

Greatest 441

Chapter 441: A Costly MistakeForty minutes later, the Juventus players returned to their hotel and headed straight to the restaurant to enjoy their late dinner. Zachary, who was quite exhausted after playing his first 90 minutes as a Juventus player, quickly ate his meal before saying his goodnight wishes to his teammates and coaches. He then exited the restaurant and returned to his room.

After cleaning up and brushing his teeth, he stepped onto his room's balcony and dialed Camilla's number using WhatsApp. She picked up almost immediately, and they wasted no time immersing themselves in a deep conversation that touched upon all topics, big and small. They even talked about all the irrelevant things, like what they had had for dinner, before exchanging intimate sweet nothings and saying their goodbyes.

After ending the call, Zachary immediately stepped away from the balcony and returned to the spacious interior of his hotel room. The artificial lighting lit up his face as he settled on his bed and sank into a moment of contemplation.

A few seconds elapsed as he sat there, staring blankly at the wall — until he made a resolution and picked up his phone again. The corners of his lips rose into an arc as he navigated his phone book and dialed another number.

"Hello, Zachary," the voice of Angelo Mattiello, his guide and interpreter, sounded from the other end of the line after the international call connected. "I watched your game today. You were incredible on the pitch. Congratulations."

"Thank you," Zachary responded. "How are you doing?"

"I'm okay," Angelo replied. "But just bored since my main client is away on tour in Asia."

Zachary laughed. "Don't worry! Your boredom will end soon since we're returning to Turin tomorrow. That aside, I need some help."

"Speak away. I'm all ears."

"Can you link me up with a reliable estate agent after I return to Turin tomorrow?" Zachary said. "I wish to buy a good house in a good neighborhood at a good price."

"Oh," Angelo intoned. "What's your budget?"

"One to two million," Zachary replied.

"You will get a luxurious Villa, not a house, at that price," Angelo reminded.

"That's my intent," Zachary said. "I want to purchase a spacious place that can easily accommodate most people working for me. It should also have amenities like a swimming pool, a sauna, an indoor gym, and expansive gardens, among other things."

"I get you, my man," Angelo said from the other end of the line. "I'll immediately get in touch with an estate agent I know. Then, when you arrive in Italy, you can link up with him, and he'll take you to see the houses available for sale in Turin. Does that work for you?"

"That's what I need," Zachary responded. "You can schedule the meeting with the real estate agent for Wednesday morning. By then, I should have already recovered from the jetlag."

"Okay, boss," Angelo said. "I will schedule the meeting for Wednesday at 10:00 AM."

"Excellent," Zachary intoned. "I have to go to bed now as it has already clocked eleven here in Singapore. See you tomorrow when I return to Turin."

"Okay," Angelo replied. "Have a good night, and see you tomorrow. Bye."

Zachary smiled and ended the call without any more needless words. Without further ado, he placed his phone on the bedside table before switching off the lights and jumping into bed. A short while later, he descended into slumberland and was soon dreaming about his would-be-mansion in one of the good neighborhoods of Turin.

As planned, the Juventus team returned to Turin the following day and started the next phase of their intensive pre-season training program. After only a single day of rest, they were back on the turfs at the Juventus training center, going through fitness and tactical drills like exercising maniacs.

Under the supervision of the overly-strict coaches, they trained from early morning to late evening from Wednesday to Friday. In those three days, they covered all areas relevant to football players, including physical fitness, ball skills, and tactical ingenuity, during their team sessions to prepare for the upcoming season. Anyone watching from the sidelines could clearly see that they were men on a mission as they went about their training without ever voicing a complaint.

Zachary, on his part, was as busy as the rest of his teammates and barely had time to attend his language classes during those three days. He had even failed to turn up for his appointment with the real estate agent on Wednesday morning due to the intensive schedule placed upon his shoulders by his new team.

But he wasn't complaining as he enjoyed the process of training and improving himself to become a better footballer. He would rather delay other things, like purchasing a house, rather than offend his new bosses by missing a training session. That was how desperate he was to gain acceptance in his new team. And that was how much he was obsessed with football.

The three days quickly flashed by as the Juventus players trained themselves at the training center. And soon, Saturday, the day when Juventus would face off against AC Milan and Sassuolo in the TIM Trophy, arrived with regal ease. It was finally the time for the Old Lady players to test themselves against top Italian opponents before the commencement of the new season.

The first game that day was at 2:00 PM in the fully-packed Mapei Stadium of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The Juventus players played an intensive forty-five minutes of football against the highly tactical AC Milan side, which gave them a hard time.

Zachary, who had gotten his second start for Juventus in a row, was slow to grow into the game. He struggled in the midfield to cope with the highly intensive pressing tactics of the team from Milan and committed a couple of mistakes during the first ten minutes of gameplay. He was clearly not at his best

— and on several occasions, Andrea Pirlo and Claudio Marchisio, the other two midfielders, had to cover for him so that Juventus would not concede an early goal.

But, of course, that couldn't help for long. The AC Milan players quickly noticed that he was the weak link in the team and started applying more pressure on him. Sulley Muntari and Nigel de Jong, the two opposing midfielders, harassed him and denied him even a few seconds to relax and grow into the game. And naturally, it wasn't long before they forced a costly mistake out of him.

It all began when Zachary drifted back into his half to collect the ball from Leonardo Bonucci, Juventus' center-back, during the 36th minute. After connecting with Bonucci's pass, he panicked and tried to dribble past Sulley Muntari, the AC Milan midfielder, who had been marking him the entire game. But since he was yet to return to his peak, he failed to beat the midfielder with his sub-par dribbling skills and lost the ball.

What followed was a nightmare for Zachary. Sulley Muntari quickly stepped away from him to initiate a counterattack against Juventus. The Ghanaian midfielder worked his magic to find Stephan El Shaarawy, his teammate, who had just run into a pocket of space at the edge of the box.

El Shaarawy controlled the ball well and stepped past Martín Cáceres, one of the Juventus center-backs, with a deft touch. And without losing his composure, he rounded Gianluigi Buffon, the Juventus keeper, and rifled the ball into the back of the net to score AC Milan's 1st goal for the night.

"Damn it!" Zachary cursed as he watched the AC Milan players heading to the corner flag to celebrate the goal. A sense of guilt had already flooded his entire being, especially since he was the person that had committed the mistake that led to his team conceding the first goal. He couldn't even think straight as he couldn't understand what had given him the confidence to dribble when he was yet to return to his peak.

FWEEEEEEE

After the goal celebrations, the referee blew the whistle and signaled the players to return to their positions. Like the rest of the players, Zachary began making his way to his midfield starting spot, just outside the center circle. But before he could even cover half the distance, a signal from the bench caused him to stop in his tracks.

Zachary looked towards the sidelines and realized that the fourth official had already raised the board to signal his substitution off the pitch. And by the official's side was Arturo Vidal, the other Juventus midfielder who seemed to have already warmed up in preparation to enter the game.

"Phew!"

Zachary expelled a lungful of air as he started walking towards the touchline. His shoulders slumped a little, and his heart sank into the abyss of frustration as the inevitable had finally happened. For the first time since he started his professional career in his second life, he wasn't being taken out of the game for tactical reasons but due to his horrible performance. And to make matters worse, there was a possibility that he wouldn't get an opportunity to make amends before the pre-season ended.

Chapter 442: TIM Trophy Conclusion and Analysis
Zachary watched the rest of the game from the bench. He looked on with bated breath as his new teammates tried their best to create chances and score an equalizing goal against AC Milan. But it was as if the goddess of luck was against Juventus that evening. The players failed to find the back of the net and eventually lost the game to AC Milan after five minutes of added time.

After the referee blew the final whistle, Zachary couldn't help but bury his head in his hands. The guilt he was feeling multiplied a hundredfold as he was aware that he was the sole cause of his team's loss. His mind turned blank, and he sat there listlessly while replaying scenes from the just-concluded game within his mind. His poor display on the pitch had affected him that greatly.

The TIM Trophy was one weird pre-season tournament. The three participating clubs had to play three round-robin 45-minute matches in a short period of a single afternoon. And there was almost no time for rest between the games.

The tournament match schedule was as follows. The organizers would decide which teams to play in the first match that lasted only forty-five minutes plus added time. Then, immediately after the first game, the third team would go into action and play against the losing team from the first match. And following

that order, the third team would continue playing and end the tournament by facing off against the first-match winner.

