

Greatest 501

Chapter 501 Away Game against Lazio

501 Away Game against Lazio

The long-anticipated Serie A battle between Lazio and Juventus kicked off at 8:45 PM on Saturday within the packed Olimpico di Roma.

For that game, Juventus was gunning for a win so as to cement their lead at the zenith of the Serie A table. On the other hand, Lazio hoped to cause an upset and rise to the fifth position, which happened to be a Europa League spot in Italian football. So, it was another game of high stakes, and it caused a lot of excitement among the fans when the kick-off whistle sounded.

Having won their past fifteen games in both the Serie A and the Champions League, the opening momentum was definitely behind Coach Allegri's men. As soon as the referee's whistle to kick off the game sounded, they showed no signs of slowing down, even while playing at an away ground. They relied on their highly gifted ball distributors, like Zachary Bemba and Andrea Pirlo, to fly out of the traps and tear apart Lazio's 4-3-3 formation on several occasions. And following that, they created three clear chances on goal before eventually taking the lead during the fifth minute of gameplay.

Zachary was the architect again for that opening goal. After receiving a pinpoint pass from Andrea Pirlo, he cut through the left flank like a raging Tsunami before squaring the ball to the immaculately positioned Carlos Tevez. And with that, everything else was straightforward.

Tevez pounced forward to meet the pass with an almost-instantaneous reaction. Then, with a deft touch, he guided the ball past the Lazio goalkeeper to score Juventus' 1st goal for the night. And with that, the score was 1:0 in favor of Juventus.

The goal celebrations ended in a few seconds, and the game continued. However, even after scoring, the Old Lady players didn't relax. It was as if they were not from the international break, as they showed no signs of fatigue on the field of play. They poured forward on multiple occasions to launch deadly attacks against the home team, and it wasn't long before they created another goal-scoring opportunity.

That time around, it was Carlos Tevez who engineered the attack. Having connected with a defense-splitting pass from Andrea Pirlo, he ran at the Lazio defenders like an incarnation of a world-sprinting

champion. With his agile footwork, he went past one, then the second, before skipping past the third opponent.

But just as the Argentine was about to escape a fourth opponent, Senad Lulic, one of Lazio's central midfielders, came sliding in from his blindside with an aggressive tackle. And with that, the opposing midfielder caught Tevez on the ankle and sent him tumbling to the ground.

Fortunately for Juventus, the aggressive tackle didn't injure Tevez. Instead, the Argentine had managed to create an excellent free-kick opportunity, which Zachary converted from thirty yards away to score Juventus' second goal for the night. And with that, Juventus was clearly in the driving seat with a two-goal advantage right before half-time.

After the fifteen-minute break, the second half kicked off, with many Lazio fans hoping their team would rise to the occasion and mount some pressure on the visitors. But they soon realized their wishes were merely pipe dreams after the Juventus players started the second half in high gear.

Juventus was flying, and four minutes after the restart, Zachary found himself on the end of a rebound following some brilliant team play and an exchange of clever passes on the left wing. And being in fine form and at the top of his game, he capitalized on the opportunity to steer home from the edge of the box and score Juventus' third goal for the night.

With that, Juventus were on the road to thrashing the opponents. They were already three goals ahead during the 49th minute, and anyone watching the game could tell that they had totally outsmarted Lazio. They were miles ahead in pass completion, creativity, and chance conversion. And due to those impressive attributes, it wasn't long before the Juventus players created another opportunity to score a goal.

During the 62nd minute, Stephan Lichtsteiner dispossessed Keita Baldé, the opposing wing player, close to the border of the defensive third on the right flank. And before any other opponents could close him down, he flicked the ball to Andrea Pirlo to initiate another lightning-fast attack.

From there on, the counterattack was on, and the Juventus players bolted forward. Andrea Pirlo passed to Claudio Marchisio, who quickly passed to Zachary. And before the opposing players could fall back, Zachary escaped the harassment by an opposing player before threading a pass back to Stephan Lichtsteiner on the right flank.

What followed was only natural. Stephan Lichtsteiner used his incredible pace to spear deep into Lazio's half before finding Fernando Llorente with a tricky and clever chip into the box. And with that immaculate assistance, he set up the Spaniard, who quickly hammered home to score Juventus's fourth goal for the night during the 64th minute.

After the goal, Coach Allegri made three straight substitutions hoping to rest his players before the ensuing busy schedule for Juventus. He pulled out Andrea Pirlo, Carlos Tevez, and Zachary and replaced them with Álvaro Morata, Federico Mattiello, and Arturo Vidal.

However, after stepping onto the pitch, the three substitutes couldn't match the level of their predecessors. As a result, Juventus attacking brilliance dropped by quite a bit, thus allowing the Lazio players to push forward and launch attacks of their own.

With Lazio dictating the proceedings on the field, the Juventus players found themselves on the defensive during the final ten minutes of gameplay. And unfortunately, their often-solid defensive capabilities couldn't save them, and they conceded a goal during the 88th minute.

But that was not the end of the action on the field of play. The Lazio players continued battling, hoping to cut the goal deficit even further. They created more opportunities on goal and even came close to scoring on several occasions. Their spirit was brimming, and they were surely causing problems for Juventus.

Fortunately for Juventus, the goddess of luck seemed not to be on Lazio's side. Three of Lazio's well-placed shots missed the target by centimeters, while a few other attempts were intercepted by the defenders or saved by the keeper. The Lazio players could thus not get the second goal, and as such, Juventus won the game 4:1 after three minutes of added time.

After the game, Zachary didn't immediately return to the dressing room to celebrate with his teammates. Instead, he headed to the press area for the required player's post-match interview.

"Zachary! Welcome, and congratulations on putting up another wonderful performance tonight." The Sky Italia reporter said in English as Zachary stepped in front of the cameras.

"Thank you," Zachary replied.

"You scored another two goals, taking your tally in the Serie A to 12 goals in twelve Serie A appearances," the reporter said, adjusting the microphone slightly. "You also provided an assist for the first goal, taking your number of assists in the Serie A to 13. How do you maintain such a level of consistency in a top league such as the Serie A?"

"By training, of course," Zachary answered. "I have always worked hard as a player, and I'm always looking for opportunities to improve myself. All the hard work allows me to be in the best shape possible during every match. And that's why I can continue performing and scoring goals for my team."

"Is that all?" The reporter pressed.

Zachary thought for a short while before saying, "I have also had ample rest during the 12-day international break. So, I was in the best shape I could ever be for the match against Lazio. I guess that could also have helped."

"Zachary!" The reporter said after a moment. "Juventus' win against Lazio tonight has allowed you and your teammates to accomplish the 12th successive win in the Serie A. Do you believe you can maintain this form and continue winning to achieve an unbeaten run throughout the entire season?"

"Of course, winning all games is our dream as a team," Zachary replied. "As a top team, we've never played to draw or to lose. We always walk onto the pitch and put everything out there, hoping to defeat every opponent, no matter how tough. So, it's only a given that we'll continue doing our utmost to win all our remaining games."

"Of course, we have a challenging series of games coming up," Zachary continued. "We have to face off against Malmö in the Champions League before playing against Torino, Fiorentina, and Atlético Madrid in a short three weeks window. Those are all demanding games. They will obviously test our resilience and capabilities as a team. But with the depth in our squad, I still believe we can win them all, especially if we continue working hard and playing as a team on the field of play."

"Thank you, Zachary, for staying back to talk to us," the reporter said in a conclusive tone. "I wish you all the best in your upcoming matches. Enjoy the rest of your evening, and goodbye."

"Enjoy your evening, too," Zachary said before stepping away from the cameras. Then, after shaking hands with the reporter and the camera crew, he left the press area and quickly headed to the dressing room. He was in a rush as he didn't want to miss the team bus back to Turin.

Chapter 502 Three Games

502 Three Games

Having won the game against Lazio, team Juventus gained even more momentum. The players continued working harder than ever off the pitch, doing their utmost to maintain their tip-top match fitness. And naturally, their relentless efforts and dedication to the sport rewarded them handsomely, allowing them to put up a series of more impressive and consistent performances on the playing field.

Firstly, they played their return Champion's League game against Malmö on Wednesday, 26th November 2014, and won by three goals to nil, even while away from home.

Fernando Llorente, Carlos Tevez, and Claudio Marchisio were the undisputed heroes for Juventus during that game, with each scoring a goal during the 39th, 47th, and 78th minutes, respectively. As for Zachary, he didn't score but only provided an assist that resulted in Claudio Marchisio's goal.

Four days later, on Sunday, 30th November 2014, Juventus resumed their domestic Serie A duties. They welcomed Torino FC, their local rivals, to the Juventus stadium for the first 'Derby della Mole' face-off that season.

