

Greatest 481

Chapter 481 Second Half Strategy

The referee blew the whistle for half-time after two more minutes of gameplay. Without further ado, the players of both teams hurried to their respective dressing rooms for the fifteen-minute break.

"Man!" Patrice Evra patted Zachary's back as they entered the dressing room. "The way you controlled that ball from Bonucci was godly. Kudos to you for creating our equalizer."

"Don't forget about my contribution," Carlos Tévez hurriedly chimed in from behind Zachary. "Zachary would have found it hard to beat the Atlético Madrid defense alone if I hadn't helped."

Patrice smiled and stepped back to put an arm around Tévez. "Of course, I can't forget your contribution, Carlos. But I'm just saying Zachary might still have scored even if he was against four Atlético Madrid defenders alone. So, please don't get so full of yourself for making an assist." He added jokingly.

"Damn it, Patrice! That's mean," Tévez said, pushing away Evra. "Do you really have to state the obvious?"

The rest of the Juventus players laughed at that while settling down on the seats in the dressing room. They soon started gulping down some water while waiting for their coach's half-time address.

Coach Allegri was in a good mood when he stepped into the dressing room at half-time. His spirits were flying high since his players had scored an equalizer right before the end of the first half. As a result, he could be more flexible with his tactics for the second half since he only had to focus on remaining stable, performance-wise, and winning the game.

Coach Allegri took a deep breath and swept his gaze across the players in the dressing room. "Lads!" He said. "Can I have your attention?"

On hearing his voice, all the players stopped whatever they were doing. Then, they immediately turned their attention to their coach, ready to listen to his half-time address.

"Our performance during the first half was sub-par," Coach Allegri began. "First of all, our pass completion rate, especially while going forward, was below standard. Secondly, our reaction as a team after losing the ball had no sense of urgency. Thirdly, we only managed to have one shot on target even after dominating possession for the entire first half. What the hell were you guys doing on the pitch?"

Coach Allegri shook his head. "You're clearly a better team than Atlético Madrid on paper. But why are you playing a shitty type of football? What is stopping you all, especially our midfielders, from creating chances and providing good service to our strikers?"

Giorgio Chiellini raised his hand on hearing the question.

"Yes, Chiellini." Coach Allegri pointed at him. "What's lacking?"

"I think we lack team spirit," Chiellini replied. "We lack that competitive edge as a team to stake everything against Atlético Madrid and win the game. That's why we're playing shitty football."

"That's fuckin' right! Thank you, Chiellini," Coach Allegri said, clapping his hands for emphasis. "I don't know what has happened to you guys on the pitch. But I can see it in the way you handle the ball. I can see it in your reactions and runs off the ball. You lack the spirit to compete as professionals out there. It's as if you're playing a fuckin' training match without any drive and competitive edge. You guys tell me! How the hell are we supposed to take on bigger clubs like Barcelona and Real Madrid later on in the competition when you're playing like this? How are we supposed to have a chance at winning the Champions League if we lack the drive to become the winners of our group?"

Coach Allegri sighed, sweeping his gaze across his players again. "This can't go on," he said, his tone softening. "We must go out there and play our hearts out during the second half. We must show Atlético Madrid that we mean business. We must show them that we're here to fuckin' compete and win the game. If we wish to have any hope of ever winning the Champions League, we must build our momentum starting here and now. We must defeat Atlético Madrid. Are you guys with me?"

"Yes, coach," the players roared back in unison.

"Good." Coach Allegri nodded and smiled. "Lastly, I'll talk a bit about the tactics. During the first half, Atlético Madrid's tactics isolated our strikers, and we couldn't link up play with them. That's why we had limited goal-scoring opportunities and almost no shot on target. We can't continue playing that way during the second half. We must involve our strikers, especially if we wish to win the game."

"So, here is our plan for the second half," Coach Allegri continued, "I want you to float in as many balls as possible towards Tévez and Zachary. I want to see crosses and defense-splitting passes flying toward Atlético Madrid's box and making their way to our strikers. I especially want Zachary involved in the game right from the first minute of the second half."

"Andrea!" The coach glanced towards Pirlo. "When you get the ball in midfield, your first option before anything else should be to look for Zachary. The same applies to you, Patrice, Claudio, Tévez, and Stephan. Float in as many crosses and lofted passes — to ensure that Zachary has good service. I can guarantee that he will fuckin' win the game for us if you follow those simple instructions. That is why I put him on the striking line today. Are we clear?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied without voicing any objections.

"Okay, then." Coach Allegri nodded, glancing at his watch. "It's almost time. Coach Trombetta! Try to translate my words to the none Italian-speaking lads as quickly as possible. We must be ready to head back to the pitch within five minutes."

"Okay, boss," Maurizio Trombetta, the assistant coach in charge of the first team, answered.

Zachary marched onto the pitch along with the rest of his teammates after the fifteen-minute half-time break. His yearning to perform was almost shooting through the stadium roof and into the night skies of Madrid. He desired to play his heart out and help his team overcome the tricky Atlético Madrid side.

"Zachary!" Andrea Pirlo suddenly called out to him as they were halfway into the pitch. "I hope you understood Coach Allegri's instructions for the second half. He wants us to supply you with as many balls as possible. Your only role is to connect with our passes and to test the Atlético Madrid keeper. So, you must remain sharp on the striking line."

"Don't worry. I'm aware of my role on the pitch." Zachary smiled while nodding. Coach Trombetta had translated Coach Allegri's tactics for him. So, he was aware that he would be the talisman during the second half, with the sole role of scoring goals. For the first time as a Juventus player, he would play as a true-blue center-forward.

"It's good that you understand," Pirlo said, patting his back. "Remember to remain alert. My passes will make their way to you when the opposing defense least expects them. Try to connect with them and, at the minimum, please ensure that you test Atlético Madrid's keeper. Okay?"

"Okay." Zachary concurred.

"Then, good." Pirlo smiled. "Let's take our positions and win this game. We'll celebrate in the hotel lobby after the match."

Zachary laughed in response and high-fived Pirlo before running to his position. He was ready to commence the second phase of the Champions League group stage battle between Atlético Madrid and Juventus.

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The referee blew the whistle, and the game restarted with Atlético Madrid's kick-off. Mario Mandzukic, Atlético Madrid's center-forward, reacted immediately and kicked the ball into his own half to kick-start the second half.

Koke, Atlético Madrid's right midfielder, connected well with the pass from Mandzukic. Then, without losing a second, he flicked it to his left to find Saúl Ñíguez, his counterpart in midfield.

Saúl Ñíguez, on his part, was a bit slow on the ball. He took a few more unnecessary touches, thus allowing the Juventus attacking players to close him down. And with no other options, he could only blast the ball toward the other side of the pitch to avoid losing possession in a dangerous area.

"Whoosh!"

The ball blasted by Níguez soared high into the night skies before descending towards Juventus' box under the influence of gravity. And without any surprises, it dropped into the outstretched and waiting hands of Gianluigi Buffon, the Juventus goalkeeper.

"I need urgency on the ball!" Coach Allegri shouted in Italian from the sidelines. "Pass the ball forward. We must pressurize them and score as soon as possible."

After hearing Coach Allegri's shout, Buffon reacted with all the haste he could muster. He threw the ball towards Leonardo Bonucci, the defender waiting at the edge of the box.

Bonucci, on his part, controlled the ball well before flicking it to his left to find Giorgio Chiellini, his counterpart in defense. The latter received it and kicked it toward the left wing, hoping to find Patrice Evra.

From there on, the Juventus players started playing with more urgency on the ball. They formed triangles and interchanged lightning-fast passes with a clear intent to break through Atlético Madrid's defensive shape. And when angles opened up, they would float in crosses or lofted passes toward the opposing box, hoping to find Zachary or Carlos Tevez. They were more purposeful in their playing style, and it wasn't long before they created their first clear goal-scoring opportunity.

Naturally, Andrea Pirlo was the player to kick-start the magic during the 56th minute. The Italian Maestro happened to receive the ball in a strategic position before the box after a period of Juventus dominance.

His ball handling was brilliant and effective. He escaped from his marker with a single deft touch and opened up a shooting angle. Then, before any other opponents could close him down, he unleashed a curling and tricky ball toward the inside of the far post.

Chapter 482 A Lightning-Fast Counterattack

It was the first-clear goal-scoring opportunity for Juventus during the second half. As a result, Coach Allegri couldn't stop his heart from racing while watching Andrea Pirlo's effort darting towards goal. He was hoping and praying that the ball would make it past the keeper and home into the back of the net. He really wished that his team would score a goal within the opening minutes of the second half.

But unfortunately, his wishes couldn't come true due to the alertness and brilliance of Miguel Ángel Moyá, the Atlético Madrid keeper.

Miguel contorted his entire body and sprang into action. Just like an acrobat, he executed a spectacular dive before punching the ball away from his goal.

"Merda!"

Coach Allegri couldn't help but mumble a curse after seeing the Atlético Madrid keeper make the sensational save. The coach sighed with dejection while beginning the reflexive motion of placing his hands at the back of his head. At that moment, he really thought that another chance for Juventus to score had already passed and gone down the drain.

However, Coach Allegri couldn't have been more wrong. Just as his hands were halfway into the air, they froze abruptly. And just suddenly, his heartbeat quickened again as he noticed a tall silhouette in Juventus' all-green away kit pouncing towards the ball.

Of course, it was Zachary taking action, and before any of the opposing defenders could react, the boy-wonder rushed forward like the wind. Without even bothering to control the rebounded ball, he blasted it into the back of the net and then raced off to the sidelines to celebrate with his teammates. He'd just scored Juventus' second goal during the 57th minute.

"I'll be damned. Where the hell did he come from?"

