zachary was surprised. "I thought you were a fan of Rosenberg? How can you miss such an important match?"

"You dummy," Camilla said humorously. "I was only supporting Rosenberg simply because you were playing for them. Now that you have joined Juventus, I have already become a staunch supporter of Juventus. It's as simple as that."

Zachary smiled, finding her whole reasoning amusing. But he chose not to comment about her shaky support of football clubs and said his goodbyes to her. A bit later, they exchanged some sweet nothings and "I love you" phrases for minutes before repeatedly expressing their heartfelt goodbyes once again. And that was how the two love birds ended their call that night.

Chapter 435: Friendly against A-League All-Stars
The Juventus squad was back in action, playing a pre-season friendly the following day, on a rainy Sunday evening. In the ANZ Stadium filled to the brim with passionate Australian fans, they faced off against the Australia & New Zealand A-League All-Stars select team captained by Juventus' former star and legend - Alessandro Del Piero.

Massimiliano Allegri, Juventus' head coach, chose to go with a midfield of Paul Pogba, Claudio Marchisio, and Andrea Pirlo that day. As for Zachary and Vidal, his other star midfielders, he left them on the bench due to their match fitness issues.

Once again, Juventus started the friendly on the back foot after conceding an early goal in the 9th minute. Most Old Lady players on the pitch, including star midfielders like Andrea Pirlo and Claudio Marchisio, struggled to find their rhythm during the entire first half. Their performance was not the best, and on several occasions, they lost the ball in the defensive midfield zones and almost gifted the opponents with another goal.

It was only when the game proceeded to the second half that a change transpired. Fernando Llorente showed his brilliance again by scoring Juventus' 1st goal in the 58th minute. Then, as if the Juventus players had gotten a wake-up call, they started playing some presentable football for the first time that evening.

Slowly but steadily, they began showing their prowess on the pitch and even created a couple of decent half-chances as they searched for opportunities to score and put the game to bed. But before they could build up any momentum, another stunning goal from the all-star team during the 76th minute sent all their previous efforts down the drain. Once again, they were in dire straits since they were trailing by a goal with less than 15 minutes of gameplay remaining on the clock. As a result, everyone in the stadium could deduce that they would most likely lose the game if nothing changed during the next few minutes.

On the sidelines, Coach Allegri was, of course, incensed by the sorry performance of his starting players. He couldn't stomach the fact that a team filled with international players, who had just won the Italian Serie A only months ago, was struggling against a side from Australia and New Zealand. Even though it was the pre-season, such a situation was unacceptable, and he could not allow the status quo on the pitch to remain the same.

He immediately turned to the bench and summoned Simone Pepe, a winger, Kwadwo Asamoah, a left midfielder, and Zachary Bemba, his newly signed attacking midfielder. He gave them brief instructions concerning positioning and playing patterns before requesting the fourth official to substitute them into the game.

When the ball went out of play for a throw-in during the 78th minute, the three substitutes stepped onto the pitch in place of the seemingly exhausted Andrea Pirlo, the underperforming Patrice Evra, and the uncreative Claudio Marchisio. They took up their positions on the field of play, and the referee blew the whistle to restart the game with a Juventus throw-in.

Kwadwo Asamoah, the freshly introduced left-midfielder, was the man to take the throw-in for Juventus. He made a short run towards the field and then planted his feet before the touchline on the left before throwing the ball towards Leonardo Bonucci, the center-back in the back line.

Leonardo Bonucci calmly controlled the ball without any pressure. He brought it to the ground with his chest and kicked it towards Stephan Lichtsteiner, Juventus' right wing-back. The latter didn't dawdle with the ball for long but immediately squared a pass to Zachary, who had just opened himself up in the middle of the pitch.

Zachary was excited after noticing the ball approach his position. But he forced himself to remain calm as he connected with the pass and whirled around to step beyond the reach of an opposing midfielder who was fast closing him down. And just at the right moment, before any other opponents could react, he unleashed a grounded pass towards Kwadwo Asamoah on the left flank.

Kwadwo Asamoah took one touch on the ball before lopping it over an opponent to find Carlos Tévez, the Argentine striker, at the left edge of the box. The latter was as creative as ever, and he immediately chested the ball first time to Paul Pogba, the Frenchman who had been running in sync with him.

Paul Pogba assessed the situation around him while receiving the ball. He danced and performed a few flashy moves to confuse the opposing defenders. Then, when the angle opened up, he placed a perfect pass for Zachary, who was just about to arrive before the arc of the 18-yard-box.

"Perfect Chance!"

Adrenaline started pumping rapidly and abnormally through Zachary's entire body as he approached the ball from a forty-five-degree angle. His eyes narrowed into slits, and he focused solely on the ball rolling towards his sprinting path at a seemingly slow pace. Then, when he judged that the moment was right, he immediately decided to go into action and pull the trigger.

Breathing in, he took the last jump-step and planted his non-kicking foot next to the ball. Then, he swung his left leg all the way back before whipping it down hard and fast to smack the ball that had just appeared before him.

"BAM!"

His new Missile-Launcher skill worked like a charm as he took the shot, and the ball rose from the ground like a surface-to-surface missile out of its launcher. It tore through the air like a lightning bolt, whooshing and whizzing through the gaps between the opposing defenders. Then, at the final moment,

it zigzagged left and right unpredictably before cracking off the post and homing into the back of the net. Due to the incredible velocity of the shot, the keeper couldn't even react.

A-League All-Stars 2 : Juventus 2

There were a brief few seconds of silence after the ball homed into the back of the net. Then, a moment later, the fans within the stands seemed to overcome their shock and started applauding the goal. They happily cheered at the top of their voices as Zachary ran toward his teammates to celebrate his first goal for Juventus.

"Who's this Zachary Bemba? How come I've never heard about him?" One Australian fan asked his friend after the cheering started dying down.