Due to the high stakes associated with the match, the Torino players were a spirited bunch. They played impressive attacking football and even scored the opening goal during the 11th minute. However, even doing all that was not enough to allow them to win the heated local derby. Instead, Juventus still came out on top and won the game with a score of 3:1 after Arturo Vidal, Álvaro Morata, and Andrea Pirlo found the back of the net during the 15th, 61st, and 87th minutes, respectively.

Surprisingly, the on-form Zachary once again failed to score, meaning that he'd gone two games without finding the back of the net. But he still put up an impressive performance and managed to provide an assist that resulted in Álvaro Morata's 61st-minute goal.

Having won the local Torino Derby, the Juventus players were in high spirits. They resumed training after a day of rest and started preparing for their next game, which happened to be against Fiorentina away

from home. They soon became busy again as they drilled and conditioned themselves with the clear intent to continue their perfect winning run in all competitions.

However, the busy schedule still couldn't prevent Zachary from celebrating his birthday on Wednesday, 3rd December 2014.

He was in a hyper mood on that day since he had just turned twenty years. As such, he eagerly left Juventus' training center immediately after training and returned home for the festivities. Then, later in the evening, he enjoyed a feast with a select few acquaintances that included Emily (his agent), Kristin (his personal assistant and publicity secretary), Bjørn Peters (his fitness trainer), Inger Peters (his chef and dietician), Angelo (his driver and interpreter), and a few of his teammates like Patrice Evra, Gianluigi Buffon, and Carlos Tevez.

The birthday party was quite enjoyable. It was simple, precious, and destined to take a significant position in Zachary's album of good memories. The only blemish, however, was that he couldn't enjoy the feast with his grandma, who'd already passed away, and his girlfriend, whose status he didn't understand quite clearly as she was still traveling. But aside from that, he really had a fabulous time that evening and even received a lot of expensive gifts from his acquaintances.

"Zachary!" Emily called out to him as they relaxed on the couch in his living room after cutting the cake. "I got a gift for you." She handed him a well-packaged box and said, "Open it."

"Thanks a lot, Emily," Zachary said and opened the box. The next moment, his eyes lit up when they landed on a silver watch, which seemed quite expensive. Its silver surface glittered under the fluorescent lighting in the room, causing Zachary to become fascinated with it. His heartbeat accelerated a little, and his mood lifted as he immediately fell in love with the watch.

"Damn!" Suddenly, Patrice Evra, who was close by, exclaimed. "That's a Moon Phase Stainless Steel watch of the renowned Patek Philippe Nautilus collection. It costs roughly 120,000 Euros on the market. Zachary! God! Why can't I get an agent like yours? I also want a 120,000 Euro watch as a birthday gift."

On hearing the statement, Zachary glanced at Evra with surprise. "This is a 120,000 Euro watch?" He asked to confirm that he hadn't heard wrong.

"Yup," Evra replied. "I'm sure it is around that price."

"I'll be damned!" Zachary exclaimed and pivoted his gaze onto the watch again. It was sure pleasing to the eyes, but he couldn't identify what was particularly special about it. "Why is this watch so expensive?" He asked.

"The brand, my friend," Evra answered. "Patek Philippe is a long-established Swiss watch manufacturer that commands a lot of prestige all around the globe. As such, Patek Philippe watches represent swag and class, especially among the rich, making them unbelievably expensive. So, you could take it that wearing a Patek Philippe watch is similar to driving a Bugatti or Lamborghini for watch enthusiasts."

"Crazy!" Zachary mumbled. "I have really got a lot to learn."

"Do you find the watch, not to your liking?" Emily asked.

"Of course, I like it," Zachary hurriedly said. "It's a 120,000 Euro watch. What's there not to like? Thanks a lot for this gift, Emily."

"You're welcome," Emily said. "I'm also representing another person to deliver a birthday gift to you. Do you still remember Susan Berdal, the lady from Audi?"

"Oh! I remember her," Zachary said. "She's the Audi executive that offered me my first endorsement in Norway. Why are we talking about her at this moment?"

The corners of Emily's lips curled up into a smile. "She sent you the recently released Audi RS 7 model as a birthday gift. She hopes you can enjoy the comfort afforded by the car while traveling around Turin."

"Okay, I understand," Zachary said. "Thank her for me. I'll put it to good use."

"Good," Emily said, nodding. "We'll discuss the newly-offered terms in the endorsement contract with Audi when you get time. But for now, let me leave the floor for the rest."

"Okay."

With that said, the gift session continued with the others in attendance presenting their own gifts. And before long, Zachary received a pair of sleek, gentle shoes from Evra, an iPhone 6 from Kristin, running shoes from the Peters couple, and a few other gifts from the rest of his teammates in attendance. Then, when the gift session ended, Zachary thanked everyone and concluded the birthday party celebrations.

While feeling refreshed after celebrating his 20th birthday, Zachary returned his focus to training the following morning. He did his utmost to hone his match fitness before playing against Fiorentina two days later, on Friday 5th, December 2014.

For that game, Zachary was at the very top of his game. Five minutes after the kick-off, he made a daring run through the middle, rushing past three Fiorentina players like the wind. Then, when the angle opened up, he threaded the ball to Carlos Tevez, who converted successfully from inside the box to score Juventus' first goal for the night.

However, making the assist didn't mark the end of Zachary's brilliance that night. He was in high gear for the next hour, executing tackles and making daring runs through the wings and the middle. He really terrorized the Fiorentina players before eventually scoring Juventus' second goal from a counterattack during the 70th minute of gameplay.

From that point onwards, everything was smooth sailing for Zachary and Juventus. All the Old Lady players remained tactically disciplined and defended as if their lives were at stake. They managed to keep the Fiorentina defenders at bay and eventually won the game by two goals to zero after six minutes of added time.

Coach Allegri was in high spirits after watching his team defeat Fiorentina away from home and obtain their 14th consecutive win in the Serie A that season. He hugged all his players and congratulated them for the job well done before stepping off the pitch and heading towards the press area.

"Coach Allegri, welcome, and congratulations upon winning yet another crucial game in the Serie A," the reporter said after he stepped in front of the cameras.

"Thanks," Coach Allegri replied.

"You must be quite happy after winning the game against Fiorentina?"

"Yes, I am," Coach Allegri said. "It's another big win for us. The boys were impressive on the field of play and gave everything to win the game. Zachary, for instance, was exceptional and managed to set up the first goal before scoring the second during the 70th minute. There was also Andrea Pirlo, Arturo Vidal, and Claudio Marchisio. Their creativity in midfield today was impressive, and they managed to help us dominate possession throughout the entire duration of the game. Of course, there are moments when we could have done better. We could have capitalized on some of our chances during the late stages of the second half to score one or two more goals. But again, this is football, and even top players can miss opportunities, especially when the opposition is playing incredibly well on the defensive end."

"You have already amassed a total of 42 points, and you're also ten points clear at the top of the Serie A table," the reporter said. "Considering all that, do you think the Serie A is in the bag?"

Coach Allegri chuckled and said, "That would be my hope. But as we know, anything can happen during the course of a long season. Many uncontrollable factors can come into play, and our form as a team can take a dip. So, I can't say for sure that the Serie A is in the bag, as that would be unprofessional. But I can promise our fans that we'll continue doing our utmost to win every game. And hopefully, our efforts will be rewarded, and we'll be able to win the Serie A once again this season."

"On Tuesday, you'll face off against Atlético Madrid," the reporter stated. "Are you ready?"

"Not yet," Coach Allegri admitted. "We'll work on the tactics as a team from tomorrow afternoon til Monday. And hopefully, we should be ready to face off against Atlético Madrid by Tuesday."

"Okay, coach," the reporter said. "Thanks for answering our questions. We wish you all the best while preparing for the game against Atlético Madrid. Have a good evening."

"Thanks. Have a good evening too."

Chapter 503 Return Game Against Atlético Madrid

With the return Champions League game against Atlético Madrid around the corner, the Juventus players worked harder than ever. They spent most of their waking hours honing their tactics with the clear intent of defeating Atlético Madrid again. And in such a manner, the days quickly passed, and Tuesday, which happened to be the Champions League matchday, arrived.

On that day, at 9:00 in the morning, the UEFA officials organized mandatory pre-match press conferences for both teams. And naturally, Coach Diego Simeone, who had just arrived in Turin with his players, took the interview. He answered questions from journalists representing various famous media houses within the comfort of Hotel Galant's spacious conference room.

"Coach Diego!" A reporter from BeIN Sports called out. "During the first leg against Juventus in Madrid, you lost the game after conceding three goals, all scored by Zachary Bemba, who has been in great form this season. So, coach! Tell us! How do you plan to stop Zachary and the rest of Juventus' attacking force tonight?"