Thus, the Juventus players were naturally back in action after a few minutes since they had lost the first game against AC Milan. They faced off against a tenacious Sassuolo side with their relatively strong squad that included star players like Andrea Pirlo, Carlos Tévez, Arturo Vidal, and Paul Pogba. And as expected, Zachary, who had been deemed unfit by the coaching staff, wasn't on the squad. He wasn't even on the substitute's bench and only watched his teammates in action from the comfort of the seats in the technical area.

From the first minute, Juventus played superb passing football and dominated the proceedings on the field of play. They hoarded a large percentage of the possession and launched several waves of relentless attacks against Sassuolo's defense. Their hard work and uncompromising playing style finally paid off during the 29th minute, and they created a terrific chance on goal.

Arturo Vidal, the central midfielder who had replaced Zachary, worked his magic close to the center circle. He slid in wholesale and dispossessed Simone Missiroli, Sassuolo's midfielder. Then, with all the haste he could muster, he picked himself from the ground and fed the ball to Paul Pogba.

Paul Pogba was on fire that day. He controlled the ball like a Maestro and stepped past an opposing player with skillful footwork. When the angle opened up, he unleashed a grounded through-pass to find Álvaro Morata, the striker, who had been lurking in a pocket of space before the box.

Morata was quite composed as he connected with Pogba's pass. With only a single touch on the ball, he left his marker in the dust and was soon on an open highway towards the goal. Before the defenders could close him down, he rounded the goalkeeper and buried the ball into the back of the net to score Juventus' first goal.

That goal was all it took for Juventus to open the floodgates. The players in black and white continued sustaining an increasing amount of pressure against their opponents. And naturally, it didn't take long for Carlos Tévez, the often hungry striker, to beat the offside trap and score the 2nd goal. A few minutes later, in the 41st minute, Andrea Pirlo scored the third from a free kick to seal Juventus' overwhelming victory against Sassuolo.

In the third and final game of the TIM trophy, the sharp and brilliant AC Milan players faced off against Sassuolo. Once again, they dominated the game from the first minute and ended up winning by a score of 2:0. In so doing, they also won the short pre-season tournament as they had beaten all their

opponents and accumulated six points. They were the true-blue champions of the TIM Trophy — an honor that would remain with them until the following year.

Zachary's disappointing performance against AC Milan became a hot topic in the news after the conclusion of the TIM Trophy. Various sports journalists and critics all over Europe were not shy to point out that an 80-million Euro signing had committed a basic mistake while playing against his first Italian opposition. Without considering the fact that Zachary had just joined Juventus, they outright criticized him on live television as if he was their enemy. It was total madness on the side of the press.

Emilia Vasquez, the ESPN reporter, also covered the topic on her late-night sports show. She spent a few seconds explaining how the TIM Trophy games had progressed earlier that day before smiling and turning towards the pundits present in the studio.

"Let's get right into the analysis of the games," she said. "Gentlemen! What was your take on the TIM Trophy games? Let's begin with you, Charles."

Charles Adams, the journalist who had once predicted that Zachary would become a flop at Juventus, smiled. "AC Milan was, of course, the better team among the three participants in the TIM Trophy. Their star players, like Sulley Muntari and Nigel de Jong, were at the top of their game. They played fantastic football and allowed AC Milan to overpower all their opponents."

"You just mentioned Sulley Muntari," Emilia Vasquez pointed out. "He was impressive in AC Milan's midfield, especially during the first game. He dispossessed Zachary Bemba before initiating that counter that led to AC Milan's goal against Juventus."

"Yes, Sulley Muntari's performance was outstanding," Charles agreed. "But we still can't credit that goal only to him. There was also Zachary Bemba, who committed that basic mistake and gifted the goal to AC Milan. I almost couldn't believe my eyes at that moment. The 80-million signing panicked like an amateur and lost the ball in the defensive third! What the hell was up with that?"

"It was just a bad day for him," Joshua Morales, the other pundit, pointed out. "Even the best players in the world get those sometimes."

"Or maybe, his skills are slowly declining, and he's no longer good enough to outmaneuver top European competition," Charles remarked. "If it were the Zachary from last season, he would have easily dribbled past Sulley Muntari. The Ghanaian midfielder would have stood no chance against that young prodigy that could wipe the floor with his opponents. But what did we see today? Zachary wasn't decisive enough and lost the ball in the defensive third. And that wasn't all. His performance during the rest of the game was a disgrace to that number 10 Juventus shirt he was wearing. He failed to control the ball most of the time. He didn't even create a single chance on goal for Juventus. As I have always insisted, his move to Juventus was a mistake. He would be doing better in any other team."

"Thanks for your analysis, Charles," Emilia Vasquez chimed in with a smile. "The TIM Trophy also marks the end of Juventus' pre-season schedule. Next Saturday, just seven days from now, the new Serie A season will commence, and the Juventus players will face off against Chievo in their opening game. Joshua! From what you have seen today, do you think those players will be ready for the challenge awaiting them next weekend?"

"I think they will be ready," Joshua Morales said. "Aside from today's games, they had a pretty good pre-season overall. They were incredible as a team and won all their games during their tour of Asia and Australia. If they can train strategically and build upon those performances over the next seven days, I can see them getting off to a flying start. They might even go on to win the Serie A title again."

"What about their new 80-million signing, Zachary Bemba?" Emilia asked. "Do you think he will be ready? Can he up his game and become the Zachary from last season within the next seven days?"

Joshua Morales smiled and said, "I think he will be ready. Let's not forget that Zachary is an incredibly talented and world-class player. Not even the top players from teams like Juventus and Lyon could stop him in the Europa League last season. Considering all that, do you really believe that he'll fail to adapt to Serie A football? Do you think he'll fail to score goals and win titles after joining a team with better players? The notion of him not succeeding at Juventus is absurd, especially if you're to consider what he has already achieved at the tender age of nineteen."

"Thank you for your profound analysis, Joshua," Emilia said. "But I have one more question for you. There were some shocking rumors on the internet today. A few reputable journalists in Turin reported that Paul Pogba, the incredibly talented young midfielder, might be on his way out of Juventus. They say he might return to Manchester United before the transfer window closes on September 1st. What do you make of this, Joshua? Could it be that he's under pressure after Zachary Bemba's arrival and has thus chosen to leave the club?"

"I think those are just baseless rumors," Joshua Morales said. "From what I have heard, both Zachary and Paul Pogba are crucial components of Coach Allegri's plans. He won't let Pogba go, especially at this late stage of the transfer window. Additionally, there are reports that Zachary already has a good relationship with Pogba. So, Zachary's presence on the team should not be a factor that pushes the Frenchman out of Juventus. That's my honest opinion."

Chapter 443 Eve of the New Italian Serie A Season

443 Eve of the New Italian Serie A Season

After completing the team practice on Friday afternoon, Zachary washed up before heading to the player resting lounge at the far end of the training center. He intended to spend some time unwinding and conversing with his teammates before attending Coach Allegri's pre-match tactical briefing scheduled to start an hour later.

He traversed the already familiar hallways of Juventus' training center before arriving at the door of the resting lounge. He pushed it open and immediately stepped forward to enter the room occupied by four familiar players. Patrice Evra was lounging on a couch at the far end of the room while Claudio Marchisio, Giorgio Chiellini, and Simone Pepe were seated in front of the big screen, watching a football match.

"Zachary, my man!" Patrice Evra, the Frenchman, was the first to call out to him in French. "Don't just stand there. Come over and sit beside me." He patted the couch next to him.

"Okay," Zachary readily agreed. He first said hi to the other three in the room before taking a few steps and settling on a couch near Evra's.

Evra gave him a once over before saying, "You were brilliant in today's tactical training session and even dribbled past Chiellini with expert ease on several occasions! What were you on, my man? Care to share?"

Zachary chuckled. "If you wish to know what I ate for breakfast or lunch, I'll humor you. I had milk, bread, cereal, and fruits in the morning. As for lunch, you don't need to ask since we ate the same food at the canteen."

"You're such a bore," Evra said, grinning and shaking his head. A few seconds passed, and he seemed to remember something. He glanced at Zachary again and said, "By the way, did you hear the news of Pogba leaving Juventus?"

"He left?" Zachary's eyes widened. "I thought he was absent from training due to the knock he received the other day!"

"Your information is outdated," Evra said with an audible sigh. "A couple of hours earlier, he completed a deadline transfer-move to return to Manchester United for a reported approximate fee of 83 million Euros. Man! He's even more expensive than you. What the hell are the guys in Manchester thinking?"