"Mate! You're out of touch with the current happenings on the football scene," his friend replied with a sigh. "Zachary Bemba is Juventus' newest and most expensive signing this year. He was the star who helped a small Norwegian team called Rosenborg to win the Europa League last season. He scored over 20 goals and broke the tournament goal-scoring record in a single season. How can you not know about him?"

It was his friend's turn to get surprised. He was like most Australians, who had a habit of focusing only on the very big European football clubs and competitions. He would watch the Champions League, yes. But he would never waste his time following an inconsequential tournament like the Europa League. So, how could he have known about Zachary?

"Is he really a great player?" The fan asked his friend again.

"Yes, he is," his friend replied matter-of-factly. "He can dribble, pass with machine-like precision, and score goals like a football demon. He even scored four goals against Juventus, and that's why they signed him for a club-record transfer fee. Then, there are his abnormal free kicks. Mate! He has never missed a set piece during his entire professional career. As long as the set piece is within the final third, he'll convert. So, tell me! Do you think he is impressive or not?"

"You make him sound like another Messi or a CR7," the fan sounded skeptical. "Is he as good as them?"

His friend thought for a moment before saying, "That, I can't tell at the moment. I'll need to watch him in the Serie A first. Then, I'll be able to judge if he is as good as those two."

Unbeknownst to Zachary, many Australian fans in the stadium were starting to research his history. Due to his incredible goal that put Juventus back to level terms, they became interested in him and asked their friends about his past deeds. Others even pulled up his information from the internet and watched a few videos of his past highlights. What happened next was pretty obvious. In a few minutes, they comprehended the extent of his skills and couldn't stop exclaiming in wonderment. They immediately decided to follow him on social media so as to get more updates about him. And that was how Zachary started attracting bunches of more Instagram and Twitter followers while he was with his new team on tour in Australia. But all that didn't matter to him as he was still on the field of play, facing off against the A-League All-Stars.

It was the 85th minute, but the game was still at a deadlock of 2:2. Naturally, Juventus was dominating the proceedings and creating more chances on the field of play. All the field players, especially the just-introduced substitutes, played like they were hungry predators chasing after prey. They outran their opponents by more than five kilometers as they searched for that one winning goal to put the game to bed. And finally, during the 93rd minute, the chance they had been looking for appeared.

After making an intelligent and abrupt run to escape from an opponent, Zachary met up with a pass from Leonardo Bonucci, the center-back, close to the boundary of the defensive third. His high spatial awareness worked wonders — and he assessed the situation on the field in a flash. Before the opponents could close him down, he angled his body and unleashed a hell-of-a-long-range-pass towards the other end of the pitch. And that was all it took for Zachary to take the entire opposing defense out of the equation.

Whoosh!

The ball zoomed through midair, darting in and out of the spaces between the opponents like a remote-controlled drone. In a matter of seconds, it landed before Paul Pogba, who had coincidentally just beaten the offside trap as he ran towards the opponent's goal. Without losing composure, the Frenchman chested it down the ground on a half-turn. Then, with a deft touch, he looped it past the approaching keeper to score Juventus' third goal for the night.

A-League All-Stars 2 : Juventus 3

It was a good night for Zachary. He had managed to change the game's trajectory by scoring a goal and creating an assist after spending less than thirteen minutes on the pitch. As a result, his new teammates couldn't stop complimenting him when the whole team grouped up to celebrate Pogba's last-minute winner.

Chapter 436: Post-Match Interview
After four minutes of added time, the game ended while Juventus was still leading by three goals to two. The Juventus players immediately waved to their passionate Australian fans before stepping off the pitch and heading back to the dressing room.

On the way through the tunnel, most of Zachary's teammates congratulated him on his feat of scoring his first goal for Juventus. They were super happy for him and encouraged him to net more goals during the pre-season and when the new Serie A season commenced.

Zachary, of course, received their good wishes politely without revealing any excess emotions. But on the inside, he was super happy since he was gaining the trust of his new teammates at the speed of a rocket escaping earth's gravity.

He couldn't have imagined or dreamed of a better start to his journey as a Juventus player. He was on cloud nine, especially since he could feel his confidence and sharpness on the pitch returning to him much faster than he had anticipated. He reckoned that he might be able to fit into the Juventus team fully if he could continue putting up solid performances while scoring a few more goals during the pre-season.

As a footballer, who had experienced two lives, Zachary understood the importance of teamwork. He had long comprehended that on a football team, it was not the strength of the individual players but the unit's prowess and how they all functioned together as a whole that mattered. He knew that even the most talented players would find it difficult to realize their potential if they couldn't straighten their character and become team players. They would find it almost impossible to play at their peak if they couldn't gain the trust of their teammates and coaches.

For instance, Zachary succeeded at Rosenborg because all his former teammates trusted him. When they were on the pitch, they would never think twice before passing the ball to him during crucial moments. Even the coach would allow him plenty of freedom on the field due to his trust in his overflowing team spirit. And that permitted him to play incredibly well and showcase his skills without any hindrances, week in, week out.

Having learned all those lessons, Zachary was determined to follow the same model during his tenure at Juventus. First and foremost, he wanted to become a good colleague who had a good relationship with his teammates and understood them well. Then, he would be able to play football without worrying about other players or coaches hindering the progress of his career.

"Zachary! A moment please!" Maurizio Trombetta, the assistant coach in charge of the first team, called out to him before he could step into the dressing room.

Zachary immediately turned around and realized that the coach was chasing after him. He stopped in his tracks and waited for the man to catch up to him.

"You have one responsibility before heading into the dressing room," the assistant coach said after standing before him. "We need you to do the post-match press conference, especially since you scored your first goal for Juventus today."

Zachary raised a brow, glancing at the Italian coach. "But I don't speak Italian, and this is the pre-season. Is this really necessary?"

"Very," Coach Maurizio Trombetta replied. "There have been a few traces of negative publicity about you floating around in the news. Some football pundits predicted that you would become a flop at Juventus. Now that you've scored, we want you to get out there and assure the fans of how well you're settling in at Juventus."