"I won't discuss our tactics here on live television," Coach Diego Simeone answered. "But I can say with a hundred percent confidence that we're ready and well-prepared to handle whatever Juventus throws at us. As you said, the Juventus attacking players, especially Zachary, Andrea Pirlo, Carlos Tevez, Fernando Llorente, and Alvaro Morata, have all been in fine form. When combined, their attacking prowess is probably rated among the best three in Europe at the moment. But don't forget that Atlético Madrid is a team accustomed to playing against tough opposition. On many occasions, we've faced off against Barcelona, Real Madrid, and many others but come out on top. I believe we can do the same against Juventus and win this game. That's my honest belief."

"Thank you for your response, Coach Diego Simeone," A reporter from Sky Italia said. "What is your minimum expectation for your players during this match? Is it a draw, or do you wish for Atlético Madrid to win the game?"

"Of course, we're here to win the game," Coach Diego Simeone replied emphatically. "Over the past few days, we've been working hard and preparing for this game. As a team, we're in the best condition, and we'll step onto the pitch with the sole goal of defeating Juventus. We want to win, get three more points, and then qualify for the knock-out stage of the Champions League. That's our sole objective here in Turin."

In the meantime, Massimiliano Allegri, Juventus' coach, also attended to his press duties at the Vinovo, Juventus' training center. As usual, he was in his sleek black suit, matched with a white shirt and black tie, as he replied to the questions fired out by the journalists in attendance.

"Coach!" A reporter from La Gazzetta dello Sport called out. "You have won all your Champions League group games, thus amassing 15 points from five opening matches. As such, you've already qualified for the knock-out stage since you're eight points clear of the second-placed Atlético Madrid. Considering all that, do you plan to rest some of your crucial players, like Zachary, Andrea Pirlo, and Carlos Tevez, especially since this match is practically meaningless in the grand scheme of things?"

Coach Allegri chuckled and said, "As professional athletes, we always yearn to compete against the best in the world. So, as a team, we'll always welcome a game against Atlético Madrid, who happen to be the Spanish champions. We'll do all we can to defeat them and continue our winning streak in all competitions."

"But again," the coach continued with a smile, "the season is quite long, and we have a tight schedule coming up. Taking all that into account, we have to rest some of our players at certain times to ensure they remain in tip-top condition throughout the season. That also applies to today's game."

"Does that mean that Zachary will not get to play today?" Another reporter hurriedly asked.

Coach Allegri smiled and answered, "I can't answer that question right now. But I can promise you'll get the answer to the question when the line-ups come out later today."

"Coach!" A Gazzetta del Popolo reporter in the front row said immediately after raising her arm. "A few weeks ago, Patrice Evra suffered a knock while playing for France and hasn't featured in any games for Juventus since then? What's the status of his injury at the moment? Is he able to return to the match line-up today night?"

On hearing the question, Coach Allegri sighed and shook his head. "Unfortunately," he said, "Patrice Evra suffered another setback during training on Sunday evening. The medical exams he took yesterday revealed that he'd strained the hamstring of his left thigh. He'll be out for six more weeks, meaning he can only return to action during January."

Later that day, just one and a half hours before the highly anticipated kick-off between Juventus and Atlético Madrid, the line-ups came out. And as promised, Coach Allegri remained true to his word and benched a few crucial players.

The players in his starting 4-3-1-2 formation were Marco Storari (as Goalkeeper), Paolo De Ceglie, Federico Mattiello, Giorgio Chiellini, and Leonardo Bonucci (as the defenders), Arturo Vidal, Simone Padoin, and Claudio Marchisio (as the defensive midfielders), Roberto Pereyra (as the only attacking midfielder) plus Fernando Llorente and Álvaro Morata (as the two strikers). As for the on-form crucial players, like Zachary, Andrea Pirlo, Gianluigi Buffon, Carlos Tevez, and Stephan Lichtsteiner, the coach had left them on the bench for that specific game.

On the other hand, Diego Simeone's starting 4-2-3-1 formation included all the famous Atlético Madrid names, such as Mario Mandzukic, Koke, Antoine Griezmann, Diego Godín, and Gabi, among others. The coach had obviously brought out all his big guns since he had to win the game in order to avoid the unfortunate fate of dropping out of the Champions League at the group stage.

One and half hours quickly passed after the release of the line-ups, and soon the clock hands around Turin pointed to the 8:45 PM mark. And as scheduled, the battle between Juventus and Atlético Madrid kicked off right on time within the packed Juventus Stadium.

For Atlético Madrid, it was a must-win game. Thus, immediately after the kick-off, the players in striped red and white jerseys poured forward like a swarm of starving locusts. They began to utilize high-pressing tactics to mount pressure on Juventus, and it wasn't long before they won possession.

From there on, they quickly gained momentum and started dictating the proceedings on the field of play. They were unlike the Atlético Madrid from weeks ago as they launched relentless attacks against Juventus for the next few minutes.

Their creativity on the pitch continued blooming as the game continued, and through their creative forward players like Mario Mandzukic, Koke, and Antoine Griezmann, they came close to scoring a couple of times. They were unquestionably the better team, even though they were playing in front of a very hostile audience of Juventus fans.

Nevertheless, they couldn't break down Juventus' tenacious defense, no matter how hard they tried during the first half. That was because players like Giorgio Chiellini, and Leonardo Bonucci, the two

center-backs, did their utmost to thwart most of Atlético Madrid's attempts on goal. And with the two Italians holding the backline, the score remained 0:0 until halftime.

After the fifteen-minute halftime break, both teams emerged unchanged, with neither coach introducing any substitute. As a result, Atlético Madrid remained the better team on paper and thus continued dictating the tempo on the pitch.

Contrary to their usual practice, the impressive attacking and passing capabilities of the Atlético Madrid players were there for everybody to see as the game proceeded forward. At times, they would utilize lightning-fast one-two exchanges to break through the middle, while at other times, they would play an unexpected long ball to find Mario Mandzukic, their highly-clinical center forward. They kept Juventus guessing with their ever-changing tactics before eventually finding the back of the net through an outside-of-the-box shot from Koke during the 62nd minute. And with that, the deadlock was finally ripped apart, and the score became 1:0 in favor of the visitors.

The referee's whistle sounded after the goal celebrations, and the game restarted with most fans thinking that Atlético Madrid would press their advantage and continue playing attacking football. Even the commentators believed that the team from Madrid was out for blood, and they would launch more spirited attacks against Juventus to get more goals.

But as the game continued, both fans and commentators soon became wide-eyed as they realized that they couldn't have been more wrong while predicting the development of the match situation.

Contrary to the expectations of many, the Atlético Madrid players returned to their old ways and started playing defensive football during the 70th minute. And as such, all the men in the red and white striped jerseys began falling back often to absorb the very-same pressure they had clearly invited from Juventus with their switch of tactics.

Chapter 504 Coach Allegri's Impromptu Decision

The Atlético Madrid players had switched to their usual defensive playing style. Fortunately for them, their defensive efforts weren't passive as they fell back. Instead, they played aggressive, hard-tackling football to terrorize the Juventus players that tried to cut through their ranks.

For the next few minutes, it was as if they were fighting a war. As such, ruthless sliding tackles, borderline aerial duels, shirt-pulling incidences, and body slams became the order of the night as the game proceeded into the late stages. And soon, it became clear to all that the Atlético Madrid players were out for blood, as not even the four yellow cards displayed by the referee could curb their ruthlessness.

More minutes passed, and the game approached the 70th-minute mark. And just then, Claudio Marchisio was on the ball after having intercepted a loose pass close to the center circle.

Taking the ball in his stride, Marchisio skipped past Gabi, Atlético Madrid's captain, as he navigated his way through the middle, hoping to find a passing angle. But just as he was about to flick the ball to his left to find Simone Padoin, his counterpart in midfield, something unexpected and unfortunate transpired.

Mario Suárez, Atlético Madrid's other central midfielder, came sliding in with a ruthless impetus. His boot skidded over the green like a deadly viper traversing the jungle, and he caught Claudio Marchisio on the ankle.

"Aaahhh!"

With an agonized cry, Claudio Marchisio went down immediately. He then started rolling around on the ground while holding onto his ankle. Anyone could tell he was clearly in pain and most likely injured by the ruthless challenge from the Atlético Madrid midfielder.

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The referee blew the whistle and immediately rushed to the scene. Then, he quickly summoned the medics, who soon began offering first aid to the injured Claudio Marchisio.

The medics focused all their attention on Marchisio's ankle, hoping to relieve his pain so he would return to action immediately. However, all their efforts were fruitless, and they soon realized that the worst-case scenario had transpired. For sure, Claudio Marchisio, one of Juventus' midfielders, had suffered an injury after being on the receiving end of a ruthless tackle. He was in great pain, and they would thus have to ferry him out of the playing field on a stretcher.