Zachary almost couldn't believe his ears when he heard the news. Two days ago, Pogba had excused himself from Juventus' training sessions by claiming that he had received a knock on his thigh muscle. But Zachary was now hearing that he was leaving the club. It was a shocking piece of news.

p But there was also something else that intrigued Zachary. During his previous life, Manchester United had only managed to re-sign Pogba in the 2016 summer transfer window. But during his second life, there was a slight change. The French midfielder had completed the move out of Juventus two years in advance, meaning that his future at Manchester might take a different trajectory from that in Zachary's previous life. The Frenchman could just escape his fate and do wonders at the club since he was going to be under the management of Louis van Gaal — a coach with a knack for shaping young and talented midfielders.

"Where's Pogba now?" Zachary asked Evra. "Is he still in Turin?"

"Nah," Evra said, shaking his head. "He is already on his way to undergo a medical in Manchester."

"He's fast!" Zachary was shocked again.

"He has to be as the transfer window closes in three days," Evra remarked and closed his eyes to rest.

Zachary smiled and adjusted his body to lay supine on the couch. In only a few minutes, he regulated his breathing and pushed the thoughts about Pogba's move to the back of his mind. Then, he closed his eyes and started contemplating his status at Juventus.

Over the past six days, he had relied on his peak match fitness to work hard and impress the coaches during training. He had followed all their instructions to the letter while also trying to stand out from his teammates. As a result, he was confident that he had done his best to at least make it to the squad for the game against Chievo Verona the following day. But whether he could make the starting line-up or remain on the bench was still a mystery to him. He could only wait for Coach Allegri's tactical meeting before knowing the final verdict.

Various thoughts continued going through Zachary's mind until he dozed off a few minutes later. He sank into a deep slumber and only managed to wake up after Patrice Evra tapped his shoulder and reminded him about the pre-match tactical meeting.

When he checked the time on his phone and realized that only a few minutes remained until four o'clock, he reacted with all the haste he could muster. He got up with a start from the couch and hurriedly made his way out of the resting lounge. He entered a washroom a few minutes later and splashed water on his face. Then, without losing a second, he dried himself with the available paper towels before rushing out into the hallways and heading to the tactics room.

He arrived a few minutes later and realized that most of his teammates had already taken their seats. A few of them were even huddled together, holding hashed conversations as they waited for the coaches to start the meeting.

Zachary tried his best to calm his racing heart and settled on a seat at the back of the room. Of course, he was a bit nervous since he was about to attend the tactical meeting to kick-start the new Serie A season with Juventus. He was also tense since he couldn't be sure that he would make Coach Allegri starting eleven.

"Posso avere la tua attenzione, per favore?" Coach Allegri said when he took center stage a minute later. He started delivering his speech and spent the next thirty minutes explaining tactics in Italian to his players. He was intense as he paced the entire room while spewing out words that sounded alien to Zachary's ears.

The coach was obviously doing his best to explain the game strategy to his players. However, Zachary couldn't understand what he was saying since he had yet to learn the Italian language. Zachary would have to wait for Coach Trombetta to translate the content for him at the end of the session.

The minutes seemed to pass slowly as the coach delivered his pre-match briefing. Zachary was almost dozing off on several occasions since he found the entire session boring. He only prevented his mind from descending into slumberland by focusing all his willpower.

More minutes that seemed like weeks to Zachary passed, and finally, the coach ended his speech and got to the exciting part of the pre-match briefing. It was finally time for the coach to announce the squad for the following day's game against Chievo Verona. As a result, a numbing silence descended upon the entire room as the players waited for the next part of the coach's presentation with bated breaths.

Coach Allegri took a few seconds to observe all the players in the tactics room. He could tell that some of his new signings, like Zachary Bemba, Patrice Evra, Álvaro Morata, and Kingsley Coman, couldn't understand what he was saying due to their zero knowledge of Italian. But even then, he wasn't about to prolong the tactical meeting by having someone else translate his words for them during the session. He would only instruct Coach Trombetta to translate for them after the meeting had ended. That way, he would remain efficient and avoid wasting the precious time of his other players.

"Let's begin with the starting eleven," he said as the big screen behind him lit up and displayed the names of the players who had made his squad. "Gianluigi Buffon will be in goal. Then, we'll use three defenders, namely: Martín Cáceres, Leonardo Bonucci, and Angelo Ogbonna, to complete our back-three defense."

"Further up the pitch, Claudio Marchisio, Andre Pirlo, and Arturo Vidal will play as our central midfielders. Then, Stephan Lichtsteiner and Kwadwo Asamoah will play on the flanks to complete our midfield of five. And finally, Carlos Tévez and Kingsley Coman will be the men to lead our attack on the striking line of our 3-5-2 formation. That's it for the starting eleven. Any questions?" The coach glanced around.

In response, all the players around the room remained silent.

"Okay, okay," Coach Allegri said after a few seconds. "Let's move on. On the bench, we have Rubinho, Marco Storari, Luca Marrone, Patrice Evra, Federico Mattiello, Rômulo, Simone Padoin, Roberto Pereyra, Zachary Bemba, Simone Pepe, Sebastian Giovinco, and Fernando Llorente. And that's all concerning our match squad. Any questions?"

Once again, the players remained silent. They obviously had no questions for the coach.

Coach Allegri smiled and nodded. "Since there are no questions, let's conclude the tactical meeting here. The match against Chievo is at 6:00 PM tomorrow, and we'll be playing at an away ground. You all need to head back to your homes and have some ample rest tonight. That way, you will be sharp and at the top of your game during the match tomorrow. Am I making myself clear?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied.

Chapter 444: Returning to the Peak "Okay, I understand," Zachary said. "Then, see you in Turin on Friday. I'll be eagerly awaiting your arrival."

Camilla chuckled. "Is that the truth? Are you sure you won't forget about me and focus only on training over the next few days?"

"Of course, I won't forget about you," Zachary conveyed. "I'll train, yes. But I'll also be eagerly waiting for you here in Turin. You'll constantly be on my mind."

Camilla chuckled again. "Okay. I guess I can only choose to trust you. What other choice do I have?"

"Please don't be so skeptical?" Zachary asked. "I'm even going to set a reminder on my phone. It'll keep notifying me about the countdown to your arrival in Turin."

Camilla sighed audibly and said, "That's an effective method for keeping your girlfriend on your mind. I'm really, really impressed."

Zachary had a feeling that there was something wrong with her tone. He suspected that she was a bit angry. But after contemplating for a few seconds and confirming that he hadn't done anything wrong to earn her ire, he pushed the matter to the back of his mind.

"Zach!" Camilla's voice sounded again to break the silence after a few seconds. "As always, it was nice talking to you. But I now have to hang up and start preparing for work. I love you."

"I love you too, and thanks for calling," Zachary responded. "Have a nice day."

"Have a nice day, too. Let's talk later." Camilla said from the other end of the line before ending the call.

Zachary smiled and felt a wave of relaxation washing across his entire being as he placed his phone back on the table. He could tell that his mood had improved after talking to his girlfriend.

He could also feel his energy levels and motivation rising and shooting into the skies. He even seemed to forget about his poor performance during the previous day's game, as the only thing on his mind was how to train efficiently and improve himself.

"I should start training before my muscles cool down," he thought. Without further ado, he settled back on his training mat and resumed his morning practice routine.

He went through the yoga poses, body strengthening workouts, and flexibility exercises with much more intensity since his mind was in the right place. His drive was as great as ever, and he only stopped his practice thirty minutes later when he was almost out of breath.

He got up from the training mat while sweating and struggling to take even a simple breath due to exhaustion. But a moment later, a rejuvenating sensation flooded his body before caressing his mind. He couldn't understand what had just happened to him, but his thoughts were clearer after those thirty minutes of intensive exercise. It was as if he'd just recalibrated his mind and also unloaded a heavy weight off his shoulders. His body was almost in a hyper state of unbounded excitement.

"DING"

Just then, the familiar system notification sound went off in his mind. It immediately roused Zachary from his state of bliss and brought him back to the present.

"Congratulations!" The system AI's apathetic voice followed. "After a sufficient period of targeted and efficient training, the user has finally overcome the side effects of the S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir. The user's ball skills have now all returned to their peak. Please check the system interface for further details."