Coach Allegri's jaw dropped as the cheers erupted all around the stadium. He even forgot to celebrate, and he couldn't hide the surprise in his heart. He stood stock-still, like a statue in a suit, as his eyes took in the sights of Zachary celebrating the goal with the other Juventus players.

"This guy has sharp instincts," Coach Allegri thought after calming his volatile emotions. "He's born to be a natural striker."

As an experienced coach, Coach Allegri understood how hard a feat it was to score a goal like the one that Zachary had just bagged. The player's positioning, spatial awareness, reaction time, and timing all

needed to be spot-on to convert such an opportunity. In a nutshell, it all came down to instincts, whereby the player in question had to have the ability to sniff out a chance and be in the right place at the right time. Otherwise, that player would find it hard to convert such opportunities and score goals under pressure.

"It's a pity that Zachary is exceptional in midfield." Coach Allegri sighed. "Otherwise, I could have convinced him or even used my authority to turn him into a striker."

The coach shook his head, pushing the notion out of his head. Zachary was not just an exceptional goal-scorer. He was also a brilliant midfielder who could dribble and unleash defense-splitting passes that could result in goals. And due to those brilliant qualities, the best position for him was the number ten position, where he could play as an attacking pivot and utilize all his skills against the opponents. Thus, the coach would only consider playing him as a striker when Juventus faced off against tricky and defensively-disciplined sides like Atlético Madrid.

Atlético Madrid 1 : Juventus FC 2

Coach Diego Simeone frowned and shook his head after glancing at the stadium's jumbotron. He thought for a moment before turning towards his substitute's bench.

"Antoine Griezmann!" He said, glancing at the Frenchman. "Start warming. I want you on the pitch within ten minutes."

"Aye, coach," Griezmann replied with a smile. He quickly donned his match gear and began his warm-up on the sidelines. He was, of course, exercising urgency in his actions, especially since he wished to enter the game as soon as possible.

The game continued after Juventus' goal celebrations. After conceding a goal, the Atlético Madrid players stopped playing a defensive game. They became more active going forward and launched a series of attacks, hoping to score an equalizer. They took advantage of their versatile 4-3-3 formation to outplay Juventus and even dominate possession for the next ten minutes.

But alas, their efforts couldn't bear fruit due to the outstanding display by the three Juventus defenders. The Juventus defenders worked hard and thwarted Atlético Madrid's efforts to score a goal by making timely interceptions and winning all of the aerial duels that came their way. As a result, the score remained 2:1 in favor of Juventus until the 67th minute.

But in-game circumstances are never constant during competitive matches. That night, the situation changed rapidly, starting from the 68th minute, just after Coach Diego Simeone introduced Antoine Griezmann as a substitute. The Frenchman was on a roll within minutes after entering the pitch, and he soon went into action and helped Atlético Madrid create their first clear goal-scoring chance during the second half.

Griezmann picked up a loose ball close to the center line before exchanging a couple of quick one-twos with Koke. Their immaculate give-and-go lightning-fast exchanges allowed them to spear deeper into Juventus' half, and before long, they were bearing down on Juventus' box with unstoppable momentum.

The ball naturally arrived back at the creative Griezmann's feet, and without losing composure, he executed his magic. The Frenchman skipped past Giorgio Chiellini with a skillful couple of touches and raced into the box like a true-blue incarnation of Usain bolt.

However, as a renowned no-nonsense defender, Chiellini couldn't allow the Frenchman to beat him that easily. The Italian whirled around with all the haste he could muster before stretching out a hand and tugging at the sprinting Griezmann's shirt.

Chiellini was obviously acting reflexively, without an ounce of ill intent. But that one action of taking the sting out of Griezmann's momentum was what put Juventus in a precarious situation.

As soon as the defender's hand made contact with the jersey, Antoine Griezmann acted as any cunning forward would by tumbling to the ground right after stepping into the penalty box. The Frenchman's acting was at Hollywood level, and he rolled down on the green while holding his head. It was as if he was in great pain and holding on for dear life.

"Penalty! Foul! Penalty..."

A commotion broke out on the pitch immediately after, and the Atlético Madrid players, coaches, and fans started shouting at the top of their voices. They went all out as they tried to coerce the referee to give the penalty.

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However, the referee clearly didn't need their reminders to make his decision. Within a few seconds, he blew the whistle and pointed at the penalty spot. But he didn't just stop at that. He also showed Giorgio Chiellini a straight red card for committing a last-man foul within the box. The referee had just condemned Juventus to play with only ten men for the remainder of the game.

"Dannazione! Che diavolo..." Coach Allegri couldn't help but mumble a couple of expletives in his native Italian language as he watched Chiellini marching out of the pitch. At that moment, his mood hit an all-time low that day, especially since he was clearly aware that his team was in a very precarious situation. His players were in a tight spot as they had to play the last twenty or so minutes while only ten men. Moreover, that was after conceding a penalty, which was the perfect opportunity for Atlético Madrid to score and bring back proceedings to level terms. They were in deep shit as a team.

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The referee blew the whistle after organizing all the players outside the box. Then, without further ado, he signaled Antoine Griezmann, who was already standing on the ball, to take the penalty.

Antoine Griezmann, on his part, seemed composed as he made an angled run toward the ball. Then, he opened up his body and sent the keeper the wrong way before unleashing a shot toward the bottom left corner.

Griezmann had obviously tried his best to convert the penalty. However, it was unfortunate that the goddess of luck seemed to be against Atlético Madrid that evening. Just at the last moment, the ball

bounced and swerved inexplicably. Then, to the gasps of many in the stadium, it blasted off the post before rebounding back into the box.

"Quickly clear the ball away..."

"Hurry! Go after the ball for the rebound..."

A couple of loud shouts immediately reverberated across the pitch. But, of course, the players of both teams didn't need reminders from their coaches and fans. They reacted like a pack of starving wolves chasing prey and pounced toward the bouncing ball. Then, what followed was a commotion in the box for a few seconds — but at the end of it all, Patrice Evra, the Juventus wing-back, got the last laugh.

Patrice Evra lunged forward and cleared the ball with an acrobatic move that resembled fictitious karate. With a powerful bicycle kick, he sent it flying toward the night skies of Madrid, thereby saving Juventus from conceding a goal during the 71st minute.

"Excellent!"

Zachary's spirits lifted after Patrice Evra made the timely clearance. But that didn't stop him from taking off and racing after the ball like the wind. His long strides covered dozens of yards within a few seconds, and he got to it just before it could bounce on the ground. Without losing even a second, he controlled it with his chest on the left wing before flicking it forward with his head and then chasing after it.

The lightning-fast solo counterattack was on, and Zachary continued flicking the ball forward with his head. Then, seconds later, he slowed down slightly and finally utilized his boot to flick the ball over the approaching Tiago Mendes. The next moment, his S-graded agility bloomed in great splendor, and he easily circumvented the Atlético Madrid defender and beat him for pace.

From there on, Zachary continued bearing down on Atlético Madrid's goal like a raging Tsunami, his heart and lungs expanding rapidly to supply his body with oxygen. Surprisingly, there was nothing flashy about his moves as he cut across the field. But with just a pure explosion of pace, he managed to cut back into the pitch before bolting past Diego Godín, the final defender between him and the goal.

A few seconds later, Zachary was one-on-one with the keeper, who had come out of the goal to meet him. But he remained composed and dug his left boot under the ball before expertly looping the ball over the head of the approaching keeper and directing it into the back of the net.

"GOAAAL..." Zachary couldn't help but yell out after the ball nestled into the back of the net. He was on cloud nine as he'd just managed to turn the precarious situation of Juventus around with one lightning-fast solo counter.

He'd scored the third goal for Juventus during the 72nd minute while also completing yet another hattrick. As a result, he couldn't contain his happiness as he raced toward the sidelines to celebrate with his teammates.

Chapter 483 Match Ending And Post-Match Reaction

After the goal celebrations, the game continued. And without any surprises, the Atlético Madrid players relied on their numerical advantage to outplay Juventus and dominate proceedings during the final twenty or so minutes of gameplay. They were relentless on the offensive and even scored a consolation goal through Arda Turan during the 88th minute. But that was all they could manage due to the tenacity of the Juventus team.

The ten men of Juventus defended as a unit and thwarted most of Atlético Madrid's attempts to create goal-scoring opportunities. Their tactical discipline was outstanding, and they remained aggressive while covering the spaces and marking the opponents during the final minutes. As a result, they held on for dear life and won the game by three goals to one after five minutes of added time.

"Yeah!"

Coach Allegri couldn't help but pump his fists repeatedly after the referee blew the final whistle. His heart throbbed with happiness after his side defeated Atlético Madrid, the reigning Spanish Champions and the runners of the previous season's Champion League. He couldn't contain his emotions, and he hugged all the members of his technical staff to celebrate. After that, he waved to the fans before heading toward Atlético Madrid's bench to shake hands with Coach Diego Simeone.

"Congratulations," Diego Simeone said in fluent Italian while smiling and extending his hand. "You got me by switching Zachary Bemba to the striking line this time. It's your victory."

Coach Allegri smiled in response and took the other man's hand for a firm handshake. "Thanks. Your team also played well. But we were just lucky to win."

Diego Simeone's eyes narrowed a bit as he released Allegri's hand. "Indeed, count yourself lucky. You're lucky to have a player like Zachary in your squad. Otherwise, you wouldn't have won tonight's game."

"You're right." Coach Allegri nodded with a smile. "But don't forget that he's a player I signed."

"That's true." Coach Diego Simeone sighed. "But we'll still have the last laugh after the second leg of this fixture in December. Not even Zachary Bemba will be able to save you from losing that game."

"Let's wait and see," Coach Allegri said before turning away and heading into the playing field. Very soon, he started moving around and hugging his players to congratulate them upon winning the match.