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In the meantime, the referee, who happened to be crowded by raging Juventus players, blew the whistle again. He then pushed himself out of the mass of bodies in striped black and white jerseys

before showing a yellow card to Mario Suñez, the player that had committed the foul. After that, he blew a whistle again and started marking out the spot for the free-kick. As for the complaining Juventus players, he clearly chose to ignore them.

"Damn it!" Coach Allegri exclaimed while running toward the fourth official after noticing that the referee had only shown Mario Suñez a yellow card for the foul.

Narrowing his eyes slightly, he yelled at the official, "Mario Suñez went for the leg instead of the ball. He should receive a red card instead of a yellow card. What's wrong with you, referees?"

"Calm down. Calm down, coach..." The fourth official said, trying to soothe Coach Allegri's flaring temper.

"Don't you dare say that to me!" Coach Allegri cut off the fourth official mid-sentence. "Don't tell me to calm down when my player has just suffered a ruthless tackle that took him out of the game."

"Calm down. Calm..." the fourth official continued. "It's unfortunate that your player has suffered an injury and can't continue the game. But that was Mario Suñez's first challenge. Surely, do you really believe that we should show him a straight red card for such a challenge?"

"Of course," Coach Allegri stated with anger. "His intent was clearly to injure Claudio. Based on that, the referee should show him a straight red card. It's that simple..."

"Coach, let's head back!" Maurizio Trombetta, one of Juventus' assistant coaches, said, pulling his boss away. "There's no use arguing with the referees as they won't change their decisions. Instead, we should calm down and decide on who to bring in place of the injured Marchisio."

"Okay."

Coach Allegri sucked in a long breath and followed after his assistant. He returned to his technical area in seconds and started thinking about the most appropriate substitute to introduce into the game.

Both Andrea Pirlo and Zachary were still on the bench. They were all highly gifted players who could enter the pitch and change the game situation quickly. Any of them could work as a substitute for the injured Marchisio at that moment.

But as the coach was about to select a substitute, his heart skipped a beat as a series of thoughts manifested within his mind. What if Zachary or Pirlo also suffer an injury? Is it worth it for a match that is clearly not that important in the bigger picture of our plans this season? Should I risk them to win the game?"

The gears in Coach Allegri's mind kept on whirling and rotating as he predicted a few unfortunate possibilities that could happen if he introduced an important player into the game. And for seconds, he couldn't decide what to do until his gaze landed on Coach Diego Simeone, the Atl tico Madrid coach, who happened to be watching him with a teasing smile at that very moment.

"Wait!" He thought with a frown. "Could this bastard have predicted this? After injuring one of my players, does he think I won't dare to introduce one of my other creative players since this is not a must-win game for us? What a cunning bastard!"

After thinking of the possibility, Coach Allegri couldn't contain his anger. He turned his gaze away from the Atl tico Madrid coach and returned his attention to Maurizio Trombetta, his assistant.

"Coach Trombetta," he said with narrowed eyes. "What's the score for the game between Olympiacos and Malm ?"

"The last time I checked, Olympiacos was still leading by two goals to one," Coach Trombetta answered dutifully.

Coach Allegri smiled. But his smile was a bit sinister. "Seems there's a possibility of Olympiacos winning. Doesn't that mean that Atl tico Madrid will drop out of the Champions League if we force them to a draw or win against them?"

Coach Trombetta thought for a short while before saying, "Both Atl tico Madrid and Olympiacos had seven points before today's games. So, if Olympiacos wins and Atl tico Madrid draws or loses, Coach

Diego and his men will drop out of the Champions League. But why ask all this? What are you thinking, boss?"

"Just some minor stuff," Coach Allegri said, still maintaining his smile that was not a smile. "Coach Trombetta. Go ahead and prep Tevez, Pirlo, and Zachary as substitutes. Let them start warming up immediately! I want them on the pitch in five."

"Boss..." Maurizio Trombetta seemed like he was about to argue.

"Don't say anything," Coach Trombetta cut him off. "Just carry out my instructions. We need to make the substitutions quickly. Or else, we might concede another goal."

"Okay, boss," the assistant said with a helpless sigh. "I'll do as you say."

Chapter 505 A 40-Yard Free-Kick

The three Juventus substitutes finally stepped onto the pitch one after the other after the ball went out of play for an Atlético Madrid throw-in during the 73rd minute.

Andrea Pirlo entered in place of the injured Claudio Marchisio while Carlos Tevez substituted in for the underperforming Álvaro Morata. As for Zachary, he replaced Roberto Pereyra, thus becoming the only attacking central midfielder for Juventus during the final 17+ minutes.

After the substitutions, it was time for the game to continue. The referee's whistle sounded, and Atlético Madrid restarted the game by taking the throw in.

Juanfran Torres, the Atlético Madrid right-back, was the man called into action. He raced towards the touchline before planting his feet firmly on the ground and throwing the ball towards the middle.

The defender's technique was spot on, and he threw the ball accurately, hoping to find Mario Suárez, who happened to have just moved into an unmarked pocket of space in the middle. However, just before Suárez could make the connection with the pin-point throw, Zachary, who had just stepped onto the pitch, came rushing in to win the ball.

Zachary timed his run to perfection before pushing off the ground to leap for the ball. His 6-foot-4 physique played its role, and he outmuscled the seemingly helpless Mario Suárez for aerial superiority. And with that, he easily won the ball fair and square before using his head to guide it towards Andrea Pirlo on his left.

"Pa..."

With the soft sound of the ball meeting the boot, Andrea Pirlo connected with Zachary's pass. Then, just before an opponent could close him down, the maestro drew his leg back and smacked the ball expertly to unleash a raking pass toward the other side of the pitch.

Of course, the Italian maestro wasn't just playing aimlessly but trying to release Carlos Tevez, the other substitute, who happened to be making a daring run toward the other side of the pitch.

"Hu..."

Inhaling deeply, Carlos Tevez leaped high and chested the ball to the ground. He then feigned going left before actually accelerating towards his right to lose Gabi, the Atlético Madrid captain who had been closely following after him.

However, just as Tevez was about to dance his way out of another tight space, José María Giménez, one of Atlético Madrid's center-backs, came rushing in with a flying tackle from the side. The center-back slammed into Carlos Tevez, thus ramming the Argentine off the ball.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle and rushed to the scene within seconds. He then went against the bitter complaints of the Atlético Madrid players and awarded Juventus a free-kick at a spot roughly forty yards from the goal.

"That was a fair challenge," Gabi, the Atlético Madrid captain, argued after the referee had made the decision. "Football is a physical game. There will always be duels based on strength when going for the ball, and that's what happened with José María. You surely can't penalize him for that."

"Are you serious!" Leonardo Bonucci, the Juventus defender who happened to have just arrived at the scene, scoffed. "Do you think this is rugby or American football? When have body slams become a thing in football?"

Gabi shook his head. "That wasn't a body slam from José María. He just went for the ball and overpowered Tevez while at it. Period. Why are you trying to make something out of nothing?"

"Leonardo!" Andrea called out to his teammate. "Ignore the idiot. We need to prepare for the free kick. Don't waste time arguing with petty people."

On hearing that, Leonardo Bonucci chuckled and said, "Pirlo! You're right, as usual. I don't know what got over me to argue with an idiot. But I have learned my lesson. I won't do it again."

"Good." Andrea Pirlo gave him a thumbs up.

Leonardo smiled and took a few steps to approach Pirlo's position. Glancing towards Zachary, who happened to be standing over the ball, the defender asked, "Is he going to take the free-kick?"

"Yes," Andrea Pirlo replied. "The guy almost never misses, even during training. He's the perfect man for the job."

"True!" Leonardo agreed. "But this free-kick is almost forty yards from goal. Will he be able to find the target from such a long distance?"

"Honestly," Pirlo said, "I'm not sure. But when I talked to him, he said that he wanted to have a go at the goal. So, I let him be."

"Eehh!" Leonardo Bonucci exclaimed. "Pirlo! That's not like you. Isn't it better to have him deliver a chip behind the defensive line and into the box? I feel that that's the only way we can score from a free-kick at such a distance."

Andrea Pirlo sighed and shook his head. "Let's not talk about this anymore. Zachary hasn't disappointed us since arriving here. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt."

"Okay," Leonardo agreed.

In the meantime, Zachary had just finished positioning the ball on the free-kick spot. Sucking in a deep breath to calm himself down, he took a few steps back and started observing the goings-on before him.

The referee was still organizing the wall, which happened to have only two players. Most likely, the Atlético Madrid keeper thought there was no need for a long defensive wall since the free-kick was almost forty yards from goal.