"Finally, I'm back at my peak." Zachary thought and immediately summoned the system interface with a mental command. He navigated through the system's panel with familiar ease before arriving at the attribute menu. Without further ado, he rubbed his hands together and started perusing his updated stats.

*USER STATS

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

Balance and Coordination: S-

Agility: S+

Strength: S+

Stamina: S+

Endurance Points: 17,500/18,000 (S+)

->Soccer Technique: [Av. Rating: S+]

Ball Control: S+

Dribbling Skills: S-

Passing Accuracy: S+

Body Control: S-

NB: The user is in peak condition.

Zachary finally breathed a sigh of relief after he confirmed that he had overcome the side effects of the S-grade elixir from the system interface. At long last, he could start playing confidently again instead of constantly worrying about committing mistakes due to his lacking fitness. He couldn't contain his excitement as he could finally unleash all his skills without fear or favor on the pitch.

"Now that I have overcome this hurdle, I can finally focus on the team training sessions," he mused while trying to contain his bubbly emotions. "If I can do well during training over the next seven days, the coaches might consider me for the game against Chievo Verona. I have to do my best."

The knowledge of returning to his peak fitness had totally rejuvenated him. It was like the final piece of the puzzle that helped him overcome the setback of committing a costly mistake during the previous day's game against AC Milan. He was like a renewed man who was only thinking about doing his best during the team training sessions so as to cement his place at Juventus and make the squad for the game against Chievo Verona on 30th August.

The next few days flashed by quickly as Zachary trained with the team. He didn't rest on his laurels after regaining his peak fitness but continued pushing his limits and trying his best to improve himself. His drive was commendable, and he didn't short-change himself as he constantly worked on refining his skills to prepare for the upcoming Serie A season.

Zachary's unwavering attitude and love for training soon impressed the coaches and teammates. In only a short while, they seemed to forget all about the mistake he had committed during Juventus' game against AC Milan, and they started treating him with cordiality again. Some players, like Andrea Pirlo and Gianluigi Buffon, even gave him advice on ways to improve his game on several occasions. And that further filled Zachary with glee as he could tell that they were trying their best to help him fit into the team.

Two more days elapsed as Zachary and his new teammates prepared for the new season. And finally, Friday, 29th August, the eve of the day when Juventus would play their opening game against Chievo Verona, had arrived. The excitement was in the air all around the Juventus training center as the team was about to kick start its Serie A season.

But in the evening of that same day, something unexpected happened and cut the excitement short. Paul Pogba, the incredibly talented young Frenchman, had up and decided to leave Juventus and return to Manchester United. He had made his decision abruptly and stealthily — only after informing a few of his close friends at the club.

Chapter 445: Eve of the New Italian Serie A SeasonAfter completing the team practice on Friday afternoon, Zachary washed up before heading to the player resting lounge at the far end of the training center. He intended to spend some time unwinding and conversing with his teammates before attending Coach Allegri's pre-match tactical briefing scheduled to start an hour later.

He traversed the already familiar hallways of Juventus' training center before arriving at the door of the resting lounge. He pushed it open and immediately stepped forward to enter the room occupied by four

familiar players. Patrice Evra was lounging on a couch at the far end of the room while Claudio Marchisio, Giorgio Chiellini, and Simone Pepe were seated in front of the big screen, watching a football match.

"Zachary, my man!" Patrice Evra, the Frenchman, was the first to call out to him in French. "Don't just stand there. Come over and sit beside me." He patted the couch next to him.

"Okay," Zachary readily agreed. He first said hi to the other three in the room before taking a few steps and settling on a couch near Evra's.

Evra gave him a once over before saying, "You were brilliant in today's tactical training session and even dribbled past Chiellini with expert ease on several occasions! What were you on, my man? Care to share?"

Zachary chuckled. "If you wish to know what I ate for breakfast or lunch, I'll humor you. I had milk, bread, cereal, and fruits in the morning. As for lunch, you don't need to ask since we ate the same food at the canteen."

"You're such a bore," Evra said, grinning and shaking his head. A few seconds passed, and he seemed to remember something. He glanced at Zachary again and said, "By the way, did you hear the news of Pogba leaving Juventus?"

"He left?" Zachary's eyes widened. "I thought he was absent from training due to the knock he received the other day!"

"Your information is outdated," Evra said with an audible sigh. "A couple of hours earlier, he completed a deadline transfer-move to return to Manchester United for a reported approximate fee of 83 million Euros. Man! He's even more expensive than you. What the hell are the guys in Manchester thinking?"

Zachary almost couldn't believe his ears when he heard the news. Two days ago, Pogba had excused himself from Juventus' training sessions by claiming that he had received a knock on his thigh muscle. But Zachary was now hearing that he was leaving the club. It was a shocking piece of news.

But there was also something else that intrigued Zachary. During his previous life, Manchester United had only managed to re-sign Pogba in the 2016 summer transfer window. But during his second life, there was a slight change. The French midfielder had completed the move out of Juventus two years in advance, meaning that his future at Manchester might take a different trajectory from that in Zachary's previous life. The Frenchman could just escape his fate and do wonders at the club since he was going to be under the management of Louis van Gaal — a coach with a knack for shaping young and talented midfielders.

"Where's Pogba now?" Zachary asked Evra. "Is he still in Turin?"

"Nah," Evra said, shaking his head. "He is already on his way to undergo a medical in Manchester."

"He's fast!" Zachary was shocked again.

"He has to be as the transfer window closes in three days," Evra remarked and closed his eyes to rest.

Zachary smiled and adjusted his body to lay supine on the couch. In only a few minutes, he regulated his breathing and pushed the thoughts about Pogba's move to the back of his mind. Then, he closed his eyes and started contemplating his status at Juventus.

Over the past six days, he had relied on his peak match fitness to work hard and impress the coaches during training. He had followed all their instructions to the letter while also trying to stand out from his teammates. As a result, he was confident that he had done his best to at least make it to the squad for the game against Chievo Verona the following day. But whether he could make the starting line-up or remain on the bench was still a mystery to him. He could only wait for Coach Allegri's tactical meeting before knowing the final verdict.

Various thoughts continued going through Zachary's mind until he dozed off a few minutes later. He sank into a deep slumber and only managed to wake up after Patrice Evra tapped his shoulder and reminded him about the pre-match tactical meeting.

When he checked the time on his phone and realized that only a few minutes remained until four o'clock, he reacted with all the haste he could muster. He got up with a start from the couch and hurriedly made his way out of the resting lounge. He entered a washroom a few minutes later and

splashed water on his face. Then, without losing a second, he dried himself with the available paper towels before rushing out into the hallways and heading to the tactics room.

He arrived a few minutes later and realized that most of his teammates had already taken their seats. A few of them were even huddled together, holding hashed conversations as they waited for the coaches to start the meeting.

Zachary tried his best to calm his racing heart and settled on a seat at the back of the room. Of course, he was a bit nervous since he was about to attend the tactical meeting to kick-start the new Serie A season with Juventus. He was also tense since he couldn't be sure that he would make Coach Allegri starting eleven.

"Posso avere la tua attenzione, per favore?" Coach Allegri said when he took center stage a minute later. He started delivering his speech and spent the next thirty minutes explaining tactics in Italian to his players. He was intense as he paced the entire room while spewing out words that sounded alien to Zachary's ears.

The coach was obviously doing his best to explain the game strategy to his players. However, Zachary couldn't understand what he was saying since he had yet to learn the Italian language. Zachary would have to wait for Coach Trombetta to translate the content for him at the end of the session.

The minutes seemed to pass slowly as the coach delivered his pre-match briefing. Zachary was almost dozing off on several occasions since he found the entire session boring. He only prevented his mind from descending into slumberland by focusing all his willpower.

More minutes that seemed like weeks to Zachary passed, and finally, the coach ended his speech and got to the exciting part of the pre-match briefing. It was finally time for the coach to announce the squad for the following day's game against Chievo Verona. As a result, a numbing silence descended upon the entire room as the players waited for the next part of the coach's presentation with bated breaths.

Coach Allegri took a few seconds to observe all the players in the tactics room. He could tell that some of his new signings, like Zachary Bamba, Patrice Evra, Álvaro Morata, and Kingsley Coman, couldn't understand what he was saying due to their zero knowledge of Italian. But even then, he wasn't about to prolong the tactical meeting by having someone else translate his words for them during the session. He would only instruct Coach Trombetta to translate for them after the meeting had ended. That way, he would remain efficient and avoid wasting the precious time of his other players.