Zachary, on his part, was still overflowing with happiness as he left the pitch and walked down the tunnel with the match ball in hand. Under the guidance of a UEFA official, he took a different route from his teammates and headed to the press area to partake in the post-match press conference.

"Zachary!" The beautiful female reporter said after he stepped before the cameras a few seconds later. "Congratulations upon winning the match."

"Thank you," he replied with a smile.

The reporter smiled back and said, "You were outstanding on the pitch today and managed to score your second consecutive hat trick in the Champions League. That implies that your tally in the Champions League is six goals in two matches. How are you managing to score such an insane number of goals in every game?"

"I guess I could say I'm lucky," Zachary responded with a shrug.

"Really?" The reporter pressed with a soft chuckle.

"Yeah, I guess so," Zachary said. "Aside from being lucky, I also have skilled teammates who are good at creating chances. That also helps."

The reporter smiled. "You played as a center-forward in today's game," she stated. "So, most of us are just wondering. Are you thinking of switching positions from midfield and playing as a striker from now on?"

"Of course not," Zachary said. "I love playing in midfield. That's my natural position, especially since I love making runs from the back. But even then, I will not hesitate to play striking or any other number as long as it helps my team win the game."

"There's also another matter I'm curious about," the reporter continued, "After Antoine Griezmann missed the penalty during the 71st minute, you reacted so fast and chased after the ball cleared by Patrice Evra. How were you able to achieve that? Could you have anticipated that Antoine would miss beforehand?"

"Of course, I wasn't sure he would miss," Zachary replied with a hearty chuckle. "But I knew there was a chance as he was against the best goalkeeper in the world. So, I bided my time and remained alert while waiting for an opportunity to counter. And as luck would have it, Buffon saved the penalty, and then Patrice cleared the ball, sending it my way. From there on, I only had to remain composed and control the ball before initiating the counterattack."

"Well, thanks, Zachary, for answering our questions," the reporter said in a conclusive tone. "Congratulations upon winning today's game, and I wish you all the best in your upcoming matches. Have a good night."

"Have a good night, too," Zachary responded before stepping away from the cameras.

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"Well, well, well," Emilia Vasquez, the ESPN presenter, said, smiling at the cameras in the studio. "That was Zachary, the hatrick hero, talking to Rebecca, one of our reporters at the Vicente Calderón Stadium. His second consecutive hatrick in the Champions League has helped Juventus overcome Atlético Madrid and ascend to the top of Group A. It's another phenomenal performance by the 19-year-old playmaker."

"Indeed," Alessandro Costacurta, one of the in-studio pundits, said as the cameras focused on him. "You know what: I was worried at the start of the match when I noticed that Coach Allegri had played him as a striker. I thought to myself: What the hell? Why is he playing him out of his natural midfield position? I even believed that Coach Allegri had messed up big time and was only waiting to criticize his tactics at the end of the game."

Emilia and the other pundits in the studio laughed at that.

"But you guys know what?" Alessandro continued without minding the laughter of the others in the studio. "Zachary Bemba went out there and proved me wrong. He proved that he's a highly versatile player who can play striking as well as he can play midfield. This guy is a phenomenon. He is slowly ascending to the ranks of the best players in the world."

"We also learned another thing about Zachary today." Joshua Morales chuckled. "His instincts for goal are inhuman, and he's the type of player who's a nightmare for defenders. You cannot lose track of him, even for a second, while defending against him on the field of play. Otherwise, he will punish you."

Emilia Vasquez smiled and said, "Aside from Zachary, most of the other Juventus players were a bit sub-par today. They dominated possession, yes. But they still couldn't link up play with Zachary and Tevez, their two strikers."

"You're right, Emilia," Joshua Morales, the other in-studio pundit, concurred. "Yes, the Juventus midfielders, especially Andrea Pirlo and Claudio Marchisio, were not at their best today. Their service to Zachary and Tevez was not that good, and that's why Juventus didn't have many shots on goal, despite dominating possession. Fortunately for Coach Allegri, Zachary came through and delivered when it mattered. He scored those three goals, allowing Juventus to win the game."

"I think you guys are forgetting to give credit to Diego Simeone and his players," Alessandro Costacurta reminded. "Atlético Madrid is the team that outsmarted both Barcelona and Real Madrid to win La Liga last season. So, it's understandable that most Juventus players didn't perform at their best today."

"You do have a point," Emilia immediately agreed. "In fact, I thought the Atlético Madrid players were pretty unlucky today. They hit the post like three times and even missed the penalty. Had it been their day, maybe they would have converted all those chances and defeated Juventus."

"But it wasn't their day, and there are no ifs in football." Joshua Morales hurriedly corrected. "They lost 3:2 to Olympiacos during their first group fixture and have now lost 3:1 to Juventus. They are in trouble as they are at the bottom of group A."

"It's just two matches," Alessandro chimed in. "There are still four Champions League group matches remaining. So, Atlético Madrid still has a high chance of qualifying for the knock-out stages."

"Are you forgetting that they still have to face Juventus in Turin on 9th December?" Joshua Morales questioned. "Their chances of qualifying are minimal after losing today's game."

"Gentlemen!" Emilia hurriedly chimed in. "The match aside, let's talk about Zachary. After watching his performances this season, do you think he can win the Golden Boy award?"

"I think he's the undisputed player to win the Golden Boy award," Joshua Morales replied.

"I'm with Joshua on this one," Alessandro Costacurta also concurred. "Frankly, his level is way above that of the other players within his age group. He even has the potential to make it in the top ten players of the world if he can continue putting up such outstanding performances. He's the real deal."

"I wonder who else will be on the Golden Boy award nominee list!" Emilia commented. "Can you guys guess?"

"Well," Alessandro Costacurta replied, "there's Kurt Zouma, John Stones, Raheem Sterling, Divock Origi, Adnan Januzaj, Luke Shaw, Eric Dier, Aymeric Laporte, and Saúl Ñíguez, among others."

"I think Alessandro has forgotten the names from the Serie A, Bundesliga, and Ligue 1," Joshua Morales hurriedly chimed in. "For instance, there's Kingsley Coman and Mateo Kovacic from Serie A. Then, from

Bundesliga and Ligue 1, I can name Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg, Marquinhos, Adrien Rabiot, Benjamin Mendy, and Lucas Ocampos. All those players have been exceptional this year — but they are still not at Zachary's level. They can't outcompete him for the Golden Boy award."

Chapter 484 Hidden System Mission Completion

It was already way-past midnight by the time Zachary returned to his room on the fourth floor of Madrid's infamous Hotel Riu Plaza España. He felt exhausted physically and mentally after playing more than 90 minutes of Champions League football against the tenacious Atlético Madrid side. He was eager to jump into bed and enter a long and peaceful slumber.

However, something unexpected but pleasant happened the next second to interrupt his plans. The all-familiar system notification resounded in his mind immediately after he finished locking the hotel room door behind him.

"DING"

"Congratulations to the user for unlocking and completing a hidden system mission associated with the 2014-15 UEFA Champions League," the system AI's apathetic voice sounded immediately after. "The user can check the mission completion details and rewards associated with the mission completion on the system interface."

"Eh!"

Zachary's heart immediately skipped a bit, and the feeling of exhaustion faded from his mind. A shaky smile slowly outlined his face as the surprise sunk in. He switched on the light and instructed the system AI to display the hidden mission completion details.

3 New Messages

CONGRATULATIONS

->You have scored a hattrick against Atlético Madrid, a top-level team in the Champions League, and completed a Hidden System Mission.

->You're one step closer to cementing your name on the list of the most exceptional players of the generation.

->Mission Rewards

1) A total of 10,000 Juju points

2) A chance to draw a skill shard from the system lottery that will allow the user to initiate a serial mission to learn a random GOAT skill

"A shard, not a skill?" Zachary was a bit confused after reading the system completion notification.
"System! What is this about?"

"DING"

A chime rang in his mind immediately.

"A shard is a fragment of the total memory and associated system packages needed to learn a skill," the system AI replied. "By drawing a specific shard from the lottery, the user can trigger a serial mission to collect the other fragments needed to learn the specific GOAT Skill. Does the user wish to draw the shard right away?"

"Yes, this should be simple." Zachary agreed. He still didn't understand the whole shard thing and how it worked. But he was sure the reward would benefit his career since it was from the system. Thus, agreeing couldn't bring him any harm.

"User's command received," the AI intoned after a few seconds. "System lottery coming up."

No sooner had the system AI's voice sounded than a big spin-lottery-wheel filled up the translucent blue screen before Zachary. It was the all-familiar wheel with small squares depicting various images of famous players around its perimeter. Its surface glowed with shiny lights, and there were two purple arms originating from its center and pointing towards one of the squares. And surprisingly, that square contained an image of the legendary Argentine player - Lionel Messi, with the ball at his feet.

"This might be a surprisingly great reward," Zachary thought with a smile. He then turned his attention towards the two buttons on the side of the wheel with the phrases 'spin-and-win,' '*3 chances,' and 'confirm lottery' inscribed below them. Settling down on the bed, he carefully studied their set-up and understood that he had three chances to spin the wheel.

"Great. I should be able to obtain a great skill with these three chances."

Zachary's hopes soared. Without dilly-dallying, he pressed the spin-and-win button, and the wheel spun for a few seconds before slowing down. Its velocity gradually reduced until the purple arms halted while pointing to the square depicting Thierry Henry, the legendary French striker, with the ball at his feet.

"This makes life difficult," Zachary thought, shaking his head. "But I think I should try again. Maybe, I might get something better."

The spirit of gambling flooded Zachary's entire being, and he chose to tap on the spin-and-win button again. The next moment, his heartbeat accelerated as the wheel spun faster and faster. Then, after what seemed like weeks to Zachary, it slowed down before coming to a complete halt. But unfortunately for Zachary, the pointer had pointed to a square with an image of Jaap Stam, the legendary Dutch and Manchester United defender, heading the ball.