As Zachary's gaze kept roaming around, he noticed more details. He noted how Atlético Madrid had set up the defensive backline in front of their box and far away from their goal. It was as if they were most afraid of runs from the other Juventus players instead of Zachary himself. And most likely, they thought that Zachary wouldn't go for a shot but would try to link up with his teammates to make something out of the free-kick.

"Aren't they taking me too lightly?" He pondered with a smile. But with a single shake of his head, he cast the thought out of his mind. He then took a deep breath and activated the Dead-Ball Specialist Juju while awaiting the referee's signal.

A few more seconds passed, and the referee finally finished organizing the players in front of the box. Then, after taking a strategic position, he blew his whistle and signaled for Zachary to take the free-kick.

"Whoosh!"

Zachary went into action right away. Taking a deep breath, he made an angled run toward the ball while emptying his mind. A few long strides allowed him to arrive in front of the ball, and he drew his leg back before swinging it down to smack the ball dead in the center. For that moment, Zachary didn't bother with tricks but just hit the ball with raw power. So, there wasn't anything fancy with his technique, but just leg strength on display.

"Whoosh!"

The ball took off like a surface-to-surface missile just fired out of its launcher. Its white and black surface glimmered under the bright floodlights of the Juventus stadium as it tore through the air like a lightning bolt. And before the keeper could react or even move an inch, it ricocheted off the crossbar before bouncing into the back of the net.

"Sarò dannato!"

"Che diavolo!"

Andrea Pirlo and Leonardo Bonucci, the two players who happened to be near Zachary, exclaimed as their eyes widened with surprise. They were so shocked, and they turned to glance at Zachary as if he was a monster in human skin.

Zachary, on his part, just smiled and raised his arms to celebrate in response. He'd successfully converted a 40-yard free-kick to score an equalizing goal for Juventus during the 76th minute. He felt giddy with excitement and thus couldn't stop his heart from going on a wild caper in his chest.

Chapter 506 The Coach who Experienced more than Double Emotional Damage

"Damn it! Why does this boy keep scoring against us?" Coach Diego Simeone cursed out loud after Zachary converted a 40-yard free-kick to score an equalizing goal for Juventus. The thunderous cheers around the stadium sounded like funeral songs in his ears, and he couldn't stop himself from punching the air in front of him. He really felt crestfallen and disoriented after his players conceded a goal that could potentially force his team out of the Champions League at the group stage.

Taking a deep breath, he turned toward one of his assistants and asked, "Juan! What is the score for the game between Olympiacos and Malmö?"

"Just give me a moment to check," Juan Vizcaíno, the assistant, said before playing around with the buttons on his tablet. Then, a few seconds later, his eyes lit up, and he turned to glance at his boss.

"What is the score?" Coach Diego Simeone hurriedly pressed for an answer. "Don't keep me guessing. Hurry up and spit it out."

"The score is 2:2," Juan answered with a smile. "Markus Rosenberg scored the equalizer for Malmö six minutes ago."

"Yeah!" The coach pumped out his fist, his eyes brimming with hope. "Things are not so bad. But we must still do our utmost to win this game if we want to be sure of qualifying. Otherwise, we'll really be fucked if Olympiacos scores a late winner against Malmö."

Juan Vizcaíno, the assistant, nodded but didn't say anything. He continued playing around with the buttons on his tablet while waiting for his boss' next set of instructions.

Coach Diego Simeone, on his part, cocked his head slightly to observe Massimiliano Allegri, Juventus' head coach, who happened to be voicing instructions to his players. Then, narrowing his eyes slightly, he said, "I don't know why that bastard, Max Allegri, is trying so hard to win this game. He has brought in all his crucial players, even though he has already qualified as first in the group. Truly annoying!"

"Boss!" Suddenly the panicked voice of the assistant rang in his ears. "Konstantinos Mitroglou has just scored the third goal for Olympiacos."

"What?" Coach Diego Simeone's heart jumped with unease.

"I said that Olympiacos has just scored the third goal against Malmö," the assistant said. "And based on the match statistics, Olympiacos is the better team compared to Malmö. So, they have a high chance of winning and qualifying for the next Champions League stage as the second team in Group A. That's unless we can up our game and defeat Juventus."

"Damn! How can they score so fast? We're really fucked."

Coach Diego Simeone felt like his world had been turned upside down. He knew that Olympiacos would reach ten points if they won the other Group A game. So, that meant that the only way for Atlético Madrid to surpass them in such a situation was by winning the game against Juventus. They had to

defeat the Old Lady or otherwise face the shameful destiny of dropping out of the Champions League at the group stage.

"Coach!" Juan Vizcaíno, the assistant, called out. "What's your plan?"

Coach Allegri didn't answer right away. Instead, he turned his gaze to the pitch to observe Zachary, who was on the ball. The twenty-year-old playmaker was like a whirlwind as he cut through the middle, executing sidesteps to leave opponents in the dust. Zachary then exchanged a couple of one-twos with Fernando Llorente and Carlos Tevez as he speared deeper into Atlético Madrid's half. A few more strides brought him to the edge of the box, and he unleashed a curling shot toward the top right corner.

"Damn!"

At that moment, Coach Diego Simeone really thought that his team was about to concede the second goal. His heartbeat accelerated to abnormal levels, and he couldn't help but clench and unclench his fists as he watched the ball heading toward the goal. He was really nervous.

Fortunately for the coach, Miguel Ángel Moyá, the Atlético Madrid keeper, was alert and leaped to make the save. The shot-stopper flew through the air with a stunning acrobatic dive before punching Zachary's effort out of play for a corner kick. And with that, he'd saved Atlético Madrid from conceding a goal during the 83rd minute.

"Damn it!" Coach Allegri cursed for the umpteenth time that night. "What the hell are Gabi and Suárez doing on the pitch? They allowed Zachary to pass through our ranks with ease. They almost caused us to concede another goal."

"Boss!" Juan Vizcaíno, the ever-dutiful assistant, said. "Ibrahim Afellay has just scored the fourth goal for Olympiacos."

"What?" Coach Diego felt dizzy.

"I said," the assistant repeated, "Olympiacos has just scored the fourth goal against Malmö. Olympiacos now has a two-goal cushion with only seven minutes remaining to the ninety-minute mark. They will most likely win the other final Group A game."

"Shit! How are they scoring so many goals in a few minutes? Are they playing against Malmö's under-16 team?"

Coach Diego took a moment to organize his thoughts before saying, "Unless we defeat Juventus, we're fucked. Juan! Hurry up and tell Ñíguez and Turan to warm up quickly. I want them on the pitch in three."

"Okay, I'll tell..." Juan stopped his words midsentence and turned his focus to the pitch. The assistant's wavering gaze said it all. He clearly thought something unexpected was about to occur on the field of play.

With a shudder, Coach Diego Simeone followed suit and started observing the proceedings on the field of play. There was already chaos in Atlético Madrid's box since Andrea Pirlo was about to take the corner kick for Juventus. Players of both teams were already pushing and pulling each other as they fought to gain an advantage before the corner ball came in. They were obviously going all out to attack and defend.

However, Coach Diego Simeone's heart remained firm even after his eyes feasted on all the confusion within Atlético Madrid's box. He wasn't that worried, as his players were so good at defending corner kicks delivered into the box.

However, what really tickled the coach's intuitive sixth sense was the sight of Zachary standing before the edge of the 18-yard box. The cunning young bastard had been within the fray inside the box. But after seemingly arguing with one of the Atlético Madrid defenders, he'd turned away in anguish before slowly walking towards the edge of the box. And on reaching there, he'd immediately taken up the position while projecting a feeling of not being interested in the corner kick.

"Damn it! This is bad!"

An ominous thought immediately swirled around Coach Diego Simeone's mind. With all the haste he could muster, he started rushing towards the touchline while yelling, "Hurry! Close down Zachary quickly. Don't let him..."

But right before Coach Diego Simeone could finish the command, Andrea Pirlo took the corner. The Italian Maestro's passing skills were among the best in the world. So, he effortlessly floated the ball towards Zachary, who'd already positioned himself at the edge of the box.

Zachary, on his part, was like a mountain lion pouncing forward as the ball approached his position. With a mighty swing of his left leg, he connected with the ball from Pirlo on the volley and sent it flying toward the goal.

"Damn!"

Coach Diego Simeone's heart jumped into his throat as his eyes followed the ball's trajectory. The ball was so fast, and before he could even blink, it took a slight deflection off the foot of a player in an Atlético Madrid jersey before homing into the back of the net.

With that, the Italian giants finally completed their comeback with another goal from Zachary during the 85th minute. The score was thus 2:1 in favor of the team from Turin, and they were taking firm steps towards achieving their sixth consecutive victory in the Champions League.