"Let's begin with the starting eleven," he said as the big screen behind him lit up and displayed the names of the players who had made his squad. "Gianluigi Buffon will be in goal. Then, we'll use three defenders, namely: Martín Cáceres, Leonardo Bonucci, and Angelo Ogbonna, to complete our back-three defense."

"Further up the pitch, Claudio Marchisio, Andre Pirlo, and Arturo Vidal will play as our central midfielders. Then, Stephan Lichtsteiner and Kwadwo Asamoah will play on the flanks to complete our midfield of five. And finally, Carlos Tévez and Kingsley Coman will be the men to lead our attack on the striking line of our 3-5-2 formation. That's it for the starting eleven. Any questions?" The coach glanced around.

In response, all the players around the room remained silent.

"Okay, okay," Coach Allegri said after a few seconds. "Let's move on. On the bench, we have Rubinho, Marco Storari, Luca Marrone, Patrice Evra, Federico Mattiello, Rômulo, Simone Padoin, Roberto Pereyra, Zachary Bamba, Simone Pepe, Sebastian Giovinco, and Fernando Llorente. And that's all concerning our match squad. Any questions?"

Once again, the players remained silent. They obviously had no questions for the coach.

Coach Allegri smiled and nodded. "Since there are no questions, let's conclude the tactical meeting here. The match against Chievo is at 6:00 PM tomorrow, and we'll be playing at an away ground. You all need to head back to your homes and have some ample rest tonight. That way, you will be sharp and at the top of your game during the match tomorrow. Am I making myself clear?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied.

Chapter 446: The 2014/15 Italian Serie A System Mission
After the meeting, Zachary approached Coach Trombetta, the assistant coach in charge of the first team, to request an English translation of Coach Allegri's pre-match tactical briefing. He would obviously not depart from the training center before understanding the game plan for the following day. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to get a wink of sleep later that night.

Coach Trombetta's translation skills were as good as ever. He spent roughly a quarter an hour explaining the tactics for the following day's game in simple English. He spoke in detail and ensured that Zachary and his other colleagues who didn't understand the Italian language comprehended the game plan. After that, he wished the players a good night before sending them away from the tactics room.

Zachary got up, ready to follow his colleagues out of the tactics room. He was eager to return to his hotel room since Camilla was already waiting for him there. But before he could take even a single step towards the exit, Coach Trombetta called his name and instructed him to retake his seat.

"Zachary!" The assistant coach said, glancing at him with a smile. "How are you these days? Do you feel like you have regained your full match fitness?"

"I'm very okay," Zachary replied. "And I can assure you that I have already regained my full match fitness. I'm ready to step onto the pitch and play whenever the team needs me."

"Are you sure?" Coach Trombetta asked again. "And before you answer, remember that in a top team like Juventus, you can't commit basic mistakes that will cost your teammates an official game. You have to be at the top of your game during every match. Or else you'll lose your position on the squad."

"Don't worry," Zachary responded, his tone exuding confidence. "I know my body well. I feel good, and I'm sure that I have regained my peak. As long as you put me on the pitch, I won't disappoint."

"I like your confidence," Coach Trombetta remarked with a smile. "I was worried that you would lose your confidence after committing that mistake in the game against AC Milan. But from what I can see, my worries have been for naught. You seem to have recovered well."

"Yes, I have," Zachary said, nodding emphatically. "That mistake woke me up, and I pushed myself to train more effectively over the past seven days. That's why I have overcome my fitness issues in a short period of time."

Coach Trombetta nodded. "Try to get enough sleep today. You need to be in your best state if Coach Allegri decides to bring you on as a substitute in the game tomorrow. Okay?"

"I understand, coach," Zachary replied. "As long as the coach needs me, I'll be ready."

Zachary departed from the training center later that evening. A soft smile constantly outlined his face as he sat in the backseat of Angelo's white Citroen, watching the scenery flash by outside the vehicle's window. His emotions were almost in a hyper state, and he couldn't wait for the following day to arrive so that he could play his first official game for Juventus.

"DING"

Suddenly, the system notification sound rang within his mind, jolting him back to full attention. He narrowed his eyes as he turned his gaze away from the scenery outside the vehicle's window.

"The system has detected that the user has been added to the Juventus squad playing in the 2014/15 Italian Serie A season," the system AI's apathetic voice followed. "The conditions required to initiate the long-term 2014/15 Italian Serie A Mission have been met."

"DING"

"The 2014/15 Italian Serie A Mission initiated successfully."

"Does the user wish to view the details of the mission right away?"

Zachary took a moment to observe Angelo, his driver, who was on the steering wheel. After noticing that the Italian man wasn't focusing on him, he breathed in and gave a mental command, "Please, bring up the details on the interface right away. Make sure they fit on a single screen. I don't wish to scroll and attract any unwanted attention."

"DING"

"Commands received," the system AI intoned. "Mission details have been displayed on the interface."

Zachary leaned back into the car seat and began perusing through the contents displayed on the crystal-like display that had appeared before him. He was eager to learn the details of his new mission.

G.O.A.T MISSIONS

#NEW MISSION: 2014/15 Italian Serie A Challenge

->The system has detected that the user is part of the Juventus squad that will play the 2014/15 Italian Serie A season. The system has designed an associated mission for the event.

->The user needs to accept the mission first to stand a chance of winning rewards after completing the milestones below.

*Milestone 1: Play 65% of the fixtures in the 2014/15 Serie A season. The user must be part of the starting eleven or a playing substitute in at least 25 of the total 38 Serie A matches.

*Milestone 2: Help your teammates become the 2014/15 Italian Serie A Champions.

*Milestone 3: Provide the most assists in the 2014/15 Italian Serie A season.

*Milestone 4: Become the top scorer of the 2014/15 Italian Serie A season.

*Milestone 5: Become the MVP of the 2014/15 Italian Serie A season.

*Milestone 6: Score 40 or more goals during the 2014/15 Serie A Season.

*Milestone 7: Help your teammates achieve an unbeaten run throughout the 2014/15 Italian Serie A. The user must work hard to ensure Juventus doesn't lose even a single match from the beginning to the end of the season.

*Rewards:

->Milestone 1 completion reward: 2000 Juju-points

->Milestone 2 completion reward: 2000 Juju-points

->Milestone 3 completion reward: 10,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 4 completion reward: 20,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 5 completion reward: 30,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 6 completion reward: 100,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 7 completion reward: A dosage of S-grade vitality-enhancing elixir.

NB: There will be additional rewards if the user realizes any other milestones that can unlock hidden missions.

->The user can choose not to accept the mission.

*Accept *Reject

*Punishment if none of the milestones has been achieved after the stipulated time (In case the user accepts).

->Minus 120,000 Juju-points

*The user has to complete at least one milestone before the tournament ends to escape the penalty.

*Remarks: Only by constantly breaking records can an individual move up the ranks of the greats of any field.

Chapter 447: Camilla Visits Zachary immediately tapped his finger on the translucent crystal-like display to accept the system mission. He didn't even need to contemplate since he was confident in his ability to realize at least one milestone of the 2014/15 Italian Serie A Challenge.

He could at least start by focusing on keeping himself fit and playing more than 65% of the Serie A matches for Juventus. Then, he would meet the conditions for the first milestone and escape the system penalty even if he failed the rest of the mission.

As for the milestones that required him to score forty goals or help Juventus achieve an unbeaten run, he wasn't even five percent sure that he would be able to realize them. He knew that the Italian Serie A was a top football league in Europe, with very intense competition. He would find it a difficult task if he wished to constantly beat opposing defenders and score goals, week in, week out, as he did during his time in the Norwegian League. He was better off focusing on winning individual games rather than setting unrealistic goals like creating history by scoring more than forty goals in a single Serie A season.

"We're here," Angelo said after a few more minutes as he pulled up into one of the parking spaces in front of the J Hotel.

"Finally," Zachary said. "Thanks for taking care of me again today. I really appreciate the help you have afforded me over the past few days."

"Don't mention it," Angelo said, turning his head to glance at Zachary from the driver's seat. "It's my job to help you, and I enjoy it. But that aside, what about your appointment with the real estate agent? Can you get time soon and look at the houses he has arranged for you?"

Zachary sighed and shook his head. "I'm still busy training and trying to fit into the team. So, tell him to give me a few more weeks. When I settle down and achieve stability on the team, we can contact him and look at the houses."