"Damn! I might have messed up big time." Zachary shook his head, a feeling of regret flooding his spirits. He'd just let go of a great chance to draw a Thierry Henry skill shard, hoping to get a better one. But Zachary had instead gotten an opportunity to obtain a Jaap Stam skill shard after spinning the wheel for

the second time. As far as he was concerned, it was a total loss, especially since he'd never considered playing as a defender.

"I still have one chance," Zachary consoled himself. "God! Please help me get a good skill this time around."

Zachary even turned religious at that moment and mumbled a silent prayer. Then, he took a deep breath and rubbed his hands together before tapping the spin-and-win button again.

"Whoosh"

That time around, the wheel seemed to spin faster than the previous two times. It rotated for a good four or five seconds before eventually slowing down.

Naturally, Zachary's eyes were on the wheel at that instant. He watched with bated breath as the pointer slowly moved past the squares with the images of Lionel Messi, Ronaldo Luís Nazário de Lima, and Andres Iniesta before moving towards another photo of a player with long hair in a Barcelona shirt. It was a picture of Ronaldinho Gaúcho, the Brazilian legend, and former Ballon D'or winner.

"Please stop! Please stop..."

Zachary prayed and willed the wheel to stop when the pointer pointed to Ronaldinho's square. He clenched his fists as his eyes remained glued to the slowly moving lottery wheel.

The experience of waiting was unnerving due to the tension. But it was worth it as the pointer finally came to a halt at the last moment, just when it was about to move past Ronaldinho's square.

"Thank God," Zachary mumbled, his spirits brightening. A soft smile slowly framed his facial features as he'd finally managed to obtain an opportunity to draw a hidden shard from Ronaldinho, one of the greatest players that ever played the game. But that didn't stop him from tapping the confirm-lottery button to approve the result.

"DING"

The familiar system notification sounded in Zachary's mind as his finger left the system interface. Then, with an explosion of digital aesthetics, a glittering image of Ronaldinho popped out of the wheel and slowly floated forward. It soon hovered in front of everything else on the crystal-like display that was the system interface.

"DING"

"Congratulations," the AI's voice intoned right after. "The user has won the lottery and obtained one of the twelve shards required to learn Ronaldinho's Step-Over and Feint Kingly Magic."

"Associated system mission initiated to help the user obtain the remaining eleven skill shards," the AI continued. "Please review the details on the interface to understand the mission."

Zachary expelled a lungful of air and focused on the translucent crystal-like display before him. Then, without further ado, he started perusing the mission details.

GOAT MISSIONS

#NEW MISSION: Giant-Killer Hatrick Challenge

->Score more hattricks against top-level teams within the next two years to acquire more skill shards of Ronaldinho's Step-Over and Feint Kingly Magic.

#NB

->The system will award a skill shard for each hatrick scored against the top four teams of the best European Leagues, including the Italian Serie A, the English Premier League, the French League 1, the Spanish La Liga, and the German Bundesliga within the next two years.

->For this mission, multiple hatricks against the same team will also be considered. However, the user must complete the mission target and score eleven more hatricks against top-level teams within two years before obtaining all the twelve skill shards of Ronaldinho's Step-Over and Feint Kingly Magic. Otherwise, the user won't be able to meet the requirements to learn the skill."

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

*Accept *Reject

*Remarks: The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible. And that's also the way of the greats.

"This is tough. But I'll accept it and try my best."

Zachary thought for a bit and then accepted the mission. He knew that scoring eleven more hatricks against the best European teams was an almost impossible feat. But since there was no penalty for failing the system task, there was no harm in trying. He only needed to do his best over the next two years — and just maybe, he could complete the mission and obtain all the shards required to learn Ronaldinho's Step-Over and Feint Kingly Magic.

"Phew."

Zachary breathed out and closed the system interface after accepting the mission. He then quickly went through his planned pre-bedtime routine, including taking a shower, brushing his teeth, and sending Camilla a message before jumping into bed.

The intense fatigue kicked in right after he went under the covers, forcing his mind to descend into a sweet and welcoming embrace of slumber. In a matter of minutes, he was fast asleep, dreaming of himself winning the Ballon d'Or.

Chapter 485 House Purchase And Preparations For The AS Roma Game

The following day, the Juventus team returned to Turin in a jubilant mood. All the players were brimming with excitement and positive energy after defeating Atlético Madrid. Their euphoria was infectious, and their bright smiles lit up Juventus' training center as they alighted from the bus.

"Juventus! Juventus..."

"Tevez..."

The fans waiting eagerly beyond the railings started singing to welcome their stars back to Turin. They chanted all the players' names for the next few minutes and caused the atmosphere around the gates of the Vinovo to become more electrifying. And when they finally got to vocalizing Zachary's name, they became even louder. They were like a bunch of madmen as they yelled phrases like "Zachary, the hattrick hero," "Zachary, the nemesis of Madrid," "Zachary, the phenomenon of the Champions League," and so on, and so forth. Anyone watching from the side could clearly tell that they really adored Zachary.

"The fans are really starting to fall in love with you," Patrice Evra said to Zachary as they started making their way into the training center. "If you continue scoring goals, you might become as famous as Messi and Ronaldo in no time."

Zachary chuckled and shook his head. "That's not easy," he said. "Moreover, I don't really care about fame. I only care about winning as many trophies as possible."

Patrice gave Zachary a sideways glance and whistled. "Someone is being really humble today afternoon. He doesn't want fame — but wants to win many trophies. He's really modest and unpretentious."

"Don't misinterpret my words," Zachary said with a smile. "I was only saying that I don't play football for fame. I only play football because I love it. Fame is just a bonus for me."

"No worries. I get you." Patrice smiled and patted Zachary's back. "Football aside, how are you planning to spend your day off? Do you want to come to my place to hang out?"

"Nope," Zachary said. "I will be holding a series of meeting with one of my lawyers to complete the procedures to purchase a house today. On top of that, I have to train and attend language classes. So, I have no time to hang out over the next three days."

On hearing that, Patrice seemed stunned. He stopped in his tracks and turned to face Zachary. "Bro!" He said. "You're buying a house? Where?"

Zachary smiled and told him about the house in Pinerolo, Piedmont. He described the 14-bedroom villa in vivid detail and then disclosed the money he'd spent to purchase it.

"Cong's, man," Patrice said with a smile after hearing Zachary's description. "You seem to have gotten yourself a good deal. 1.8 million is really not that expensive, especially for the house you just described."

Zachary blanked out on hearing Patrice describe 1.8 million Euros as not expensive. The corners of his mouth twitched ever so slightly, and he couldn't help but recall details from his previous life.

Before his rebirth, he'd once played for TP Mazembe, one of the biggest clubs on the African continent. At one point, he was a key member of their squad and was earning what he thought was good money at the time. But even then, he could never afford to buy a house valued at a million Euros. The hell: He couldn't even afford to purchase one at 50,000 Euros even after saving a year's income. So, when he heard Patrice commenting on how 1.8 million was really not expensive, feelings of melancholy threatened to overwhelm him.

But aside from that, Zachary also felt proud of his achievements. He took defiant joy in the fact that he had escaped a life of struggle and joined the ranks of the privileged in the world. He could even afford to splash 1.8 million Euros on buying a house without batting an eye.

"Does this mean you'll soon leave that crappy hotel room of yours?" Patrice asked, clearly unaware of what was on Zachary's mind. "When do you plan to move into the house?"

"I'm not sure," Zachary replied, shaking his head. "After completing the transfer procedures for the property, I'll have to hire an interior designer to work on the house. I can only move in after the interior designer finishes work on the house."

"Okay," Patrice said. "But you should know that interior designers work fast. A good one should complete the work on your house within four or five days. Do you wish for me to recommend you one? She handled the interior design of my mansion right after I moved to Turin."

"Oh!" Zachary's curiosity was piqued. "How much would I need to spend to hire her?"

Patrice smiled. "Most interior designers charge for their time by the hour, anywhere from 50 Euros to 500 Euros, depending on their experience. A good interior designer such as her will, of course, charge higher fees. She might charge you roughly 100,000 Euros, plus a few other expenses, to work on your 14-bedroom villa."

"That's expensive," Zachary exclaimed. "I can basically buy a good new house with that 100,000 Euros."

"You have to spend to get the good stuff," Patrice said with a shrug. "There's no way around it."

"Okay, then," Zachary said, nodding. "Give me her number. I'll contact her and see if we can come to an agreement."

"Good choice, my man," Patrice said. "You won't be disappointed."

Zachary smiled in response. He planned to call the interior designer after returning home that very day. He was hoping to have her start interior design work on his soon-to-be mansion immediately so he could move into it at the beginning of the following week.

The following three days went according to plan for Zachary.

On the first day after playing against Atlético Madrid, he met Mateo Tavano, the solicitor, and completed the required legal procedures to purchase the 14-bedroom villa in Pinerolo, Piedmont.

On the second day, just before going for the team training at Juventus' training center, he wired the 1.8 million Euro house purchase fees to the seller's account, thus becoming the legally recognized sole owner of the villa in Pinerolo, Piedmont. He was ecstatic after completing the deal and immediately hired the interior designer recommended by Patrice Evra to work on the house.

As expected, the interior designer was a greedy vulture. She asked for a fee of 115,000 Euros to decorate and furnish the entire place. But even then, Zachary still chose to go with her after she promised to finish all the interior design work on the house within five days. He could afford to spend the money as he wanted to vacate the hotel room and move into the house as soon as possible. He was eager to have a place of his own.

On the third day, after paying an advance fee to the interior designer, Zachary returned his total focus to the team training. He forgot everything else and immersed himself in the team's preparations for the following day's Serie A game against the tricky AS Roma side. He was as hardworking as ever while going through the team drills, as he wanted to make the starting line-up for the team once again. And not even the intense precipitation on that Saturday could affect his motivation.