"We're in trouble."

Coach Diego Simeone sighed with helplessness. He couldn't believe that his players had lost a crucial lead during the final minutes of gameplay. He was disheartened, and his mood was already sinking into the abyss of desperation as he watched the Juventus players celebrating on one side of the pitch.

"Boss!" Juan Vizcaíno, the ever-dutiful assistant, suddenly called out from beside him.

For some reason, Coach Diego Simeone felt his heart skip a bit. He turned to face his assistant and asked, "What is it this time, Juan?"

"Boss!" The assistant said. "David Fuster has just scored another goal for Olympiacos in the other final game of Group A. As we speak, the score is 5:2, and Olympiacos is on course to defeat Malmö."

"Eehh!"

Coach Diego Simeone's shoulders drooped as he received double emotional damage. He felt like the universe was working against his team, and he couldn't come to terms with the fact that a third-rate team like Olympiacos could score five goals in a single Champions League game. What was next? Were pigs about to start to fly? Everything didn't make sense to the coach, and he felt even more disoriented. At that moment, he really wished to abandon the game and return to the dressing room. But he knew he couldn't really follow through with the thought as he was the manager of a top European football club.

"Boss!" Juan Vizcaíno, the assistant, called out again.

"Yes, Juan," Diego Simeone said without masking the annoyance within his voice. "Don't tell me that Olympiacos has scored a sixth goal!"

"No, that's not it," Juan replied. "I only wanted to inquire whether I should continue prepping Níguez and Turan as substitutes."

Taking a deep breath, Coach Diego collected himself and said, "Go ahead and tell them to warm up. We'll throw everything we have at Juventus during these remaining few minutes. Maybe, we can cause a last-minute upset and qualify for the next stage of the Champions League. I hope that luck will be on our side."

Chapter 507 Checking Out the Competition

After conceding a goal, the Atlético Madrid players became more daring on the attack. They launched a series of relentless attacks, hoping to score an equalizer and possibly a winning goal before the ninety-minute mark. However, all their efforts still remained fruitless due to the tactical discipline and defensive solidity of the Juventus squad.

The Juventus players, on their part, were quite impressive during the final minutes. By employing strategies like time wasting, fouls, and parking the bus, they repeatedly took the sting out of Atlético Madrid's offensive attempts. They also constantly fell back as a team and remained solid in defense in order to deny the Madrid-based team any chance to score a goal. As such, they maintained their lead and managed to win the game with a score of 2:1 after six minutes of injury time.

The following morning, Zachary woke up late and went through his post-match yoga recovery routine within the comfort of his expansive master bedroom. He was in a pretty good mood since he'd scored another two goals in the Champions League the previous night. As such, his motions were seamless and brimming with spirit as he went from pose to pose, hoping to quicken his post-match recovery.

After completing the yoga routine, Zachary quickly cleaned up and put on a brand-new Nike tracksuit before heading downstairs. On arriving in the kitchen area of his new villa, he spotted Jaslene, his newly-hired maid, cleaning the kitchen.

She was a beautiful young girl of about 20-something years, and from what Zachary had heard, she was Filipino by descent. That morning, she had donned a pretty and fitting maid's uniform, allowing her curves to stand out within the otherwise dull atmosphere of the villa.

"Boss!" She exclaimed as she caught sight of Zachary. "Good morning?"

"Good morning to you too, Jaslene," Zachary replied with a smile. "But I already instructed you not to call me boss, as that makes me feel like an old uncle. Just call me Zachary like the rest do. Okay?"

"Okay, boss..." She replied but stopped abruptly after realizing her mistake. Smiling shyly, she said, "Yes, Zachary. I understand."

"Good." Zachary nodded and turned his gaze away from her. After sweeping his eyes across the sparkling kitchen and taking in the spotlessly clean tiles, sinks, and floors, he asked, "Where's Inger? Is she up yet?"

"Yes, she's up already," Jaslene replied. "She should be in the dining room at the moment."

"Okay, then. I'll go, find Inger. Just continue with your work."

"Yes, boss."

Zachary could only smile helplessly in response before whirling around and heading to the dining room. On arriving, he found Inger playing with her phone while seated on one of the chairs around the dining table.

"Hello, Inger!" Zachary greeted. "How's your morning?"

Inger's smile blossomed as she turned her focus away from her phone. She cocked her head slightly and replied, "My morning is fine. How about you? You woke up late today!"

"The fatigue from yesterday's match has taken its toll on me," Zachary responded. "I decided to sleep longer to allow my body to recover quicker."

"Oh!" Inger's eyes lit up. "I watched the match together with Bjørn from here. And OMG! You were really impressive when you came on as a substitute. You even scored the equalizer and winning goal for Juventus. Congs, man."

"Thanks," Zachary replied, smiling a bit unnaturally. He always found it slightly weird when acquaintances showered him with over-the-top praises. "Is breakfast ready?"

"Yup," she replied. "I prepared chicken breast with; Avocado, rice, beetroot, spinach, Quinoa salad, and a glass of coconut water. I'll bring the food over immediately."

"Thanks."

With that said, Inger immediately headed to the kitchen before returning with the food a few minutes later. She placed it before Zachary and then went away to do her other chores.

As for Zachary, he quickly busied himself with the food. He ate with relish and finished the meal in less than ten minutes. But since he still felt hungry, he didn't just stop at that.

After consulting with Inger, he picked a glass of milk, cereals, and bananas from the fridge before swallowing them to complete his meal. And with that, he finally finished his breakfast and was thus free to focus on other things.

Coach Allegri had allowed all the Juventus players two days off after they won the match against Atlético Madrid the previous night. Thus, that very day, Zachary had ample free time on his hands, which he mostly spent resting in his new villa.

He watched birds in his gardens in the morning and then went through a light gym routine at noon before enjoying a sumptuous lunch prepared by Inger, his chef. Then, after taking a short nap in the afternoon, he had Angelo, his driver, drop him at the language school, where he spent the rest of the day studying Italian.

At around 9:00 PM, he returned home, feeling even more tired after spending hours cramming and comprehending Italian sentences. He quickly took a shower and dried himself with a towel before descending the stairs and heading to the living room. Along the way, he picked a glass of juice from the fridge before continuing further and settling in front of the large screen to watch European Football.

Since it was Wednesday night, there were many Champions League games scheduled. For instance, there were high-stakes games like Barcelona vs. PSG, AS Roma vs. Man City, and Chelsea vs. Sporting. They were all live on different paid Television channels in Italy.

"You're also going to watch football!" Coach Bjørn Peters, Zachary's fitness trainer, exclaimed on seeing him settle on the couch beside him.

"Yes," Zachary replied after taking a sip of his juice. "I want to check out the competition."

Coach Bjørn Peters chuckled. "Checking out the competition is a good practice. But aren't you worried about oversleeping and being late for the team training tomorrow?"

"Nah," Zachary replied with a shake of his head. "We have another day off tomorrow. I don't have to get up early."

"Well, that's new!" Coach Bjørn Peters exclaimed.

"What's new?" Zachary inquired.

"I meant Coach Allegri giving you a day off," the fitness trainer replied with a smile. "The man should be over the moon after Juventus defeated Atlético Madrid."

"He sure is," Zachary said as the image of Coach Allegri celebrating the win yesterday appeared in his mind. After the final whistle had sounded, the coach went crazy with excitement and even celebrated before his opponent - Diego Simeone. But he didn't just stop at that. The coach also awarded all the Juventus players two days of rest as an appreciative gesture for the job well done against Atlético Madrid.

"That was some crazy stuff..."

Slowly pushing the memories of yesternight out of his mind, Zachary fixed his eyes on the large screen. The next moment, his eyes lit up when he noticed that the match on the screen was between Barcelona and PSG. He quickly placed his glass of juice on the table before focusing on the proceedings displayed on the screen.

As usual, Barcelona was the dominant team on the field of play, especially with players like Messi, Neymar, Pedro, Luis Suárez, Andrés Iniesta, and Sergio Busquets in their ranks. After conceding a goal in the opening stages, they quickly flew forward like packs of wolves on the hunt as they mounted a never-ending series of attacks on the Paris-based side. Their teamwork was so out of this world, and they relied on their signature Tiki-taka football to dominate possession and break down PSG's tenacity as the match proceeded forward. And with that, they managed to win the game by three goals to one after Lionel Messi, Neymar, and Luis Suárez found the back of the net during the 19th, 41st, and 79th minutes, respectively.

"This Barcelona team is something else," Bjørn Peters said with a sigh after the game ended. "They are always dictating the tempo in every game they play. No offense to you, Zachary, but I think they have the most lethal attacking combination in the world."