"Okay, I understand where you're coming from," Angelo said with a smile. "I'll cancel the appointment until you're ready. When do you wish for me to pick you up tomorrow?"

"Pick me up at 10:00 AM," Zachary said. "I must be at the training center by at least eleven tomorrow. I don't wish to miss the team bus to Verona."

"Okay, I'll pick you up at ten," Angelo said, nodding. "Otherwise, have a goodnight."

"Thanks, and have a good night, too," Zachary said and immediately stepped out of the vehicle. After watching Angelo steer the car away from the hotel, he took a moment to admire the sights around him. He breathed in the fresh and natural autumn fragrances as his eyes took in all the infrastructure and green trees lining up the street in front of the J Hotel.

The next moment, a smile slowly outlined his facial features as he felt he was in the most optimum state, especially on the eve of his possible debut in the Italian Serie A. He couldn't explain why, but for the first time since he lost his grandma, he felt like he was alive, driven, and ready to face any challenge that came his way. He was in a good mood, and even the sunset reigning supreme on the western horizon of Turin seemed more beautiful in his eyes.

"Let's head into the hotel."

Zachary ignored the nearby people glancing at him with sparkling eyes and immediately walked into the hotel. He greeted the receptionist before taking the stairs to the third floor. He traversed the spotless clean hallways and arrived at the door leading into his room.

"Knock! Knock..." He knocked a couple of times before waiting.

A second or two elapsed, and then the door silently opened to reveal Camilla's captivating figure in its full splendor. God! She was as gorgeous as ever. She was really a beauty that could cause the downfall of nations with just a smile.

"Hey, stranger!" She said after a few seconds. Her emerald-green eyes sparkled with warmth, and she immediately jumped into Zachary's arms. She was like a pretty bird that had just returned to its nest after a long journey across the world.

"Let's first enter the room," Zachary said, patting her back and glancing around. Since he was no longer in Norway, he was constantly on guard against the paparazzi. He didn't wish to see a picture of him being intimate with Camilla in the news the following day.

"Okay," Camilla readily agreed and led him by the arm into the room. What followed was only natural. After spending almost a month apart, the two love birds engaged in the age-old ritual of intimacy. There was a hunger in their actions as they embraced and immersed themselves in the sweet throes of passion on the giant bed in the hotel room. They forgot about everything else and didn't stop until they hit a couple of blissful and fulfilling zeniths in each other's arms.

"So, how was your day?" Camilla asked while resting in Zachary's arms an hour later.

"As good as it can be," Zachary responded, caressing her back. "I made the squad for the game tomorrow."

"Congratulations," Camilla said, smiling and shifting slightly within Zachary's embrace. "Are you among the starting eleven?"

"Unfortunately not," Zachary replied with a sigh. "I'm on the bench. But that's still a good start. As long as I get an opportunity to step on the pitch for a few minutes, I'm sure I'll be able to convince the coaches with my ability."

"I'm sure you will," Camilla agreed. "Continue working hard, and you'll eventually cement your rightful place in Juventus."

Zachary nodded. "Enough about me. When did you arrive?"

"At around three in the afternoon."

"Did the hotel staff give you a hard time?"

"Not at all," Camilla replied. "I was surprised when they readily allowed me into your room. They only asked for my ID, and that was it."

Zachary smiled. "I had given them your details and informed them to let you into the room. And before I forget, I'm really sorry about not picking you up from the airport."

"No problem," Camilla said. "I'm aware that you were busy preparing for the game tomorrow. Did you get me a ticket for the game?"

"Of course," Zachary responded. "How could I forget?"

"Thanks," Camilla said coyly and inched closer to Zachary. "I'm really looking forward to seeing you on the pitch tomorrow."

"Let's hope that the coach gives me an opportunity," Zachary intoned. "Have you eaten, by the way?"

"Not yet. I was waiting for you."

"You must be starving," Zachary said. "Let's head to the restaurant and eat something. Moreover, we need to go to bed early so that I can rest and be in optimum condition during tomorrow's game."

"Okay, let's clean up and head to the restaurant," Camilla readily agreed. "We'll talk about everything else later."

Chapter 448: Season Opener against ChievoVeronaSaturday, August 30, 2014.

Stadio Marcantonio Bentegodi, ChievoVerona's Home Ground, Verona, Italy.

Time: 5:30 PM.

The sunset on the western horizon of Turin was glorious, all rosy and salmon-pink. Its golden rays filtered through the sparse clouds and shone down on the crowds flooding into the Marcantonio Bentegodi Stadium. Of course, the football supporters were at the famous stadium in Verona to watch the 2014/15 Italian Serie A season-opening game between ChievoVerona and Juventus.

As the minutes flashed by, the atmosphere all around the stadium became more and more electrifying. The fans who had arrived early were already cheering at the top of their voices within the stands. They sang the various famous chants of their respective teams in hoarse voices as they waited for the game's kick-off at 6:30 PM. They were obviously very excited and looking forward to the season opener.

Like always, some overly-enthusiastic fans and dedicated journalists had eagerly camped at the stadium gates. At that moment, they had already craned their necks as they watched the road leading up to the stadium with sparkling eyes.

"The Juventus bus is here," one of the fans in the crowd suddenly yelled to spark off a flurry of activity before the stadium gates.

The fans started yelling the names of the famous Juventus players as the bus slowly pulled up in front of the stadium. As for the journalists, they went into alert mode and readied their cameras in preparation to take some photos of the famous football players.

Coach Allegri, who had donned a full suit that day, was the first to step out of the bus. He waved to the fans before hurrying forward and entering the stadium. Then, the players followed after him while also waving to the fans. But they didn't stop to sign any autographs as they were in a hurry to begin their pre-match warm-up.

"Did you notice that Zachary was in the squad?" A fan asked his friend when all the players had entered the stadium. "Why were there rumors of him being unfit yesterday?"

"Beats me," his friend said, shrugging. "Maybe, the press got it all wrong, like they usually do. But I really hope that he gets an opportunity to play today. I want to see him start scoring goals for Juventus as soon as possible."

"What worries me is that picture of him enjoying dinner with a girl in some hotel on the internet," the first fan said. "Instead of resting and getting ready for the game yesterday night, he was vibing some lady. Honestly, that kind of behavior seems unprofessional. I hope he doesn't make another mistake if he gets an opportunity to step onto the pitch today."

"Don't be so hard on the guy," His friend said. "Footballers are humans too. They also have the right to enjoy life. We should only care about their performance on the pitch, not their personal lives."

"What if their personal life affects their performance on the pitch?"

"Then, we can be harsh on them after the game," the friend responded. "But in Zachary's case, he's yet to step on the pitch, and yet you're already judging him as unprofessional. Let's wait and see how he performs before putting labels on him."

"I hope you are right," the first supporter said. "Let's enter the stadium. The game is about to begin."

The time passed quickly, and soon the clock hands in Turin pointed to the 6:30 PM mark. Without any delays, the referee blew the whistle and signaled the Chievo players to kick off the game.

Maxi López, Chievo's center-forward, immediately kicked the ball back into his midfield to kick-start the season-opening game between the two teams. With a simple pass, he found Mariano Izco, Chievo's central midfielder.

Mariano Izco comfortably controlled the ball close to the edge of the center circle while under no pressure. After only a single touch, he whirled around and passed the ball into his defense to find Bostjan Cesar, Chievo's center-back.

Bostjan Cesar surprisingly took his time to react to the pass. The center-back controlled the ball without any sense of urgency in his actions before passing it to Dario Dainelli, his counterpart in central defense.

But by then, Carlos Tévez, one of Juventus' two strikers, had already made a spirited run across the field to close down the defender. The Argentine forward tracked down the seemingly stunned Dario Dainelli and slid in wholesale, trying to tackle the ball with an outstretched boot.

Dario Dainelli, in turn, read the situation accurately and quickly whirled around to escape from Carlos' tackle. But before he could find a safe outlet for the ball, Kingsley Coman, the other Juventus striker, was on him, pressing him and closing down all his passing angles.

The young Frenchman was aggressive while pressing. He harassed the helpless defender and won the ball in a short span of a few seconds. Before the other opponents could close him down, he squared a pass to Carlos Tévez, the striker who had already picked himself from the ground.

Tévez was, of course, a man of steel nerves and iron balls. He remained composed as he controlled the ball with a touch that took him past the other center-back. Then, within a second, he exploded with speed and rounded the keeper to score Juventus' first goal during the second minute of gameplay.