The time passed quickly as the Juventus players went through drills to prepare for the game against AS Roma, and soon evening arrived. Everything went as planned, and Coach Allegri, who had been keenly supervising the training since morning, immediately called the players into the tactics room for the pre-match tactical meeting.

After the players took their seats, the coach wasted no time before starting to explain the tactics. Illuminated by the soft rays of the setting sun streaming in through the open window, his face was stern as he presented the game plan to be used against AS Roma. And as usual, he spent roughly an hour describing formations, player off-ball movements, and marking strategies before reading the starting line-up.

"Gianluigi Buffon, Giorgio Chiellini, Leonardo Bonucci, Martín Cáceres, Claudio Marchisio, Andrea Pirlo..."

The coach vocalized the names of the starting eleven almost in a single breath. But what surprised many in the room was that he'd decided not to include Zachary in the first eleven for the game against AS Roma. Zachary was instead on the bench with the likes of second-string players such as Marco Storari, Angelo Ogbonna, Rômulo, Kingsley Coman, and Sebastian Giovinco.

"As you all know, our game against AS Roma is a late kick-off scheduled to be played tomorrow at 9:00 PM in the Olimpico di Roma," Coach Allegri said after reading the line-up. "But even if it's a late kick-off, we still have to set off for Rome early in the morning. That way, we'll have ample time to rest after arriving."

"So, here is our schedule for tomorrow," the coach continued. "We should all be here at the Vinovo by 9:30 AM. Then, we'll take a bus to the airport before boarding an 11 o'clock flight to Rome. After arriving in Rome, we'll have lunch and rest for two or three hours. Then, we'll go through a mild exercising routine to refresh our bodies before heading to the Olimpico di Roma to defeat AS Roma. That's our plan for tomorrow. Any questions?"

The coach glanced around. However, all the players remained silent and didn't raise their hands. They clearly had no questions for their coach.

"I'm glad we're on the same page," the coach said. "Let's call it a day and head back to our homes. But remember, AS Roma is a tricky opponent. So, I want you all to have ample rest tonight so you can be at the top of your game tomorrow evening. I don't want to see players dozing off early in the morning before we set off for Rome tomorrow. Clear?"

"Clear, coach," the players replied in unison while trying to suppress their chuckles. They'd obviously recalled the amusing incident when the coach caught Zachary napping.

Chapter 486 Away Game Against AS Roma

At exactly 9:00 PM, the referee blew the whistle, and the highly anticipated Serie A battle between AS Roma and Juventus commenced.

Tévez kicked off the proceedings with a back pass into his midfield with a clear intent of finding Arturo Vidal. From there on, the Juventus players started passing the ball immaculately among themselves and showcased a hunger to dictate proceedings on the field.

The Old Lady players were brilliant on and off the ball. They played with conviction, covering spaces and closing down the opponents as if their lives were at stake. They thus dominated possession in the opening minutes, and it didn't take long for them to create their first real goal-scoring opportunity.

It all started with Roberto Pereyra, the freshly-introduced face in Juventus' midfield. Roberto won an aerial duel against the shorter Miralem Pjanic close to the border of the defensive third during the 13th minute. He towered over the AS Roma man and headed the ball to Andrea Pirlo, who was strategically positioned in an unmarked pocket of space close to the center circle.

Andrea Pirlo, on his part, was as brilliant as ever while connecting with the ball. He calmly controlled it while assessing the situation on the other side of the pitch. Then, before any of the opponents could close him down, he drew his leg back and unleashed a hell of a pass toward the other side of the pitch.

"Whoosh"

Tévez was akin to an unstoppable tempest as he cut through the pitch, chasing after the ball. His short strides covered yards of space within seconds, allowing him to connect with the long-range defense-splitting pass from Andrea Pirlo.

At that moment, Konstantinos Manolas and Mapou Yanga-Mbiwa, the two AS Roma defenders, were already closing him down, all guns blazing. They were trying to sandwich him and stop him from threatening their goal.

However, the action of the AS Roma center-backs didn't ruffle the experienced Argentine's feathers. After controlling the ball, Tévez skillfully faked going right before abruptly altering his center of gravity

and whirling around toward the left. And before the two center-backs could react, he exploded with speed and rushed into the box with an indomitable impetus.

"Tévez! Tévez! Tévez..."

The traveling Juventus supporters in the stands behind the goal started chanting Tévez's name as he approached the goal at breakneck speed. Their cheers seemed to boost his confidence, and he rounded the keeper with a couple of deft touches. Before any of the opponents could close him down, he buried the ball into the back of the net to score Juventus' 1st goal for the night.

"Oh my goodness me!" The commentator's voice resounded across the stadium as Tévez ran off to celebrate the goal. "Juventus is flying again. Through the phenomenal Carlos Tévez, they've broken the deadlock. They have broken through AS Roma's tenacious defense and scored their first goal for the night during the 14th minute. What a wonderful start for the visitors!"

"It all began with Andrea Pirlo," the co-commentator chimed in. "The Italian Maestro looked sharp since the start of the game, and it didn't take him long to find an opportunity to punish the opponents. With a single unexpected and brilliant ball, he managed to take the entire AS Roma midfield out of the equation while also setting up Tévez for the goal. And Tévez, being the experienced striker he is, didn't waste the opportunity. He remained composed and skipped past the two center-backs before burying the ball into the back of the net. What an incredible game of football!"

"This Juventus team is in incredible shape," the commentator said. "Even without Zachary Bemba, their undisputed star player, they still manage to play brilliant football. They are totally destroying AS Roma, which by the way, is the second-placed team on the Serie A table."

"Indeed," the co-commentator agreed. "Coach Allegri's men have been in fine form ever since the start of the game. During the opening fourteen minutes, they dictated the proceedings on the field of play by utilizing their signature passing to dominate possession. I'm particularly impressed by Roberto Pereyra, the new face in Juventus' midfield. He was relentless in the middle of the pack and has won most of his aerial duels against the AS Roma midfielders. He's really doing great out there."

The commentator chuckled. "He should be really motivated. He has to utilize the opportunity to impress his coaches. Otherwise, it would be impossible for him to make it back into the starting eleven, especially with phenomenal midfielders like Zachary, Vidal, Pirlo, and Marchisio present in the side."

"True," the co-commentator agreed. "Speaking of which, I wonder why Zachary is on the bench today. He scored those impressive three goals against Atlético Madrid during midweek. But Coach Allegri has decided not to include him in the starting eleven! Truly baffling!"

"It's a long season of football," the commentator said. "So, I'm guessing the coach is only rotating his squad to allow his star players some time to rest."

"That makes sense. But isn't Coach Allegri taking the Serie A lightly? How can he bench his star player when playing the second-placed team on the Serie A table?"

"Those are the advantages of having great depth in a squad. Coach Allegri can even field the second team, and it will still put on a competitive display against the second-placed AS Roma side."

AS Roma 0 : Juventus FC 1

The game continued after the goal celebrations, and as expected, the AS Roma players responded almost immediately. They utilized their highly-versatile 4-3-3 formation to launch waves of attacks on Juventus' defense. They were amazing on the offensive and came close to scoring on several occasions. However, the ever-brilliant Buffon came alive in goal and made several saves to deny AS Roma a chance to bag an equalizing goal. As a result, the score was still 0:1 in favor of Juventus when the referee blew the half-time whistle.

After a fifteen-minute break, the game recommenced, and the AS Roma players relaunched their offensive. With the words of Rudi Garcia, their passionate manager, doubtless still ringing in their ears, they were like a totally different team. They utilized high-pressing and wing-play tactics to outplay Juventus on the field of play. Then, when an opportunity would present itself, they would rely on their highly-agile wide players to send crosses into the box. They were obviously trying to link play with Francesco Totti, their star striker.

As an experienced player, Francesco Totti's movements off the ball were tricky and brilliant. During the 56th minute, he escaped the notice of the Juventus defenders and connected with an incoming cross from Gervinho. He leaped high and headed the ball toward the bottom left corner, with the clear intent to score the equalizer for AS Roma.

However, his efforts were once again fruitless due to the alertness of Buffon, the highly-experienced Juventus keeper. Buffon immediately executed a full-body dive and punched the ball out of play. His acrobatic effort saved Juventus from conceding a goal during the 56th minute.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle and pointed to the corner spot. And without wasting much time, the AS Roma players quickly took the corner.

Miralem Pjanic, AS Roma's highly-tactical midfielder, sent forth a curling ball from the corner flag into the box. His delivery was spot-on, and he linked play with Seydou Keita, his counterpart in midfield.

Seydou Keita, on his part, was brilliant in the air. He towered over the players in the box before connecting with the corner ball and planting a header toward the goal from around the penalty spot. But fortunately for Juventus, Patrice Evra was present at the far post, and he managed to blast the ball away from the goal. And that timely clearance once again saved Juventus from conceding during the 58th minute.

"This can't go on."

Coach Allegri frowned after watching his side survive yet another attack from AS Roma. His players had looked sharp in the first half and even scored a goal. But during the second half, they were the opposite. They could only be described as second-best on the field of player since they were not giving their all to go out and take on the AS Roma players. They had decided to sit back and defend instead of attacking the opponent. For sure, they were not following the game plan.

"Damn it!"

Coach Allegri couldn't help but mumble a curse once again. He was frustrated after watching Álvaro Morata lose the ball close to the center circle. The Spaniard had just gifted AS Roma another chance to counter and launch another offensive against Juventus by pointlessly holding on to the ball a little longer than necessary.