"Again, I have to ask: Is this really necessary? If I continue performing well on the pitch, the negative publicity will go away!"

"That's not enough at a big club like Juventus," Coach Trombetta replied. "You have to remember that you're a public figure. Many football fans in Italy and other countries are interested in everything about you, including your lifestyle and match fitness. For instance, the publicity office reported that many fans have been asking why you're not starting for Juventus. Due to the predictions by the pundits, the fans have doubts about you and are constantly wondering whether you're finding it difficult to adapt to life at Juventus. They fear that you might become a flop at the club. And that impacts your shirt sales and, in turn, affects the club's income. So, we can't let this negative publicity continue floating around. We need you to do a press conference so that you can assure the fans of how you find life in Turin perfect and what goals you've set for yourself at the club."

"Okay, then," Zachary said, nodding. "Lead the way to the press area. Let's get this over with."

Coach Trombetta smiled. "Don't worry," he said. "We arranged a press conference in a way that one reporter interviews you. Just take the whole thing as a conversation with a beautiful reporter and talk about your goals and aspirations at the club. I'm sure you'll do okay, and before you know it, it'll be over."

"I understand," Zachary said. "Let's go."

Coach Trombetta nodded before leading the way. They traversed the sparkling hallways of the ANZ Stadium and arrived before a door in a matter of seconds. The coach pushed it open, and they stepped inside a relatively large room that was supposedly the press area of the famous stadium in Sydney.

Zachary immediately looked around after entering the room. There was a camera crew and a few other stadium officials organizing the room for the press conference. But what caught Zachary's eye and caused him to halt in his tracks for a moment was a familiar and beautiful blonde lady in a Juventus number 10 jersey.

"It's you!" Zachary exclaimed after setting his eyes on her gorgeous face. He immediately recalled that she was the reporter who had stealthily shoved her business card into his pocket while he was in France about to play against Lyon.

"It's nice to meet you again, Zachary," she said, smiling. "Congratulations upon your move to Juventus." She stood up from her seat and extended her hand.

Zachary's expression turned unnatural after recalling how her stunt of shoving her name card into his pocket had almost caused him trouble with Camilla. But he forced himself to remain calm as he took her hand for a firm handshake. "Thank you," he replied and immediately asked, "Are you a Juventus fan now?"

"You can say so," she replied. "I became a supporter about two weeks ago."

"Two weeks ago!" Zachary's expression turned more strange after comprehending that that was the time when he'd just joined Juventus. He couldn't help but wonder whether the beautiful reporter before him was one of those stalker types he'd once read about in celebrity magazines.

"Do you two know each other?" Coach Trombetta asked from the side after noticing Zachary's strange mannerisms.

"She once interviewed me," Zachary responded, not wishing to go into the details.

"Yes, indeed," the lady reporter confirmed with a smile. "I interviewed Zachary before Rosenberg's Europa League game against Lyon last season."

"Oh, okay," Coach Trombetta intoned. "This makes things easier since you two know each other. Let's get straight into the press conference. I'm sure Zachary wants to get this over with, so he can return to his hotel room to rest. He must be tired after playing the game."

The lady reporter nodded and instructed her crew to start up the cameras. They worked quickly, and all the machines came alive in seconds. Then, a minute later, Zachary and the reporter took their seats, and the press conference started.

"Hello, viewers," the lady reporter said, smiling and facing the cameras. "I'm Éléanor Bohén from ESPN. With me here is Zachary Bemba, the man of the hour, who scored his first goal for Juventus today. He also provided the incredible assist that resulted in Juventus' 3rd goal against the A-League all-stars during injury time."

She turned away from the camera and faced Zachary. "Zachary! Thank you for staying back to talk to us. How do you feel after scoring your first goal for Juventus?"

"I feel really great," Zachary replied. "I can now sleep at ease knowing I didn't disappoint my coaches and teammates when I got the opportunity to bury the ball into the back of the net."

Éléanor chuckled. "Your goal was incredible. The shot was powerful, and even the keeper couldn't react. How did you manage to strike the ball in such a perfect manner?"

Zachary smiled. "Luck and technique," he replied. "I was lucky to be in the right place and thus allowed Pogba to pass to me. Then, I relied on my technique to smash the ball into the back of the net without allowing any opponents to close me down. That's how I did it."

"You make the process sound so simple," Éléanor remarked.

"It's quite simple if you train," Zachary responded.

Éléanor laughed. "Let's talk about something other than the match. You have spent more than two weeks with Juventus. Are you settling in well?"

"I'm trying," Zachary replied. "I'm obviously working hard to fit into the team and also elevate my game to the next level. I spend nearly every waking hour training as I want to improve myself and succeed at this great club."

"Can we expect to see more phenomenal performances from you in a Juventus shirt?"

"Definitely," Zachary replied. "I have great belief in myself. I'm confident that if I continue working hard, I'll eventually cement my place on the starting line-up and play good and consistent football. But as you also know, I have only spent slightly over two weeks with Juventus. I still need a little more time to settle down and return to my peak."

"It's nice to hear that, Zachary," Éléanor said. "But what about the language barrier issue? Do you face any problems during training or matches because you can't speak Italian?"

"The language barrier is obviously a bit inconveniencing," Zachary said. "But it's not a big problem that can affect my training or performance on the pitch. Some coaches and teammates speak more than two languages. They always act as my translators when we're on the field of play or on the training ground."

"Do you plan on learning Italian?" Éléanor asked.

"Yes, I do plan on learning Italian," Zachary said. "I have already enrolled in a language school. If all goes well, I should be able to speak and understand Italian by the end of the year."

Éléanor smiled. "I'm sure the Italian fans will love that. Based on what you have said, you seem to be having an easy time settling down in Turin well. Is that right?"

"Indeed, I'm settling in well," Zachary agreed. "I'm starting to enjoy my time here at Juventus."

Éléanor nodded with a smile. "Then, I wish you luck. And hopefully, we'll be able to see you scoring more goals for Juventus soon."