"No offense taken," Zachary replied with a smile. "I'm aware that Barcelona is a great team. If we chanced upon them, we would have to pull out all stops to get even a draw out of them. They are really a scary team, especially with Messi, Neymar, Iniesta, Suárez, and their Tiki-taka football to support them."

"That's true," Bjørn Peters said, nodding. "I have a gut feeling that they will be the biggest obstacle for you and your Juventus as you try to win the Champions League trophy this season. You'll have to defeat them before dreaming about lifting the most prestigious trophy in Europe."

"True," Zachary agreed as memories of his previous life manifested within his mind. "If we can't beat Barcelona, we should forget about this season's Champions League trophy."

Zachary had been a staunch supporter of the game during his previous life. He was well aware that Barcelona would play incredibly well and put up a series of impressive performances in the Champions League that very season. And if the future proceeded as it should, Barcelona would even overpower Juventus in the final and lift the 2014-15 Champions League trophy. In other words, the Barcelona players were the fated champions of Europe that very season.

Chapter 508 Conclusion of the Champions League Group Stages

After the Barcelona game ended, Zachary didn't immediately go to bed. Instead, he remained seated in front of the TV screen, hoping to learn the results of all the other crucial Champions League matches played around Europe. Of course, he wasn't alone, but still in the company of Coach Bjørn Peters, who'd also stayed awake to watch the post-match show.

"Welcome back from that fascinating game of football between Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain," Zachary heard the magnetic voice of the beautiful TV presenter reverberate through the speakers. "I'm Emilia Vasquez, your host for the Champions League Wrap-Up show on ESPN. And for those just joining us, please be informed that Barcelona has just defeated PSG 3:1 with goals from Lionel Messi, Neymar, and Luis Suárez. The result has allowed Barcelona to amass 15 points and top Group F ahead of the second-placed PSG. As such, they will be one of the top-seeded teams during the Champions League Round of Sixteen Draw scheduled for Monday, 15th December 2014."

Turning to glance at one of the in-studio pundits, Emilia Vasquez continued, "Shaka Hislop! The Champions League group stage has concluded satisfactorily for some and frustratingly for others, depending on the team one supports. Isn't that right?"

Shaka Hislop smiled and said, "Except for Liverpool and Atlético Madrid, all the other teams we expected to qualify did qualify. Strong sides like Bayern Munich, Barcelona, Juventus, Chelsea, and Real Madrid all topped their respective groups. So, I can confidently say that this season's UEFA Champions League group stage ended in a satisfactory way."

Emilia Vasquez nodded. "According to you, which teams are the best performers for the just-concluded group stage?"

Shaka Hislop immediately replied, "First on the list is definitely Real Madrid. The Madrid-based side was impressive throughout the group stages. With their phenomenal star-studded line-up, which includes highly-gifted attacking players like Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema, Toni Kroos, Modric, and Marcello, they won all their group games and amassed a total of 18 points. They are by far the best-performing team of the group stages with their six out of six wins and a goal difference of 14."

"Second on the list would be Juventus," Shaka Hislop continued. "The Turin-based club has been in fine form after gaining a boost with the addition of their new playmaker/goal-machine - Zachary Bamba. Similar to Real Madrid, they won all their group games but only fell short because of their goal difference of 12."

"Third on the list is Bayern Munich. The Munich-based side was also impressive during the group stages. They won five of their games and only lost the game against Manchester City. With their goal difference of 12, they are the third-best performing team in the group stages, just barely ahead of Barcelona, who only have a goal difference of 10."

"Thank you, Shaka," Emilia Vasquez said and turned towards another in-studio pundit. "Joshua Morales! The Champions League group stages are over, and the representatives of the remaining clubs will travel to Nyon, Switzerland, for the draw of the round of 16 on Monday. What should we expect from this draw? Which teams could potentially face off against each other in the Round of Sixteen knock-out phase?"

"Thank you, Emilia," Joshua Morales said with a smile. "The rules for the draw are pretty straightforward. The top seeds, or in other words, the winners of each group, will go into one pot, while the second seeds in another pot. Then a chosen UEFA representative will draw the teams from the two pots together to determine who faces who. But please note that a club can't meet an opponent from their own association or from the group stages, and the group winners will be away in the first round of fixtures."

"For this Champions League draw," Joshua Morales continued, "the top seeds are the group winners in the first pot, who are Real Madrid, Juventus, Bayern Munich, Chelsea, FC Porto, AS Monaco, Borussia Dortmund, and Barcelona. On the other hand, the runners-up in the other pot are FC Basel, Manchester City, Olympiacos, Schalke 04, Shakhtar Donetsk, Bayer Leverkusen, Arsenal, and Paris Saint-Germain."

"Following that reasoning, potential match-ups for the Round of Sixteen include teams from the first pot, such as Juventus, Real Madrid, or Barcelona, facing off against runners-up from the second pot, such as FC Basel, Manchester City, or Olympiacos."

"Does that mean there's a possibility for a match-up between Real Madrid and Manchester City or Juventus and Arsenal?" Emilia Vasquez, the ESPN TV presenter, chimed in with a smile.

"Yup, there's a chance," Joshua Morales answered. "If fate wills it, we could see Arsenal facing Juventus or Barcelona facing Manchester City. It all depends on how the draw on Monday will go..."

As minutes passed, Zachary got bored with the progress of the TV show. As a professional footballer, he knew there was no point in dwelling on stuff he couldn't control. So, instead of worrying about the opponent Juventus could possibly face during the Round of Sixteen, Zachary was better off going to bed and resuming his targeted training tomorrow. And with that thought in mind, he quickly got up from his seat, hoping to head back to his room for the night.

"Are you finally going to bed?" Coach Bjørn Peters asked before Zachary could even take the first step.

"Yes," Zachary said, "It's already past one. I can't stay up any longer."

Coach Bjørn Peters smiled and nodded. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Go ahead. I'm all ears."

"Which teams in the runners-up pot would you want Juventus to face during the Round of Sixteen?"

Zachary smiled and answered, "Shakhtar Donetsk, Bayer Leverkusen, Schalke 04, and FC Basel."

"Eh!" Coach Bjørn Peters exclaimed. "You only wish to play against the weaker opponents?"

"True," Zachary said with a shrug. "Why would I go hunting a wolf when there's an option of hunting a deer?"

Coach Bjørn Peters chuckled. "Then which team in the runners-up pot would you not want to play against during the Round of Sixteen?"

"Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester City, and Arsenal," Zachary replied. "I would prefer not to face those in the Round of Sixteen. But again, if the draw pits us against them, I'll still welcome the prospect of competing against them. The games will be tough, but our odds of winning will still be high."

"Okay, then," Coach Bjørn Peters said with a sigh. "Hope you get an easy opponent for the draw on Monday as I really wish to see you progress further into the Champions League. I can then brag to my friends that my client is doing wonders on the top European Football Stage."

"Worry not!" Zachary said seriously. "I'll do my all to win the Champions League at one point in my career. If not this year, then I will try for next year. And if not next year, I'll try for the year after that and then repeat the process until I help Juventus to bring the Champions League Trophy to Turin. That's the minimum expectation of myself at this club."

"Ata boy!" Coach Bjørn Peters said, giving Zachary a thumbs up. "As the saying goes, if you believe in yourself and have dedication, consistency, and pride, you'll be a winner. So, keep working hard, and you'll lift that Champions League trophy sooner than you know."

"Thanks for the encouragement," Zachary said with a smile.

"Just a moment before you go to bed," Coach Bjørn Peters suddenly said solemnly.

"Yes, what is it, coach?"

"You haven't played for any country. Right?" The fitness trainer glanced at Zachary with a glint in his eyes.

"Yup." Zachary nodded. "I haven't represented any country in international competitions, but..."

"You don't have to explain to me your reasons," Coach Bjørn Peters hurriedly cut in. "But if you're still considering a country to represent, could you put Norway in your thoughts?"

"Coach!" Zachary said with a shake of his head. "I have already chosen a country to represent. As I speak, there are people already helping me to process citizenship papers for that country. So, I can't represent Norway in the future. I'm sorry."

"Oh!" Coach Bjørn Peters' eyes widened. "Which country is so lucky to have you represent them?"

Zachary smiled and replied, "I can't say for the moment. But you'll know in a few weeks."

He had already been in touch with the officials from Ivory Coast multiple times. They were working fast to process his papers and had even hinted that they would finalize everything before the end of the year. So, going by that, he would soon be a citizen of Ivory Coast, and he might also be eligible to play for them in January's African Cup of Nations.

"Oh, okay," Coach Bjørn Peters said after hearing Zachary's response. "It's a pity you've already chosen to play for another country. But again, you must have your own reasons. So, let me wish you the best of luck while representing that country."