"Terrible! Terrible..." Coach Allegri mumbled while following the proceedings on the field. He watched with bated breath as Miralem Pjanic, the AS Roma midfielder, picked up the loose ball and unleashed a grounded pass into the left wing to find Gervinho. And from there on, the counter was on, and the AS Roma players flew forward.

Gervinho was like the wind while cutting through the left flank. He skillfully exchanged a couple of one-twos with Seydou Keita, the AS Roma midfielder, before unleashing a cross toward Juventus' box.

"Whoosh"

Within the box, Francesco Totti responded and went into action once again. At just the right moment, he pounced forward and inched past Leonardo Bonucci with an explosion of speed.

Totti's positioning and movements were spot-on, and he connected with the incoming cross just close to the edge of the penalty box. He effortlessly outsmarted the defenders and headed home to guide the ball beyond the reach of the helpless Buffon. After that, he raced toward the sideline to celebrate AS Roma's 64th-minute equalizing goal against Juventus.

"Terrible!" Coach Allegri shook his head and immediately turned towards Maurizio Trombetta, his assistant. "We need to shake up things on the field to regain momentum. Otherwise, we'll lose this game.

"That's true," Coach Trombetta agreed. "So, what's your plan, boss?"

Coach Allegri smiled cryptically and said, "Let's summon the big guns and see if AS Roma can handle it. We must win this game."

Coach Trombetta smiled back. "Should I tell Zachary to warm up?"

"Yes." Coach Allegri nodded. "I want him ready to enter the pitch within five minutes. And let's also add Fernando Llorente into the mix. He's hungry to play. Maybe, he can also create a difference on the field of play."

Chapter 487 Dangerous Substitutes I

The illumination from the Olimpico di Roma's bright floodlights lit up the faces of Zachary and Fernando Llorente, highlighting their intense facial expressions as they warmed up on the sidelines. The two Juventus players were quite focused as they prepared to enter the game. Not even the loud jeers of the hostile AS Roma fans could disturb their concentration as they went through the light warm-up routine.

"Zachary! Fernando!" Coach Trombetta, the assistant coach in charge of Juventus' first team, yelled out after the two men completed another repetition of the warm-up routine. "That's enough warm-up. Finish putting on all your gear and come here for your instructions."

"Aye, coach," Zachary and Fernando Llorente responded in unison.

After hearing the summon of the coach, Llorente readily completed his warm-up and returned to the bench to finish his preparations. Zachary, however, didn't immediately answer the assistant coach's summons. Instead, he followed his own pace and completed a couple of more stretches to ensure his body was in great shape. Then, after confirming his condition, he hurriedly returned to the bench and changed into his match jersey before rushing toward Coach Trombetta for his match instructions. His eyes shone with immense hunger to enter the game as he stepped before the assistant coach.

Unsurprisingly, Zachary wasn't alone in his eagerness to enter the game and perform. Fernando Llorente, the striker who'd finished his pre-game preparations, also exuded an intense fighting spirit as he strode toward Coach Trombetta to receive his match instructions.

With one glance, Zachary could tell that the striker was starving for game time. Most probably, his last-minute drop from Juventus' squad that faced off against AtlÁ©tico Madrid during the midweek had awakened an intense desire to fight for a number in the starting eleven. He looked eager to perform, thus giving Zachary a feeling that his fate might change for the better.

If the striker maintained his fighting spirit, he might soon evolve into a much more clinical version of the Fernando Llorente that Zachary knew from his previous life. He might mature to become a lethal box assassin, capable of competing with phenomenal strikers like Lewandowski and Luis Suárez.

"Zachary! Fernando!" Coach Trombetta said, interrupting Zachary's musings. "How do you feel? Are you ready to enter the game?"

"Yes, of course," Zachary and Llorente responded in chorus, their voices filled with unwavering conviction.

"Good." Coach Trombetta nodded, leaning closer. "Listen, the both of you! We're in trouble as AS Roma has started overpowering us in midfield. They are dominating possession and creating more chances on goal. We can't let this go on, especially if we wish to win the game. So, this is where you two come in."

"Zachary!" the assistant coach continued after taking a deep breath. "You'll enter the game in place of Roberto Pereyra. After you step onto the pitch, try to be more active. Play intelligent football, filled with conviction and purpose, and help us dictate the tempo again. You must have already noticed that Miralem Pjanic and Seydou Keita, the two AS Roma midfielders, are moving forward a lot. Try to exploit the spaces they leave behind and run at the opposing defenders. If there's a chance, try to shoot from outside the eighteen to test the keeper. But if the situation is not right, you can link play with our strikers to advance play and create goal-scoring opportunities. Clear?"

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

"Good," Coach Trombetta said and immediately turned to Llorente. Patting the Spanish striker's back, he continued, "Fernando! You'll enter the game in place of Álvaro Morata. You're our second striker, and your only role on the pitch will be to score. So, position yourself well and remain alert on the striking line. Always be ready to convert opportunities that come your way. Understood?"

"Yes, coach," Llorente replied, balling his fist.

On the pitch, AS Roma was still dictating the tempo by relying on their brilliant zonal and man-marking strategies. They were totally outplaying Juventus with their intensity and hunger to win. They even resorted to brutal tackling when proceedings on the field didn't go their way.

The AS Roma players that performed the best were Miralem Pjanic, Daniele De Rossi, and Seydou Keita, the three central midfielders. If a Juventus player happened to receive the ball in the middle, the three AS Roma midfielders would turn into predators, hunting down the player in question to win back possession almost immediately. As a result, sliding tackles, fifty-fifty challenges, and ruthless fouls reigned supreme on the football field as the men in maroon colors showed Juventus that football was a physical game. They were obviously not about to entertain any sort of nonsense from Juventus.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle after Seydou Keita slid forward and brought down Andrea Pirlo close to the center circle. But that time, the referee didn't let off the AS Roma man but instead showed him a yellow card for repeatedly pushing the envelope and committing borderline challenges.

"I got the ball first," Seydou Keita obviously tried to protest the caution. "That can't be a yellow card."

In response, the referee just smiled and shook his head. And without bothering to argue with the AS Roma midfielder, he pointed toward the sidelines to signal a Juventus substitution.

It was obviously time for Zachary and Fernando Llorente to enter the game. As a result, the fourth official readily put up the board to confirm the substitutions. Without dilly-dallying, the two substitutes ran onto the pitch while Morata and Roberto Pereyra exited the game and took their seats on the sidelines. And in a matter of seconds, the game was ready to restart with Juventus' freekick.

"De Rossi!" Rudi Garcia, the AS Roma coach, yelled in Italian right after the substitutes stepped onto the pitch. "You're in charge of marking Zachary Bamba. Don't allow him to do as he pleases in midfield. Okay?"

"Okay," De Rossi replied with a thumbs-up. The AS Roma midfielder immediately left his holding midfield position close to the border of the defensive third and then started shadowing Zachary.

De Rossi was, of course, happy with his coach's arrangement. His fighting spirit was overflowing as he yearned to compete with Zachary and teach him that the Italian Serie A was no joke. He wanted to show the budding playmaker the way of Italian football.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle, and the game continued. Andrea Pirlo, Juventus' deep-lying playmaker, immediately took the freekick short to find Claudio Marchisio, his counterpart in midfield. The latter controlled the ball while surveying the situation around him to look for options that could be the outlet for the ball.

"Whoosh!"

Zachary immediately took off like a rocket right after Claudio Marchisio took a second touch on the ball. In almost an instant, Zachary exploded with speed, thus leaving De Rossi, his marker, in the dust. And before any other AS Roma players could react, he was already bolting into an unmarked pocket of space toward the left side of the pitch.

All midfielders playing on the professional stage had four underlying attributes. They possessed excellent foot-eye coordination, superior peripheral awareness, impeccable vision-balance integration, and superb dynamic visual acuity. They could track the movements of other players and the ball while they (themselves) were in motion or under pressure. And, of course, Claudio Marchisio, a brilliant and renowned midfielder all over the world, possessed all those qualities. He spotted Zachary's run almost instantaneously and passed the ball to him.

"Sweet!"

Zachary's mood brightened as he noticed the ball making its way to him. He slowed down slightly and controlled it with an outstretched leg before whirling around to face the other side of the pitch. He was

ready to take off toward the other side of the pitch to initiate an attack. But he had to halt his actions the next moment as he noticed that De Rossi was already strategically positioned to block his potential run toward AS Roma's box.

Chapter 488 Dangerous Substitutes II

"This guy is fast!" Zachary was surprised as he quickly took note of De Rossi's position. But his surprise didn't delay his actions in the slightest.

He faked going right before altering his center of gravity and going left. But surprisingly, his feint didn't manage to throw off De Rossi. The Italian midfielder remained on Zachary like superglue, harassing him physically to stop his run toward AS Roma's side of the pitch.

However, Zachary, being a 6'4-foot giant, couldn't allow a 'small man' of 6 feet to bully him physically. With a sudden jerk of his shoulder, he shrugged off De Rossi before exchanging lightning-fast one-twos with Patrice Evra on the left flank. His give-and-go passing strategy worked wonders, and he beat De Rossi and two more AS Roma players before quickly arriving in the final third. And in some magical way, he cut into the pitch with an explosion of pace and soon started bearing down on AS Roma's box with unstoppable momentum.

The cheers of the traveling Juventus supporters hit another high as Zachary quickly approached the box. His incredible spatial awareness worked like a charm, and with a single glance, he took note of the position of the players between him and the goal. Be it the center-backs, the goalkeeper, and his teammates — they were all crystal-clear in his mental map, allowing him to decide on a shooting angle. He drew back his leg before swinging it hard and fast at the ball.

"BAM!"

The sweet sound of his left boot connecting with the ball was audible as the Rocket Launcher Steven Gerrard GOAT Skill activated automatically. And without fear or favor, he blasted the ball and unleashed a powerful shot toward AS Roma's goal.

"Whoosh! Whoosh!"