"I certainly will," Zachary said. "I will try my best to succeed at this club. That, I promise."

"Excellent," Éléanor said, smiling. "Thanks again for taking the time to talk to us even after playing a game. We wish you all the best during your time at Juventus."

"Thanks," Zachary replied, and the interview ended.

Chapter 437: A Shocking UEFA Super Cup Result
As Zachary was about to leave the room with Coach Trombetta after the interview, Éléanor Bohen, the ESPN reporter, called out to him. Her dazzling blue

eyes crinkled at the edges, and the corners of her full lips turned upwards. She stepped forward and asked Zachary, "Can I talk to you alone for a moment?"

Coach Trombetta, who had been quietly watching on from the side, flashed Zachary a knowing smile. He reminded Zachary about the time of departure of the team bus before excusing himself and stepping out of the press room.

"So, what do you wish to talk about?" Zachary immediately asked Éléanor.

Éléanor smiled and said, "I was expecting your call after the Lyon game. But you didn't call!"

"I have a girlfriend," Zachary stated. "A beautiful and understanding girlfriend!"

"Oh!" Éléanor seemed surprised. "But does having a girlfriend stop us from being friends?"

"Yes, it does," Zachary stated. "One intelligent man once said that a wise man shouldn't become friends with other girls if he has a girlfriend. It's the surefire way to avoid trouble."

Éléanor chuckled, glancing at Zachary with an amused expression. "Your girlfriend is lucky to have you as her boyfriend," she said. "Is she with you here in Turin?"

Zachary raised a brow. "Please don't ask me such questions. I don't want to discuss my personal life with journalists. Have a good night."

Without waiting for a response, he turned around and stepped away from the reporter. He was decisive as he didn't wish to associate himself with any lady drama that could potentially distract him before he achieved his career goals.

Éléonor's jaw dropped when she saw Zachary stepping away from her like she was the plague. She blanked out for a moment and watched him absentmindedly as he left the room. Then, when his back disappeared through the doorway, Éléonor did some introspection. She couldn't help but wonder whether her charms had fallen to the extent that she could even attract the attention of a 19-year-old who had just risen to fame.

"Our gorgeous Éléonor also has times like these," the voice of the only other lady within her camera crew interrupted her thought process. She mercilessly laughed at her friend's plight and continued, "He just gave you the cold shoulder without batting an eye. What an interesting lad!"

Éléonor's eyes narrowed as she glanced at Beatrice, her long-time friend. "He didn't reject me," she articulated. "He just said that he had a girlfriend. So, I still have a chance."

"Dream on!" Beatrice said with a chuckle. "If a guy says he has a girlfriend, it means he isn't interested in you. Otherwise, he would have hidden the fact that he was in a relationship. My conclusion: You have no chance. So, better stop."

Éléonor ignored her friend's advice and asked, "Do you know there was a slight jolt in his emotion when I inquired whether his girlfriend was in Turin with him? He turned all defensive and immediately left."

"Oh!" Beatrice's eyes widened.

Éléonor smiled, her eyes filled with glee. "As I said, I still have a chance since the relationship with the girlfriend seems unstable. They must be having problems. Otherwise, there's no sensible lady who would willingly let her rich and dashing boyfriend stay alone in a city like Turin."

"You're as sharp as ever," Beatrice said. "But I still believe that you have no chance. I was watching the entire time. He didn't even steal a single glance at your boobs during the interview. It was like he was talking to a robot the entire time."

"That will change," Éléonor said confidently. "I only need to create more opportunities to interact with him. When I show him my good side, things will work out."

"You're a lost cause." Beatrice chuckled and shook her head. "Let's pack up. We need to edit the content and send it to the station tomorrow morning."

"Okay," Éléanor agreed and pushed the thoughts about Zachary to the back of her head. Once again, she turned all professional and concentrated on doing her job.

Zachary didn't let his one good performance for Juventus inflate his ego. He continued working like a maniac and utilized all his day hours on Monday to polish up his ball skills. He was focused from morning to evening since he wished to elevate his fitness to the peak before the new Serie A season commenced on 30th August.

Monday quickly passed, and Tuesday arrived. He again woke up early and trained with his teammates for the whole day. And again, time passed quickly, and dusk arrived faster than expected. He had dinner with his teammates before returning to his hotel room and switching on the TV screen. Of course, he was about to watch Rosenborg's Super Cup game against Real Madrid that evening.

"Dear viewers," the commentator's voice reverberated across the room a few seconds later, right after the TV finished booting up. "Welcome to the live broadcast of today's UEFA Super Cup game. We are about to witness a historical battle between two champions of Europe. Rosenborg, a team from Norway that overcame all odds to win the Europa League, will be facing off against a star-studded Real Madrid side that won the Champions League last season."

"Who will emerge as the victor tonight?" The commentator continued. "Will Rosenborg overcome all odds and win again, even without Zachary Bemba, their young playmaker that has just joined Juventus? Or will it be Real Madrid? Let's look at the line-ups before we move on to the game."

Real Madrid's line-up came up first, and Zachary immediately noticed that all their stars, including Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale, Karim Benzema, Sergio Ramos, Pepe, Luka Modrić, and Iker Casillas, were on the squad. But when Rosenborg's line-up appeared, he realized that a few names that should be among the starting eleven were missing. He couldn't see Eric Bailly, Paul Kasongo, and Nicki Nielsen among the players on the squad. The three of them were not even on the substitute's bench.

"What happened?" Zachary wondered, recalling some rumors he had heard about his previous club. "Could the transfer speculation be true?"

Over the past two weeks, there was a lot of gossip about Rosenborg's situation in the transfer market. Many media houses and famous sports journalists reported that top clubs like Villarreal, Lyon, Atlético Madrid, and Manchester United, among others, had approached Rosenborg to sign some of the young players that won the Europa League. They even hinted that Rosenborg was taking a positive approach towards the potential deals due to the ample sums of money involved. And they predicted that if negotiations went well, the Norwegian giants might lose three or more of their young players before the transfer window's closing date.