The striker seemed quite excited by his feat of scoring. He rushed to the corner flag while yelling at the top of his voice to celebrate his first goal of the season. It was as if he was announcing to the Juventus fans present in the stands that he was back in business right after the start of the season.

The game continued after the goal celebrations. And once again, the Juventus players utilized high pressing tactics to pressurize the ChievoVerona defenders right after the restart of the game. The men in white and black ran at the opponents like predators on the hunt and forced them to play the ball high and long on several occasions. And that allowed Juventus to constantly regain possession quickly before starting to dominate proceedings again.

Fifteen more minutes quickly elapsed as the Old Lady players slowly built momentum by dominating a considerable fraction of the ball possession. By arraying themselves into a 3-5-2 formation, they managed to pass the ball more fluidly, especially in midfield. They played with intensity and soon managed to create another clear goal-scoring chance.

Andrea Pirlo worked his magic in midfield and opened up Chievo's defense with his signature long-range passing during the 19th minute. With a single ball over the midfield, the Italian Maestro released Stephan Lichtsteiner, the attacking wing-back who had just made a daring run on the right flank.

Stephan Lichtsteiner was as brilliant as ever. He expertly controlled the ball close to the touchline on the right flank before exploding with speed and racing towards Chievo's half. A short while later, he stepped into the final third and unleashed a lofted cross towards the box to create another perfect goal-scoring chance for Juventus.

Carlos Tévez immediately went into action and raced into the box. His almost instantaneous acceleration allowed him to escape from his marker and connect with the descending ball without any pressure. He tapped it into the back of the net with an outstretched boot to score Juventus' second goal in the 18th minute.

AC ChievoVerona 0 : Juventus FC 2

On the bench, Zachary watched on with mixed emotions as his teammates celebrated their second goal that evening. He was obviously happy that his team was winning and destroying the opponents. But at the same time, he was also worried as there was a possibility of never getting a chance to step onto the pitch if the starting eleven continued performing incredibly well.

Chapter 449: Serie A Debut I
The Chievo players seemed to have gotten a wake-up call after conceding the second goal. They arrayed themselves into a 4-5-1 formation and started playing with more intensity. Their hard work paid off, and they managed to choke Juventus' momentum. In the end, they even avoided conceding another goal until the first half ended.

After the fifteen-minute half-time break, the players of both teams returned to the pitch. And without any delays, the referee blew the whistle to restart the game with a Juventus kick-off.

Carlos Tévez, one of the two Juventus strikers, kick-started the second half by passing the ball back into his midfield to find Andrea Pirlo. The latter brought it under control as he assessed the situation on the pitch with his eagle-like vision. Then, the next instant, he drew his leg back and unleashed a lofted pass towards the left wing before any opponent could close him down.

Whoosh!

Andrea Pirlo's pass was as spot on as ever. The ball zoomed across and over the pitch like a surface-to-surface missile before descending and landing on Kwadwo Asamoah's chest.

Asamoah, on his part, didn't dawdle with the ball on the left flank. He immediately skipped past a sliding tackle from the opposing winger before squaring a pass to Claudio Marchisio, the midfielder running in sync with him through the middle.

The two players then played a series of quick one-twos on the left flank as they tore through the field, heading towards Chievo's goal with an unwavering impetus. A few seconds later, they stepped past the boundary of the final third, and the ball naturally found its way back to Kwadwo Asamoah. The Ghanaian midfielder didn't lose any second smashing the ball with his left boot to unleash a lofted cross towards the box.

It was another goal-scoring chance right at the start of the second half for Juventus. And, of course, Carlos Tévez, the ever-active striker, went into action almost instantaneously. He jetted into the box like a raging Godzilla before pushing off the ground to connect with the incoming cross.

Unfortunately, a little nudge from the opposing center-back rendered his efforts fruitless. His head missed the ball by mere centimeters, thus sealing his fate of missing the perfect chance to score a hat-trick and the third goal for Juventus that evening. He could only place his hands behind his head and sigh with regret.

A few seconds elapsed, and a goal-kick from Chievo's goalkeeper restarted the game. Once again, the Juventus players applied pressure on the opponents and won possession back quickly. They started passing the ball among themselves and launched another wave of attacks to kick-start another spell of dominance for the Old Lady.

The Old Lady players would commence every offensive by building from the back before tearing apart Chievo's formation with abrupt through-passes from either Andrea Pirlo or Claudio Marchisio. Their fluid passing and hard work allowed them to control the game and create many goal-scoring chances that almost resulted in the third goal.

Regrettably, Juventus' luck was terrible during the second half, and they didn't convert any of their chances. Kingsley Coman and Carlos Tévez, the two strikers, both missed one-on-ones with the keeper during the 49th and 55th minutes, respectively. Then, during the 67th minute, the Chievo keeper made an incredible save to stop Andrea Pirlo's long-range effort from finding the back of the net. But that was not all. A few more shots smashed off the post while others missed the target by mere centimeters. Juventus' second half was not going as planned as they couldn't get the third goal, no matter how hard they tried.

To make matters worse, a rare and perfect opportunity for Chievo to get back into the game appeared during the 69th minute. The Chievo players won a corner kick and executed it perfectly to score their first goal for the night during the 71st minute. As a result, the seemingly sure win for Juventus was up in the air as only a single goal separated the two teams when nineteen minutes were still remaining to the ninety-minute mark.

AC ChievoVerona 1 : Juventus FC 2

On the sidelines, Coach Massimiliano Allegri sighed and shook his head as he watched the Chievo players celebrate their goal. He was a bit distressed. His players played well and created many chances during the second half. But they were not clinical enough within the final third and failed to convert and kill off the game early in the second half. Moreover, they also allowed the opponents to score and crawl their way back into the game. As a result, they were in for a tense final few minutes. They had to remain cautious and alert until the final whistle sounded, or else they might concede another goal and end their

first game of the season with only a single point. As far as Coach Allegri was concerned, such a scenario was totally unacceptable.

"I have got to change something," Coach Allegri thought and turned towards his bench. His gaze swept over all the substitutes until it stopped on Zachary Bemba, his most expensive signing for the summer. The young playmaker was the perfect player to turn a match around if he was at the top of his game. He could create chances out of nothing, take set-pieces with almost inhuman precision, and score almost-impossible goals.

But the crucial question for the coach to consider was whether the young man was back at the top of his game. Had he really overcome his match-fitness issues? Or did he lie to Coach Trombetta to get some playing time during the season opener? Due to those doubts, the coach was in a dilemma. He was hesitant to introduce the young playmaker into the game.

"A penny for your thoughts?" Coach Trombetta, the assistant coach in charge of the first team, asked from beside him. "What's going on in your mind?"

Coach Allegri sighed again. "I'm just considering whether to introduce Zachary into the game. He's creative and clinical enough. He might be the player that helps us overcome ChievoVerona."

"Then, what is stopping you?" Coach Trombetta asked.

"I still have doubts about his match fitness," the head coach replied. "Has he really returned to his peak? And has he regained his confidence as a player, especially after committing that blunder against AC Milan?"

"He already confirmed that he's in his best shape," Coach Trombetta said. "Moreover, you must have noticed how sharp and impressive he was during the training sessions leading to the match. His dribbling was always unpredictable, his passing accurate, and his execution of the tactical drills superb. My conclusion is that he's fully fit, both physically and mentally."

"I guess I should trust you on this since you have been close to him during the past week," Coach Allegri said, smiling. "Okay. Tell Zachary to start warming up immediately. I want him on the pitch in less than five minutes."

"Okay," Coach Trombetta agreed with a smile. "I'll summon him right away."

"One more thing," Coach Allegri said. "You're in charge of explaining the plan for the last few minutes to Zachary. He has to understand that he will play behind the strikers in our 3-5-2 formation. He has got to stop Chievo's momentum by taking control of the midfield and creating more goal-scoring chances. And when the opportunities arise, he can try his luck on goal from long range. Maybe, he will score."

"I understand," Coach Trombetta replied. "I'll explain all the tactics to him."

Zachary could literally feel his heart racing with anticipation when the coaches signaled him to start his warm-up. His spirits had already brightened as he was about to make his official debut appearance for his new club.

Without losing even a second, he changed into his match gear and went through a dynamic warm-up routine on the sidelines. He completed it in only five minutes before rushing back to the technical area to prepare for his imminent substitution into the game.

"Zachary!" Coach Trombetta called out to him a few seconds later. "Come here for a second."