Zachary had smashed the ball with a low spin, thus sending it on a zig-zag trajectory toward the far post. It tore through the air like a lightning bolt, swerving left and right before dipping slightly and homing

into the top right corner. Due to its unpredictable movement, the AS Roma keeper couldn't even react and remained stock still until it had long flashed past him and nestled into the back of the net.

AS Roma 1 : Juventus FC 2

"GOAAAL!" The commentator yelled as the score on the stadium's jumbotron switched to show Juventus' lead. "It's another goal for Zachary Bemba, the phenomenal 19-year-old in a Juventus shirt. His impact is immediate. Just seconds after stepping onto the pitch, he has already found the back of the net, putting Juventus in the lead again. Truly sensational stuff from the young playmaker!"

"Yes, Zachary is proving to be a truly amazing player," the co-commentator chimed in. "He brilliantly escaped the notice of De Rossi to receive the ball from Claudio Marchisio. From there on, it was pure magic on the pitch. Zachary exchanged a couple of one-twos with Patrice Evra on the left flank — and before long, he was in the final third. He beat the keeper effortlessly with an outside-of-the-eighteen shot to score Juventus' second goal within the 74th minute. Truly amazing skills!"

"This is a great player in the making," the commentator said with a sigh. "He has all the qualities to make it in the ranks of the greats. His dribbling skills are monstrous, his vision on the pitch excellent, and his finishing superb. If he continues like this, we'll have to start debating whether he can win the Ballon d'Or."

In response, the co-commentator laughed but chose not to comment on such a tricky topic.

The game continued after the goal celebrations. And as expected, the AS Roma players reacted by going on the offensive again. They repeatedly flew forward while using wing-play tactics to create goal-scoring chances. As a result, crosses into the box became the order of the night as Gervinho and Adem Ljajic, AS Roma's wide players, worked their magic. They worked hard over the next few minutes, hoping to create opportunities by linking play with Francesco Totti, their highly-experienced center-forward.

But their efforts were not successful that time around. The highly-tactical Juventus players remained alert and thwarted all the crosses coming their way. They remained steadfast while defending and ensured that AS Roma didn't get any chance to test Buffon, the Juventus keeper.

"Juve! Juventus! Juve..."

Slowly but steadily, the game headed into the final five minutes, and the atmosphere around the stadium became more electrifying. An escalating number of traveling Juventus fans started singing, causing the thunderous cheers within the Olimpico di Roma to reach a new level. The Juventus fans could obviously sense that their team was about to overpower AS Roma, another strong opponent in the Italian Serie A.

Morale was quite crucial for a team to win a game. So, when the fans started singing, the Juventus players became more energetic. They were more aggressive on and off the ball, and it didn't take long for them to create another goal-scoring opportunity.

It all started after a failed AS Roma corner kick during the 87th minute. After picking up the loose ball from the edge box, Andrea Pirlo hurriedly passed the ball to his left, hoping to find Zachary Bemba and initiate a counterattack.

Zachary, on his part, remained composed as he adjusted his position and controlled the ball. With a single abrupt turn, he skipped past Adem Ljajic before moving right and sidestepping past De Rossi to create a pocket of space to work with the ball.

The next moment, his S-graded agility worked wonders, and he accelerated to top speed and jumped past another sliding tackle from an opponent. Then, without halting, he continued his mad dash toward the other side of the pitch to advance the counterattack.

Most AS Roma players had been attacking the corner kick only seconds ago. So, they were out of shape and not yet back in their half to defend. As a result, Zachary had yards and yards of space to run with the ball before unleashing a simple pass to his right to find Fernando Llorente, one of the two Juventus strikers.

Fernando Llorente, on his part, was also fast on the ball. He controlled the ball mid-stride and then exchanged a couple of quick one-twos with Carlos Tevez. He circumvented Miralem Pjanic, the last remaining opposing player, and received an excellent return ball from Tevez.

From there on, everything was easy for the sharp Spanish striker. Fernando skillfully bolted around the keeper and buried the ball into the net. He then raced towards the sidelines, screaming at the top of his lungs to celebrate Juventus' 3rd goal during the 88th minute.

Chapter 489 Agnelli, The Ambitious President

After Fernando Llorente scored the third goal for Juventus, the game's tempo slowed down considerably. Of course, the AS Roma players continued attacking, hoping to get another goal and reduce their losing margin. However, the highly tenacious and disciplined Juventus players didn't let them.

The Old Lady players played brilliantly during the final minutes and thwarted all of AS Roma's attempts to create goal-scoring opportunities. Additionally, they utilized clever game management strategies, including time-wasting and borderline fouls, to take the sting out of AS Roma's attacking tempo on multiple occasions. As a result, they effortlessly held on to their 3:1 lead until the game ended after five minutes of added time.

After the final whistle sounded, the Juventus players ran around the pitch celebrating. They were on cloud nine as they had just attained their sixth consecutive win of the recently commenced Serie A season. They had already amassed a whopping 18 points and were thus the undisputable table leaders of the Italian Serie A. They were already having a great season, for sure.

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"I can't even begin to express how disappointed I'm with our performance today.

After the game, Rudi Garcia, the AS Roma coach, took the press conference with a cold expression. He glanced into the cameras and continued, "We started slow and allowed Juventus to dictate the tempo during the opening minutes. As a result, we quickly conceded the opening goal, which put us on the back foot. We were also not at our best in our marking during the latter part of the game. We allowed players like Zachary and Claudio Marchisio a lot of room in the midfield, permitting them to punish us. All in all, our performance was below standard tonight."

"Coach," the reporter said, "You just mentioned Zachary Bemba, the young Juventus playmaker. He has been in good form over the past few weeks. He was again the difference in today's game. What's your impression of him?"

"Well," Coach Rudi Garcia said with a sigh, "All I can say is that Coach Allegri is a lucky manager to have such a talented player in his squad. Zachary is just so good on the field, with an uncanny ability to take hold of the ball, control games, run at players, pass and score, and be the difference in any competitive game. Up close or in one-on-one situations: you can't touch him since he's always in control. If he has the ball at his feet, he determines everything around him, including the opponent's decision-making. He's just so hard to mark, and being his opponent is a hard place to be."

"However," the coach quickly continued, "we shouldn't use his brilliance as an excuse to lose. No disrespect to Zachary, he's a great player, but we could have limited his influence on the field if we had utilized proper man-marking and zonal marking strategies. At least, we would have stopped him from scoring the second goal and prevented him from advancing the counter that resulted in the third. But we didn't try hard enough, and he punished us. And that's why we lost to Juventus by three goals to one."

"The loss today was your first this season," the reporter chimed in. "That implies that you now have 15 points, placing you in the second spot behind the table leaders - Juventus, who, by the way, have won all their games this season so far."

"Yes," Coach Rudi Garcia agreed, "It's a pity as the loss today puts us three points behind Juventus on the Serie A table. But again, the season has just begun. We have many games ahead of us, and anything can happen along the course of the season. If we work hard and win most of our upcoming games, it's highly possible to overtake Juventus on the Serie A table and even win the title. We only have to believe in ourselves."

"One last question, Rudi," the reporter said with a smile. "Juventus has already won all their six opening games this season. Do you think they can maintain a perfect winning streak or, at the very least, an unbeaten run until the end of the season?"

"You're funny." Coach Rudi Garcia laughed on hearing the question. "Do you really think it's possible for a team in a highly competitive top league, such as the Serie A, to achieve an unbeaten run? Let's take a look at Juventus, for instance. They still have to face off against other top teams like Fiorentina, AC,

Milan, Inter Milan, and their local rivals - Torino. Do you really think they will come out of all those games unscathed?"

"I think it's possible, especially since they have great depth in their squad," the reporter argued.

"Then, your understanding of football and top-level competitive matches is quite limited," the coach said with a scoff. "In football, many things can happen during a season. Injuries can happen, the team's morale might also dip at certain times, and the opponents might be more prepared than you during some games. Tell me! With all those factors in play, do you think a team can achieve an unbeaten run or a perfect winning streak? Moreover, is that possible in today's Serie A?" The coach looked at the reporter as if he was a clown.

"You never know," the reporter answered meekly.

The coach shook his head, feeling exasperated. "Then, let me tell you this: There isn't a possibility of Juventus achieving a perfect winning streak or an unbeaten run this season. No disrespect to Juventus — they are a great side filled with many talents. However, let's also not forget that the Italian Serie A has grown more competitive over the past few years. Many dark horses are waiting to upset the big names. So, considering all that, I can say that Juventus will lose a game at some point in time. They will drop three, six, nine, or even more points long before the end of the season, and we'll be able to catch up with them on the Serie A table. We might even beat them to the title."

The reporter laughed on hearing that. "You must have very great belief in your players, then."

"Of course," Coach Rudi Garcia concurred with a nod. "AS Roma is a side filled with many talents this season. We can compete for the title."

"Okay," the reporter replied, smiling. "Rudi! Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us. I wish you the best in your upcoming games."

"Thank you," Coach Rudi Garcia replied, and the interview ended.

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The following day, Andrea Agnelli, Juventus FC's president, arrived early in office, at around eight. After signing a few documents on his table, his morning schedule opened up, and he decided to watch the sports news on the big screen in his office.

Switching on the TV, the speakers came alive with the voice of Rudi Garcia, the AS Roma head coach. "You're funny." Coach Rudi Garcia laughed on hearing a reporter's question. "Do you really think that it's possible for a team in a highly competitive top league, such as the Serie A, to achieve an unbeaten run? Let's take a look at Juventus, for instance..."

President Andrea Agnelli's ears perked up after hearing the word Juventus from a rival's mouth. Then, with utmost concentration, President Agnelli listened to Rudi Garcia's interview until it ended a few seconds later.