Zachary found the entire situation a bit unsettling. Deep down, he still had favorable feelings for his first club. Zachary wanted them to continue dominating Norwegian football while also putting up incredible performances in European competitions. But it seemed that he couldn't realize his wish as the board of his former club seemed intent on selling most of the young players that had already shown potential.

"Most probably, Rosenborg is about to sell Eric Bailly, Paul Kasongo, and Nicki Nielsen," Zachary mused. "That should be the reason they are not on the squad."

During Zachary's previous life, both Kasongo and Nicki hadn't gotten a chance to play for well-known European clubs. Kasongo had passed away before he could kick-start his football career, while Nicki had only played for small-time clubs like Esbjerg FB and Lech Poznań after leaving Rosenborg.

But in Zachary's new life, circumstances were totally different due to his influence. The two players had already garnered interest from famous clubs like Southampton, Tottenham, and Lyon due to their incredible performances in the previous Europa League. They were already on their way to stardom due to their association with Zachary, causing him to sigh in wonderment about how small things could change entire trajectories of fates of various people.

"I wonder how they will turn out in the future!" Zachary sighed and silently wished them luck on the journey to realize their full potential. He hoped to see them become top players that would dazzle the world with their skills.

After pushing all the distracting thoughts to the back of his mind, Zachary focused on the screen. He watched with bated breath as Real Madrid dominated his former team on the field of play from the very first minute. The team from Madrid outclassed Rosenborg in all areas of the pitch and utilized its fast

forwards to break open the floodgates. Before long, there was a goal fest that caused misery to all the Rosenborg fans watching the game.

Cristiano Ronaldo was the first to find the back of the net with a long-range effort that caught the keeper napping during the 31st minute. Then, five minutes later, he stunned the Norwegian giants again by connecting with a long-range cross from Luka Modrić before heading the ball into the back of the net to score Real Madrid's second goal.

But that wasn't the end of the nightmare for Rosenborg that night. Five minutes into the second half, Karim Benzema added a third before Sergio Ramos multiplied Rosenborg's despair with a header after connecting with a corner ball during the 67th minute. It was a total thrashing.

Zachary watched for a few more minutes until he couldn't take it anymore. He sighed and switched off the TV before cleaning up and diving into bed. He pushed all thoughts about the game out of his head and soon descended into a deep slumber.

As usual, he woke up early, at around six the following morning. First thing, even before going through his morning yoga routine, he checked the score of the previous night's game using an app on his phone. The next moment, his eyes almost bulged from their sockets as he rechecked the score. He couldn't believe that Real Madrid had scored three more goals during the final twenty minutes and won the game by seven goals to one. They had mercilessly decimated his former club by seven goals to one before becoming the winners of the 2014 UEFA Super Cup.

Chapter 438: A DebateAs usual, Emilia Vasquez hosted ESPN's daily sports show on Wednesday morning. She was as composed as ever as she smiled at the cameras and said, "Viewers! Good morning. With me in the studio are four of our notable pundits - Shaka Hislop, Steve Nicol, Joshua Morales, and Charles Adams. They will help us review and analyze games played around all around Europe over the past few days. Let's get right into it and start with last night's UEFA Super Cup. It was one strange game as we saw Real Madrid wipe the floor with Rosenborg by scoring seven goals while only conceding one. Shaka! Let's start with you! What's your take on yesterday's game?"

"All I can say is that it was a one-sided demolishing of Rosenborg by Real Madrid," Shaka replied with a sigh. "Without Zachary Bembu's presence in the midfield, the Norwegian giants couldn't seem to find the rhythm and brilliance that allowed them to win the Europa League last season. They committed many mistakes and invited Real Madrid to decimate them. And that's what happened."

"You just mentioned Zachary Bemba," Emilia Vasquez pointed out as the cameras focused back on her. "Do you think there would have been a possibility of Rosenborg beating Real Madrid if he had been on the squad?"

Shaka smiled. "I'm sure the match would have been more interesting if Zachary had been on Rosenborg's squad yesterday. The boy is like a force of nature — like a Tsunami that sweeps away everything on the field of play. Had he been on the pitch, he would have gone at Real Madrid from the first minute and created many opportunities on goal. He wouldn't have allowed the Spanish giants to wipe the floor with his team. But too bad! He's already a Juventus player."

"That reminds me of something interesting," Joshua Morales, the pundit occupying the seat next to Shaka, chimed in with a smile. "During the 16th minute, Sergio Ramos committed that risky foul against Karl Toko Ekambi at the edge of the box. The referee awarded a free kick to Rosenborg, but Mike Jensen, Rosenborg's central midfielder, failed to convert. Just imagine if Zachary had been on the pitch. He would have taken the free kick and buried the ball into the back of the net to put Rosenborg ahead early in the game. That would have been a very crucial turning point in the match. And from that moment, we would have seen a different trajectory of the game, and just maybe, Rosenborg would have played counterattacking football and won the Super Cup."

"Those are many what ifs," Charles Adams, the journalist, remarked. "Let's not forget to merit the brilliance of the Real Madrid players. They played incredibly well yesterday night, took their chances well, and destroyed Rosenborg with their creativity and speed. And even if Zachary had been present, so what? Those energetic and tactical Real Madrid players would have still found a way to contain him. They would have been more careful while defending, and they wouldn't have allowed him a chance to convert any free kicks or take shots at goal near their box."

"Guys!" Emilia Vasquez chipped in. "Let's return our focus to the UEFA Super Cup game. Cristiano Ronaldo was quite impressive during the match. He bagged two goals within a five-minute window to kick-start the goal fest that saw Rosenborg lose the game by seven goals to one."

"I'm not surprised," Charles Adams said. "Cristiano Ronaldo has always been an incredible player. Last season, he clearly outdid himself by scoring 51 goals in all competitions and helping his team win the UEFA Champions League. Yesternight, he was on form again and scored twice to help Real Madrid win the Super Cup. Honestly, I'll really be disappointed if he doesn't win the next Ballon d'Or."