"Yes, coach!" Zachary replied with zest and elicited a wave of suppressed chuckles from his other teammates on the bench. But that didn't stop him from running to the coach to receive his match instructions.

"How do you feel?" Coach Trombetta asked as soon as Zachary stepped before him.

"Honestly, I'm both nervous and excited," Zachary replied. "I'm also looking forward to stepping onto the pitch."

"That's great," Coach Trombetta said, nodding. He then explained the tactics to Zachary for a minute or two before prompting the fourth official to signal his introduction into the game.

A few seconds elapsed, and finally, the ball went out of play for yet another Juventus corner kick. The fourth official immediately put up the board to signal Zachary's introduction into the game. Zachary replaced Arturo Vidal in the 77th minute and stepped onto the pitch as an attacking midfielder in Juventus' 3-5-2 formation.

Zachary's introduction into the game sparked off a wave of mixed reactions among the Juventus fans within the stands. Some supporters were happy to see him on the pitch, while others remained skeptical about his ability to adapt quickly to the highly-intensive Serie A football.

"Do you think that he will be able to perform today?" A fan asked his counterpart while keeping his eyes on the proceedings on the pitch. "Yesterday evening, there were reports that he wasn't fully fit. But now, they have brought him into the game! What's Allegri thinking

"Let's choose to trust the coach," another fan said. "He must have considered all his other options before bringing Zachary on. And if Zachary plays like he usually did last season, then we might just destroy Chievo during the final few minutes. Let's wait and see."

"I hope nothing goes wrong. I don't wish to start the season with a draw or a loss."

"Don't jinx things for us, man," the first fan said. "We'll win the game. For now, let's focus. Our players have finished preparing for the corner kick. They will take it any second from now."

"Okay."

Chapter 450: Serie A Debut II Zachary sprinted across the pitch and immediately took up a strategic position within Chievo's box. Almost instantaneously, Bostjan Cesar, the tall Slovenian center-back, was on him, marking him and harassing him. The man was quite intense with his actions, even before the referee could blow the whistle for the corner kick.

"Chill out, man," Zachary said. He shrugged the defender off before stepping away and occupying another strategic position within the box. He was finally ready to meet the incoming corner ball without any disturbance from any defender.

"You're not going anywhere," a voice sounded in his ears just as he was in the middle of analyzing his surroundings. He turned around and immediately noticed that it was the same Slovenian defender from before who had chased after him. His actions were even more aggressive, and he immediately held on to Zachary's shirt to prevent him from moving around.

"Seriously!" Zachary eyed the defender out of the corner of his eye before choosing to ignore him. He would wait for the perfect opportunity before escaping from the opponent.

A few more seconds passed, and finally, after a couple of Chievo substitutions, the referee blew the whistle. Andrea Pirlo, Juventus' deep-lying playmaker, immediately went into action and took the corner kick. He unleashed a teasing ball from the corner spot that stirred a flurry of activity within the crowded box.

"Here it comes!"

Zachary acted with urgency just as the ball started descending into the box. He shrugged off his marker before sprinting forward and leaping high to tower above his opponents and meet the incoming cross.

His newly-acquired CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju worked like a charm, and his jump took him almost a meter above the ground. Without losing composure, he inclined his head slightly and directed the incoming corner ball towards the top right corner. And without any surprise, his effort easily beat the seemingly stunned goalkeeper and allowed him to score Juventus' third goal for the night in the 78th minute. He had scored with his first touch on the ball after stepping onto the pitch as a substitute.

"This is great."

Zachary could hardly believe how easy it was to score as he descended to the ground. Previously, he often found it challenging to find the back of the net with his head. But after learning the CR7 Aerial Finishing Juju, everything seemed natural, and Zachary headed the ball home to score his first goal for

Juventus in an official competition. He could hardly contain his happiness as he raced towards the corner flag to celebrate in front of the traveling Juventus fans.

"Oh my, God, that was magnificent," the commentator yelled in Italian as Zachary raced off towards the corner flag to celebrate with the rest of his teammates. "Zachary Bemba, the newly-signed 19-year-old playmaker, has scored his first goal for Juventus in an official competition with his first touch in the game. He easily beat all the opposition before leaping high to connect with the corner ball. What a debut for the young man!"

"Just moments ago, we were speculating that he might not manage to make an immediate impact on the game," the co-commentator chipped in immediately. "But with just a single touch, he has shut everybody down with that well-timed stunning header into the back of the net. Indeed, what a debut for the young playmaker."

In the stands, Camilla's smile was bright like the noonday sun in summer while watching Zachary celebrating with his new teammates. She was happy to witness her boyfriend score immediately after entering the pitch. She couldn't wait to congratulate him when they returned to their hotel room later that night.

The game continued after the goal celebrations. The Chievo players tried to smother Juventus' momentum with hard work and an unrelenting attitude towards the game. But they failed due to the incredible levels of skill present within the Juventus squad.

The Juventus players didn't allow the opponents to do as they pleased. They utilized high-pressing tactics to ensure that they always won the ball quickly after losing it. And in so doing, they managed to dominate proceedings on the field of play while sustaining pressure on Chievo's defense.

Zachary, on his part, was full of energy, especially since he'd just stepped onto the pitch. He didn't stop running and played fluid and steady passing football by linking up well with Andrea Pirlo and Claudio Marchisio, his counterparts in central midfield. As a result, he managed to cause plenty of problems for the opponents during the final ten minutes of gameplay.

Additionally, he stuck to his basics and played one or two-touch football to ensure he didn't commit any mistakes on his debut day. And whenever there was an opportunity, he would unleash a through pass to find the strikers or take a shot at goal. But even with his impressive performance, he didn't manage to create any other goal-scoring opportunity for Juventus until very late during injury time.

After a failed offensive by Chievo during the 91st minute, the ball naturally found its way to Andrea Pirlo. On seeing the deep-lying playmaker receive the ball, Zachary, who was in a strategic position close to the left flank, reacted immediately and took off towards the other side of the pitch like the wind.

He had already mastered a Pirlo-Juju and had some understanding of the Maestro's incredible vision of the pitch during crucial moments of the game. He was sure that Andrea would be able to spot him as long as he made a well-timed run to catch the opponents off-guard.

"Whoosh!"

Zachary was like a Ferrari on a formula one race track as he tore across the field. He kept running and didn't stop for anything since he was banking on the fact that Andrea's pass would arrive at any time. He was hopeful, and that kept him going.

On the sidelines, Coach Allegri was tense as he followed the action on the field of play. His gaze alternated from time to time, taking in the silhouette of Zachary, who was sprinting towards the other side of the pitch, and Andrea Pirlo, the playmaker with the ball.

The next instant, his heartbeat accelerated as he saw Andrea draw his leg back and unleash a hell-of-a-pass towards the other side of the pitch. With almost machine-like precision, the Maestro found the sprinting Zachary with a single lofted ball over the entire midfield.

Zachary, on his part, slowed down slightly before leaping high to connect with the incoming pass. He chested the ball down to the green and immediately executed a perfect Marseille turn to skip past an opposing defender. And before any of the opponents could close him down, he prodded the ball forward and continued on his way towards Chievo's box like a mega hurricane.

Bostjan Cesar, the Chievo center-back, soon stepped forward to close down his run. But Zachary chose not to tango with him. Instead, he slowed down a bit before unleashing a simple pass towards the right to find Carlos Tévez, the striker who had been running in sync with him.

It was the perfect opportunity for Juventus to score, and Tévez didn't disappoint. He maintained his composure and took a single touch on the ball to step into the box. Then, with a couple of deft touches, Tévez rounded the goalkeeper, who had come out from between the posts to meet him. He buried the ball into the back of the net to score Juventus' fourth goal for the evening in the 92nd minute.

AC ChievoVerona 1 : Juventus FC 4

"GOAAAAAL!"

Coach Allegri couldn't help but yell out loud when the ball nestled into the back of the net. He was pleased with his players as they had executed the counterattack perfectly. With only two passes and the brilliance of three players, they had managed to tear apart Chievo's defense and score Juventus' fourth goal for the night. As far as the coach was concerned, they had played the perfect attacking football in that one minute.

Additionally, he was impressed by the uncanny ability of his young midfielder - Zachary Bemba. The young playmaker was superb after coming on as a substitute. He right away made an impact on the

game by scoring the third goal for Juventus. Then, minutes later, he provided an assist that resulted in the f