"Does this guy think he's God?" The president scoffed after hearing the declaration of the AS Roma coach, claiming that Juventus couldn't achieve an unbeaten run. The whole interview had really left a sour taste in his mouth.

"Can we really not achieve an unbeaten run, even in the league?"

The president started drumming his fingers on his office table until he made a decision. Frowning a bit, he immediately picked up his phone and dialed Fabio Paratici's number.

"Good morning, Fabio," the president spoke into the phone after the call connected. "Thanks for a good job with the first team. I'm glad we defeated AS Roma yesterday night."

"There's no need for thanks, Mr. President. It's my duty." Fabio Paratici, Juventus' sporting director, replied with a chuckle from the other end of the line. "I have a feeling that we'll go places with the current squad of ours. We might even become major contenders for the Champions League title?"

"Really?" President Andrea Agnelli's eyes lit up. "Can we also achieve an unbeaten run in the Serie A this season?"

"Eehh!" There was an exclamation followed by a few seconds of silence before Fabio's voice sounded again. "Mr. President! Did you happen to watch Coach Rudi Garcia's post-match interview yesterday?"

"I just did today morning."

"Of course." Fabio didn't sound surprised. "That explains everything, and that's why you're calling me today instead of yesterday night."

"So, Fabio," the president said, without minding his subordinate's reaction. "The whole Rudi Garcia interview left a sour taste in my mouth. I wish we could prove him wrong in some way."

"But he was right to a certain extent," Fabio reminded. "It's almost impossible for a team to achieve an unbeaten run in today's Italian Serie A."

"I like your words," the president said excitedly. "I'm glad you said 'almost impossible,' but not 'impossible.' It indicates there's a possibility."

"You can say that," Fabio replied. "But even teams with great squads need heaven-defying luck to achieve the feat."

"Then, let's become that team that makes history," President Agnelli chimed in again. "We've many talented players in our squad, including Andrea Pirlo, Zachary Bemba, Claudio, Tevez, and many others. Let's focus on achieving an unbeaten run this season. What do we need to do to achieve this?"

"We need to talk to Coach Allegri about the issue," Fabio responded. "He's the only one who can answer your questions? But don't get your hopes up, as an unbeaten run is difficult to attain over a long season of thirty-eight games. Everything has to be perfect for every game, including squad selection, tactics, and player condition."

"Isn't that what we've been doing over the past few years?" The president questioned. "We only need to step up a little and aim for a slightly more strenuous goal. We must play every game as if it's a final — and just maybe, we can go into the history books of the Italian Serie A. We can even ride that momentum and outcompete the best European teams in the Champions League, including Barcelona, Real Madrid, and Bayern Munich. We only have to ensure that we don't lose a game."

"Okay," Fabio said with a sigh. "Being realistic, the task is almost impossible. But I will still talk to Coach Allegri about the issue today. I will get back to you with a response tomorrow morning."

"Okay, then. I will be waiting for your feedback tomorrow. Have a good day." The president said before ending the call.

Chapter 490 Coach Allegri's Demands

In another office at the Juventus headquarters, Fabio Paratici, Juventus' sporting director, sighed after ending the call with his boss. The morning sunrays streamed in through the big window on the opposite side, highlighting the helpless expression plastered on his face. He was at his wit's end as he considered how to fulfill President Agnelli's request.

"Let's talk to Coach Allegri first," he thought, standing up from his seat. "He's the only one who can determine whether the current Juventus squad can achieve an unbeaten run this season."

After donning his overcoat, he quickly walked out of his office and headed towards the exit of the building. Along the way, many of the Juventus staff greeted him, while a few others nodded to him with smiles. Of course, he responded to their salutations politely, sometimes with a nod, before continuing on his way. And very soon, he exited the main Juventus office building at Corso Galileo Ferraris and walked into the heartwarming autumn sunshine of Turin.

Standing before the entrance of the head office, Fabio quickly called his driver, who arrived within a few minutes. After exchanging a few words with the middle-aged driver, Fabio boarded his shinning Maserati Quattroporte, and off they went, driving off into Turin's morning traffic and heading to the Juventus Training Center, also known as the Vinovo. They arrived within 30 minutes, and Fabio alighted from the vehicle and walked into the training center.

On passing by the gym a few seconds later, Fabio was amazed. Through the crystal-clean window glasses, he could see players working out that early morning, even if it was a day off for the Juventus squad. Second-string players like Kingsley Coman, Paolo De Ceglie, and Simone Pepe were already working with the weights or breaking a sweat on the treadmills and cycling machines. But that was not what shocked the sporting director. Instead, what caused his eyes to bulge out was when he noticed Zachary Bemba, Fernando Llorente, and Álvaro Morata working out in the gym. After playing a game yesterday, the three players didn't utilize the day off to rest. Instead, they had already hit the gym and were busy executing stretches and going through light body-strengthening workouts. As far as the

sporting director was concerned, those three players were not humans, but machines, who didn't have the word post-match fatigue in their vocabulary.

"Director!" A familiar voice sounded behind Fabio as he was still peeking into the gym. "To what do we owe the pleasure of having you here today morning?"

On hearing the voice, Fabio immediately whirled around with a smile. And as he expected, he came face to face with Massimiliano Allegri, the head coach of Juventus. The head coach looked all dapper and fit in a tracksuit with the label of Juventus on his chest.

"Coach Allegri!" Fabio exclaimed, still maintaining his smile. "I was just about to look for you. How's your morning?"

Coach Allegri laughed. "The team is in fine form, and we just defeated AS Roma in Rome yesterday. So, my morning is as good as it can ever be. What about you, director? How's your morning?"

"My morning is also great," Fabio replied. "Thanks for a good job yesterday, by the way. The 3:1 victory over AS Roma really lifted the spirits of the fans. But coach! I have to ask. Is it okay for players like Zachary and Fernando to be training the morning after the match? Don't they require some rest to recover from post-match fatigue?"

Coach Allegri smiled and said dismissively, "Let them be. They know their bodies best. Moreover, they didn't play the full 90 minutes yesterday. So, they should have some fuel left in their reserves to do some training today. There's no need to worry about them."

"Okay, if you say so," the sporting director said, casting one more glance into the gym. "But I hope they can remain fit throughout the season. We wouldn't want our key players getting injured even before the middle of the season. That would be too unfortunate."

"Light gym workouts won't cause injuries," Coach Allegri remarked. "But director! What brings you to the Vinovo today morning?"

Fabio smiled, turning his attention from the gym and back to the coach. "We need to talk. Let's head to your office first."

"Okay," Coach Allegri said.

Turning around, the coach led the way toward his office while Fabio followed him closely. They quietly traversed the spotlessly clean hallways of the Vinovo until they arrived at a large glass door with Coach Allegri's door label sign. After opening it, they quickly headed inside before taking their seats.

"So, Mr. Director!" Coach Allegri said, leaning back in his seat. He narrowed his eyes and continued, "What do you need to talk about today?"

In response, Fabio smiled and told the coach about President Agnelli's ambition to accomplish an unbeaten run in the Italian Serie A that season. After that, he asked what was required to achieve such a feat.

"You guys are really setting very high goals for the team," Coach Allegri said with a bitter smile after hearing Fabio's question. "But worry not. If we play our cards right, we can really achieve an unbeaten run this season. As the president said, we only need to play every game as a final."

"Hearing your words brightens my spirits," Fabio said with a hearty chuckle. "So, what's needed?"

The corners of Coach Allegri's lips lifted, and he leaned forward. "I only have one request. That's for the club to sign another lethal striker and a solid center-back. I'm talking about promising names like Robert Lewandowski, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, and Romelu Lukaku on striking, and players like Nicolas Otamendi, Diego Godin, and Jose Fonte. Get me two of those players, one a defender and another a striker, in the January transfer window. Then I'll have all the tools to aim for an unbeaten run during the latter half of the season. As for staying unbeaten during the first half of the season, that will have to depend on our luck."

"Those are some big demands you're making," Fabio said, narrowing his eyes. "Don't you already have enough defenders and attacking players?"

"But they are not enough when targeting an unbeaten run," the coach argued. "To win every game, we must have unbelievable squad depth and lethal options on our bench. For instance, if the going gets tough, we can bring in a lethal striker to shake things up. And in case of injuries, we must replace the

injured players with those of the same quality. That's how we can play all the games in a season without losing."

"Could you be hoping to exploit the president's ambition and sign more players?" Fabio narrowed his eyes while looking at the coach.

Coach Allegri laughed, shaking his head. "You're the one who came to me, asking the requirements needed to accomplish an unbeaten run. All I did was answer your questions."

"Well, that's true," Fabio said, sighing resignedly. "I'll communicate to the president your demands. But don't hold much hope, as all the players you've mentioned are expensive. In the meantime, utilize your current squad to win every game. With Zachary and the rest, there's a possibility."

"Yes, there's," Coach Allegri answered. "And for your information, I'm always working hard to win every game. It's just that factors out of my control, like injuries and player morale, come into play and cause me to fall short at certain times. Otherwise, I would also love to make history by not losing or winning all the games in a season."

"By the way, what's with Zachary?" Fabio asked. "He played as a striker and performed incredibly against Atlético Madrid. Can't we convert him into a center forward? I'm sure he would do wonders on the striking line."

Coach Allegri shook his head and said, "I have already thought about that on several occasions. However, if we convert Zachary into a forward, we'll be losing one of the best midfielders in the world. If he plays as a striker, we'll obviously be underutilizing his vision, passing range, creativity, tactical awareness, and dribbling skills during crucial games. As you can see, the gain doesn't equal the loss in such circumstances."

"Okay, I understand," Fabio said, standing up. "I'll communicate to the president about your demands. Otherwise, thanks for the incredible work with the team, and have a good day."

"You too," Coach Allegri said and shook hands with the sporting director. "Have a good day too."

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