"Where does that leave Messi, Arjen Robben, and Zachary?" Emilia asked. "They all scored over forty goals for their clubs last season. Don't you think they have the potential to win the Ballon d'Or?"

Charles Adams chuckled and shook his head. "Please do us a favor and don't bring Zachary into this debate. We're talking about players with the highest probability of winning the Ballon d'Or. How does Zachary's name come into this discussion when he didn't even play the World Cup?"

"He helped his club overcome all odds and win the Europa League for the first time in history," Joshua Morales pointed out. "Such a feat surely deserves an award."

Shaka Hislop smiled and said, "I know that Charles is quite an annoying guy. But I'm with him on this one. We can't bring Zachary Bemba into the debate of the players likely to win the Ballon d'Or at this moment. He's far from that level, as he hasn't played in highly competitive leagues. And I know he won the Europa League, but that isn't enough to compare him with this year's Ballon d'Or top candidates. He still falls short."

"Thank you, Shaka," Charles Adams hurriedly said. "I have been telling people the exact same thing. Winning the Europa League doesn't warrant that Zachary is one of the best players in the world. He hasn't reached the level where he can touch the shoes of incredible talents like CR7, Neymar, or Messi."

Shaka nodded in agreement. "But before we move on, I still have to point out one thing," he said. "Zachary Bemba is an incredible player who has the potential to create miracles on the pitch. But he's still a diamond in the rough as he's only nineteen years. Only if he keeps progressing will we see him joining the ranks of top players in three to five years. But for now, we can only rate him as a young player with immense potential and the highest probability of winning the Golden Boy award. That's my honest rating of him."

"Indeed, he can win the Golden Boy award," Steve Nicol agreed. "The only other young lads that could potentially give him some competition include Kurt Zouma, Raheem Sterling, and Adrien Rabiot. But with his achievements last season, he should be able to beat them and win the award this year."

"Speaking of Zachary," Emilia said, "He was honest in his interview with Éléonor after Juventus' game against the A-League all-stars on Sunday night. He mentioned that he's working hard to progress his career to another level. He also emphasized that he's driven and deeply yearns to succeed at Juventus. Steve! Do you think he will be able to realize his goals at Juventus? Can he elevate his game and become one of those greats in football within a couple of years?"

"Honestly," Steve Nicol said, "I can't answer that question at the moment. I don't have all the data to analyze the possible trajectory of his growth over the next few years."

Emilia nodded. "I understand your reservations. But can you tell us what Zachary has to do to become one of the top players in the world?"

"Of course, he has to continue working hard," Steve Nicol said matter-of-factly. "Remember, all footballers who have managed to achieve greatness in football are consistent. They can put up spectacular performances all season round for many years. That also applies to Zachary. He needs to remain consistent on and off the pitch. He needs to play spectacular football week in, week out, and score many goals for Juventus before joining the ranks of the top world-class footballers."

"Thank you, Nicol." Emilia nodded and turned to another pundit. "Charles! You have been very open about how Zachary will likely become a flop at Juventus. Do you still think the same after watching his performance against the A-League all-stars on Sunday night?"

"Well," Charles Adams said a bit hesitantly. "If you are to factor in Zachary's signing fee, which amounts to roughly 80 million Euros, there's a chance he'll become a flop at Juventus this season. He might fail to quickly mature into the playmaker Juventus wished to acquire when they coughed out all that money. Of course, I understand that Zachary scored his first goal for Juventus on Sunday, but that's still not enough. I want to see him playing as he did at Rosenborg last season. I want to see him tearing defenses apart and scoring week in, week out. Only then will I label him a successful signing for Juventus. And only then will I acknowledge that he's worth the 80 million that Juventus splashed out to acquire him from Rosenborg."

"You're out of your mind," Joshua Morales couldn't help but comment from beside Charles. "And clearly, you don't know the meaning of the word flop."

Charles raised a brow. "Say that again."

"I said that you're out of your mind and you don't know the meaning of the word flop," Joshua Morales reiterated, not mincing words with the journalist. "Let's not forget that it was only a few weeks ago when you stated with great conviction in front of the cameras that Zachary would become a flop at Juventus. But now, after watching the guy improve after each game he plays for Juventus, you're trying to dig your way out of a grave you created for yourself. You're using wordplay to distance yourself from your remarks instead of owning up to them. Shame upon you."

"Viewers!" Emilia chimed in before Charles could respond. "We'll be heading into a short commercial break. Thanks for watching, and please don't touch that dial."

She said all that in a single breath while secretly signaling the camera crew to cut the live feed. Then, after the cameras went offline, she spent minutes calming the tempers around her as she didn't wish to see a scenario where pundits started a brawl within her studio due to differing opinions.

Chapter 439: Another Solid Performance Juventus' pre-season tour of Asia and Australia proceeded forward as planned. The Italian giants boarded their chartered plane and traveled to Carlton, Australia, on Wednesday morning. On arriving, they spent a couple of hours resting and relaxing in a hotel before heading to a nearby football pitch to continue their intense pre-season training program. Then, when evening arrived, they took the arranged team bus to the Princes Park Stadium to face off against Newcastle United Jets Football Club.

For that game, Coach Massimiliano Allegri fielded a surprising squad. He benched most of his creative players like Zachary Bemba, Andrea Pirlo, Claudio Marchisio, and Fernando Llorente with the excuse of wanting to rest them. As a result, Juventus put up a not-so-impressive performance and only scored a goal late in the 71st minute.

Fortunately, the Juventus defenders were as hard-working as ever. They helped the team keep a clean sheet and win the game with a score of 1:0 after five minutes of added time.

After the game, the Juventus squad stayed in Carlton for only one more day to relax and recover from the post-match fatigue. Then, on the morning of Friday, they boarded their chartered plane and traveled to Kallang, Singapore, to kick-start the final phase of their pre-season tour of Asia and Australia.

They were back in action two days later, on a rainy Sunday evening. They faced off against the LionsXII & S-League Internationals Select team and put up an incredible performance that wowed the fully packed Singapore National Stadium.

Zachary, who had started his first game for Juventus, played incredibly well. He quickly linked up well with Andrea Pirlo and Claudio Marchisio to dominate the midfield and bring the opponents to their knees. His solid passing and remarkable spatial awareness worked like magical charms as he created chances that almost resulted in goals during the opening fifteen minutes.

But alas, the opponents held on for dear life by defending like maniacs. They put their bodies on the line to keep the ball out of the net and prevent Juventus from scoring an opening goal. As a result, the score remained deadlocked at 0:0 until the 32nd minute, when Andrea Pirlo managed to create something out of nothing by relying on his incredible passing range.

The Italian Maestro reacted with all the haste he could muster after the opponents failed to convert a corner kick. With his signature long-range pass, he unleashed Carlos Tévez, the Argentine striker who had been lurking on the right flank, and in so doing, initiated the counterattack.

Carlos quickly connected with the ball and brought it to the ground with his chest. Before the nearby opponents could close him down, he whirled around and took off towards the other half like a raging hurricane.

Whoosh!

Tévez's short strides ate up yards of space in a matter of seconds as he tried to outrun the opponents who had stayed back to defend during the corner. But when he stepped into the final third and was about to reach the box, he met a no-nonsense defender, who swept him off the ground with a sliding tackle.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle immediately. He rushed to the scene and straight away awarded a free kick to Juventus in front of the arc of the 18-yard box. He then spent a few seconds trying to calm Carlos, who was already fuming, before showing a red card to the opposing player who had made the dangerous tackle.

"Do you wish to take it?" Andrea Pirlo asked Zachary as they stood before the ball and prepared to take the free kick a few seconds later. The Italian Maestro was stuttering a little due to his not-so-expert command of English.

"Yes, I wish to take the free kick," Zachary replied. Of course, he wouldn't pass up such a rare opportunity to impress the coaches, especially at that late stage of the pre-season tour. He wanted to quickly show his good points to his teammates and coaches and cement his place on the Juventus squad in the shortest time possible.

The edges of Andre Pirlo's mustache rose up slightly as he smiled. He assessed the situation in the opposing box before saying, "There are about 32 yards to the goal. What do you think is the best strategy for the set piece? Should we take it directly on goal, or do we try to find our teammates with a lofted ball over the defensive line?"

"I'll go directly for goal if I'm to take it," Zachary responded, his tone exuding confidence. "I'm certain I'll be able to test the keeper with the power behind my shot."

Andrea inclined his head to glance at Zachary with a surprised expression. "Although this is the pre-season, we still wish to score and win the game. Are you confident?" He asked.

"Yes, I'm confident," Zachary responded. He had never halted his free-kick training within the system simulator or on the physical training grounds. He was sure that he would be able to give the keeper a hard time as long as he utilized his Bend-it-like-Beckham Juju and his newly acquired Missile Launcher skills while taking the free-kick.

"If you're that confident, take the free kick," Andrea Pirlo said, stepping back from the ball. "Please do your best."

"Okay," Zachary replied, smiling. "Thanks for allowing me this opportunity."

"There's no need for thanks," Andrea said. "Your skills are what allowed you the opportunity to stand before this free-kick. All the Juventus players, including me, know about you from last season. We don't need to worry that you'll mess up since we're all aware that you have an impressive a hundred percent record when converting free-kicks in the final third. Which one is your prominent leg, by the way?"

"I can use both legs with ease," Zachary answered. "Previously, my right leg was a bit weaker. But after undergoing targeted training regimes over the years, I overcame that shortcoming."

"Eh!" Andrea Pirlo's eyes widened for a moment. "You're a monster. I now understand why you scored all those goals against us last season."

Zachary laughed at that and immediately placed the ball on the free-kick spot. Then, he took a deep breath and assessed the situation in the opponent's box before stepping back from the ball.

As usual, he had already activated the Dead Ball Specialist Juju. His mind was already working in overdrive, trying to deduce the best way to take the free kick and score. He was a hundred percent focused, and not even the loud cheers of the fans in the stands could interrupt his concentration at that moment.

FWEEEEEEEE

The referee's whistle sounded a few seconds later, and Zachary reacted immediately. He made an angled run towards the ball before taking the last jump step and pulling the trigger. At that moment, his set-piece skills, including the Bend-it-like-Beckham Juju, the Missile Launcher, and Dead Ball Specialist Juju, all worked in sync. He swung his leg down like a whip to smack the ball and send it rocketing towards the top right corner.

The LionsXII & S-League Internationals goalkeeper quickly reacted with a despairing dive. But the ball's incredible velocity and the immense power behind the shot rendered all his efforts fruitless. He could only watch on helplessly as the ball flashed past his outstretched fingertips and homed into the back of the net.

LionsXII & S-League Internationals 0 : Juventus 1

"Nicely taken," Andrea Pirlo complemented Zachary as they celebrated Juventus' first goal for the night close to the corner flag. "But don't think that I'll willingly surrender my position as the main set-piece taker of the team. I'll continue training and retake my position when you start missing."

Zachary chuckled. "If I ever start missing, be my guest. But when will that be?"

"Someone is growing some big balls after only converting one set-piece," Pogba said with a grin while patting Zachary's back. "Beware! Andrea doesn't like losing to anyone."

The rest of the Juventus players laughed at that as they continued celebrating the goal. They were all smiles as they hugged Zachary and complimented his incredible set-piece skills.

Zachary's mood had already soared into the night skies of Singapore at that moment. He was filled with glee as he could feel that he had finally gained the full acknowledgment of most of his teammates after converting the free kick. Even quiet players like Carlos Tévez and Kwadwo Asamoah were joking around with him — a testament that they were growing closer to him with the passing of each week.

The game continued after the goal celebrations. The Juventus players utilized their numerical advantage and pressurized the opponents during the remaining minutes of the game. They played spectacular passing football to tear up the opposing team's formation and open the floodgates. And before long, the balls started finding their way into the back of the net.

Carlos Tévez scored the 2nd and 3rd goals for Juventus during the 36th and the 42 minutes, respectively. Then, just two minutes into the second half, he added another to complete a hat trick for the night.

But that wasn't the end of the one-sided thrashing. During the 57th minute, Paul Pogba connected well with Zachary's well-timed through-pass to score Juventus 5th goal for the night. Then, Fernando Llorente, the Spanish forward, concluded the goal festival by heading home to net the 7th during the 72nd minute. The Juventus players were surely wiping the floor with Singapore's LionsXII & S-League Internationals select team.

Coach Allegri watched the proceedings for a few more minutes before shaking his head and deciding to substitute ten of his starting players. He only left Gianluigi Buffon, the goalkeeper, on the pitch and brought on ten of his young players during the 75th minute. He was that merciful, especially since he was playing a pre-season friendly and didn't wish to continue embarrassing his hosts.

Chapter 440: Coach Allegri's Considerations
After the substitutions, the game continued. The younger players of Juventus who had just stepped onto the pitch didn't take long to find their rhythm and sustain a substantial amount of attacking pressure against the opponents.

Over the next few minutes, they played genius counterattacking football to catch the team from Singapore off guard on several occasions. And finally, during the 88th minute, their hard work paid off, and Kingsley Coman, the French forward, completed a successful counter and scored Juventus' 8th and last goal for the night.

The remaining few minutes flashed by quickly, and the game concluded when the score was still 8:0 in favor of Juventus. The Old Lady had totally owned and demolished the team from Singapore, thus showcasing the power of Italian football.

On the sidelines, Coach Allegri was super excited after the referee blew the whistle. He was all smiles as he was finally starting to get a handle on how to manage his new club. He believed that he would be able to shape a new team identity and instill a winning mentality into his players' minds before the commencement of the Serie A season on 30th August.

Additionally, he was impressed by his new signing - Zachary Bemba. He was totally in love with the boy prodigy's free-kick-taking techniques that bordered on the fringes of being almost inhuman in the final third.

Over the past few weeks, he had watched Zachary in training and during matches. He had gradually concluded that the young playmaker could always find the back of the net whenever there was an opportunity to take a set-piece near the opposing team's box. His free kicks were like a force of nature that would sweep away all opposition with an indomitable impetus. Even the most experienced keepers in the world, like Gianluigi Buffon, wouldn't be able to stop a set-piece taken by him.

Having considered all that, Coach Allegri figured that he would be able to build a Juventus team that was almost unstoppable by relying on Zachary's free kicks. As long as he encouraged his other forwards to force fouls out of defenders during matches, everything would be straightforward. He would ask Zachary to try his best to convert the free kicks, and Juventus would be able to score more goals throughout the season.

And if it so happened that the opponents refused to foul due to their fear of Zachary's free kicks, he would still be able to win the game by taking advantage of their laxity and indecisiveness in defense. There were just that many tactical options for him on the striking line due to Zachary's presence on the team.

"I can't wait for the season to begin," Coach Allegri thought as he tried to contain his bubbly emotions. He took a few steps along the touchline and shook hands with the opposing coach before moving around the pitch and congratulating his players upon winning the game. Then a short while later, after waving to the enthusiastic Singaporean fans in the stands, he walked down the tunnel and returned to the dressing room.

He calmly waited a few minutes in a corner until all his players took their seats around the spacious room. Then, when they all quietened down and focused their eyes on him, he took center stage and started his post-match address in Italian.

"That was an incredible performance from you all," he said, sweeping his gaze across the room. "You had all the qualities of versatility, aerial dominance, creativity, and an indomitable spirit while on the pitch. You played incredible team football from the first minute and worked hard to decimate the opponents. I'm really proud of you. And I can say with a hundred percent conviction that you all deserve to be in a Juventus shirt after tonight's game. Please clap for yourselves."

The players laughed and clapped their hands after hearing the coach's praise. A few of them even let out a few whistles of jubilation before going silent again.

Coach Allegri smiled. "This game marks the end of our pre-season tour," he said. "I commend you all for working hard to make our tour of Asia and Australia a success. We managed to win all our games, which is quite an impressive feat. But that doesn't mean that we should grow complacent. We can't relax as our pre-season work is far from done."

"Tomorrow," he continued, "We'll return to Turin and start another intensive program to prepare for the new Serie A season. We'll train intensively at the training center for about three days to improve our in-game tactics before facing off against AC Milan and Sassuolo in the TIM Trophy. That's quite a busy schedule. But, I still expect you to continue working hard on your individual fitness as that will allow us to be ready as a team when 30th August arrives and the Serie A season commences. Clear?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied.

"Great," the coach said, smiling and glancing at his watch. "I don't want to take up more of your time since it's almost clocking nine. Let's clean up quickly and return to the hotel as soon as possible. We should go to bed early and be ready to set off for Turin tomorrow morning at around ten. Is that clear to everyone?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied.

"Then, let's move quickly and prepare to head back to the hotel," Coach Allegri said, clapping his hands. "You only have fifteen minutes to clean up and be at the bus. Don't be late, or we'll leave you behind."

"But coach," Pogba chimed in with a grin as the other players got up from their seats with the intent to head to the bathrooms. "I don't think our friends, Zachary, Patrice, Morata, and Coman, understood what we discussed."

"Don't worry about them." Coach Allegri smiled and waved his hand dismissively. "There's Coach Trombetta to translate for them. Moreover, we shouldn't babysit them all the time as that will discourage them from learning Italian faster."

The rest of the players laughed at the coach's words as they walked off toward the door leading to the washrooms. They were in a rush as they retreated, as the coach had only given them fifteen minutes to wash up and head to the bus.