"Thanks for understanding, coach." Zachary smiled. "I have to go to bed now."

"Okay, goodnight."

"Good night to you too, coach," Zachary said before walking out of the living room. In a matter of seconds, he ascended the stairs quickly and arrived in his bedroom quickly. He then jumped into bed, hoping to enter a deep slumber and allow his body to recover from the fatigue he'd accumulated playing against Atlético Madrid.

Having rested for two days, Zachary and his teammates returned their focus to their domestic duties. Under the guidance of Max Allegri, their coach, they trained intensively on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday while doing all they could to refine their tactics and hone their match fitness. Then, when Sunday, 14th December 2014, arrived, they put on their match gear and welcomed Sampdoria at the Juventus Stadium for yet another breathtaking Serie A battle.

The game was an early kick-off scheduled to commence at 12:30 PM. But even then, it still attracted an enormous crowd of roughly 39,000 football fans, most of which were Juventus supporters. And since Juventus had been performing incredibly well since the start of the new season, those fans were in high spirits while awaiting the commencement of the game. Their enthusiasm was so out of this world, and they went all out to sing the popular Juventus chants.

But there were still exceptions in the crowd, and not all the supporters were busy chanting Juventus songs. Instead, there were also those within their ranks huddled together in the middle section of the stands while discussing their expectations for their team.

"If we defeat Sampdoria, then we will have extended our perfect winning streak in the Serie A to fifteen matches," Paolo Favero, a staunch supporter of Juventus, said to his friend. "We're really flying, man."

"Yeah! We're indeed flying." Luca Maroni, his friend, who was also naturally a Juventus supporter, agreed. "If we factor in our Champions League campaign, then we already have a perfect winning streak of twenty-one games. It's simply unbelievable!"

"We've really become invincible after acquiring Zachary," Paolo said.

"Yeah, we have," Luca agreed. "By the way, how many goals does he have at the moment?"

Narrowing his eyes slightly, Paolo replied, "Thirteen goals in the Serie A and nine in the Champions League. It's simply unbelievable! He plays as an attacking midfielder in most games but still scores all those goals."

"Well, I think he's scoring a lot because of how Coach Allegri utilizes him," Luca said. "Within our standard 3-5-2 formation, he often starts in central midfield alongside Andrea Pirlo, our deep-lying playmaker, and Claudio Marchisio, our defensive midfielder. However, he usually pushes forward and

joins our strikers as an additional attacker during critical moments. And that allows him more room and flexibility to provide assists or shoot and score goals."

"True," Paolo agreed. "He's a true in-and-out creative midfielder who can play as a Mezzala, a box-to-box midfielder, a false nine, and an advanced playmaker. Man! We're so lucky to have him."

"Indeed," Luca agreed again. "But he will face a tough challenge when we play against Cagliari Calcio next Thursday. You know how the Cagliari fans are. They will always use whatever means possible, including racial insults, to help their team win the game."

"Yeah, I know," Paolo said. "It's a must that they will use racial insults to throw Zachary off his rhythm. And since he's the best player in the Italian Serie A at the moment, they might take the insults to a never-before-seen level. I hope things won't get so bad to the point of forcing him to walk off the pitch."

Shaking his head, Luca sighed and said, "Let's pray that the worst won't occur. I don't want us to lose the game against Cagliari because one of our players walked off the pitch. That would truly be unfortunate."

"Yeah..."

The minutes passed quickly, and soon 12:30 PM arrived. And with the referee's whistle, the Serie A battle between Juventus and Sampdoria kicked off right on time under the fire of the noon sun.

For that game, Coach Allegri had brought out most of his top guns. Gianluigi Buffon was in goal, while Giorgio Chiellini, Leonardo Bonucci, and Martín Angelo Ogbonna were the three defenders. Then, Arturo Vidal, Andrea Pirlo, and Zachary Bemba were the three players holding the reigns in central midfield, while Kwadwo Asamoah and Stephan Lichtsteiner were on the flanks to complete the midfield of five. And finally, Fernando Llorente and Carlos Tévez were playing as the two strikers to complete Juventus' 3-5-2 starting formation against Juventus.

The start of the game was pretty intense, as the Juventus players flew forward and launched spectacular attacks through their creative midfielders linking up play with the wide players. And for the next few

minutes, stunning runs through the wings became the order of the day until Juventus finally created a real goal-scoring chance during the 11th minute.

Stephan Lichtsteiner was the man in action at that moment. After controlling a pin-point pass from Zachary, he raced forward and speared deeper into Sampdoria's half like a bullet train on the rails. He skipped past a sliding challenge from an opponent and then stepped into the final third. Then, after the angle opened up, he unleashed a raking cross into the box where Fernando Llorente was already lurking.

"Whoosh!"

Fernando Llorente reacted immediately and leaped for the incoming ball. He effortlessly outmuscled Alessio Romagnoli, the Sampdoria center-back, in a battle for aerial superiority before heading the ball past the keeper to score Juventus' 1st goal during the 12th minute.

The game continued after the celebrations, and like always, Juventus didn't turn down the heat even after scoring the opening goal. The Old Lady players remained rampant while launching more relentless attacks on Sampdoria's defense. And as the game proceeded forward, they created more breathtaking chances as they searched for their second goal.

Firstly, Carlos Tevez threatened to double the lead during the 22nd minute. However, a slight deflection on an opposing center-back's boot took the Argentine's shot wide and away from the goal.

Moments later, during the 24th minute, Zachary was also about to score after unleashing a long-range missile from the outside-of-the-eighteen. But a stunning save from the keeper denied his effort, and he could only place his hands behind his head dejectedly.

But that was not all. Fernando Llorente and Carlos Tevez, the two Juventus strikers, were again just inches away from scoring during the 33rd and 41st minutes, respectively. But another spectacular save from the keeper and a moment of brilliant defending by one of the center-backs denied the two strikers the opportunity to extend the lead before half-time. As such, the game headed into the break with Juventus only leading by a goal to nil against the underperforming Sampdoria side.

After the fifteen-minute break, Juventus was even more threatening going forward — and Sergio Romero, the Sampdoria keeper, soon had to make yet another vital save to deny Fernando Llorente's finish after a sweeping counter. But that was not the end of Sampdoria's nightmares. Minutes later, during the 61st minute, the busy keeper was called into action again to deny Juventus from taking the lead through another long-range shot from Zachary.

The game was obviously one-sided, with the Juventus players looking ever more dangerous on the attack as the match approached the 70th minute. Moreover, the Old Lady players didn't just continue relying on wing play and long balls but also utilized the brilliant passing abilities of their players to hoard more than 70% possession during most moments of the game. And with that, they created even more opportunities on goal by relying on fast and snappy exchanges through the middle.

They were really doing their utmost to score the second goal and seal their win against Sampdoria, and as a result, everyone watching the game thought their win was a sure-and-done deal.

But football can change in moments, as it takes only seconds to create an opportunity. And such a scenario soon transpired in the game between Juventus and Sampdoria.

Three of Sampdoria's attacking players took one opportunity to race forward after a failed Juventus corner kick during the 76th minute. They exchanged lightning-fast passes as they launched a counterattack that caught Juventus napping.

Then seconds later, the ball naturally found its way to Stefano Okaka, one of Sampdoria's strikers, who remained composed and hammered it into the back of the net to score the equalizer for the visitors during the 77th minute. And with that, the score was back to 1:1 with only 13 minutes + added time remaining to the end of the game.

"This is bad," Coach Allegri exclaimed as he watched the Sampdoria players celebrating their equalizing goal on one side of the pitch. "I fear that the chances we missed early on may come back to haunt us."

"True, we have a tricky situation on our hands." Maurizio Trombetta, his assistant, nodded with a frown. "This is one of those strange games of the season where our luck is always at its worst. We've been the dominant team ever since the start of the match. We have also created many opportunities and attempted more than fifteen shots on target. However, we still couldn't score and kill the game off. And even worse, we conceded an equalizing goal during the 77th minute. Truly unfortunate!"

"Yeah, we're very unlucky today," Coach Allegri agreed. "But fortunately, we still have thirteen minutes to make something happen. As long as we utilize our players well, we'll create more chances and hopefully score before the ninety-minute mark."

"What's your plan, boss?" Coach Trombetta asked.

"The key to winning such matches is trusting and relying on our best players," Coach Allegri said. "We need to push them to work harder and create more opportunities. And with that, their individual brilliance will bloom in great splendor, and they can make something happen out of nothing. That's what we need at this moment. That's what we need to win this game and maintain our perfect winning streak in all competitions."

"Okay," Coach Trombetta said with a smile. "So, going by your words, we must rely on Zachary?"

"Not just Zachary alone," Coach Allegri said, "We also need Andrea Pirlo, Stephan Lichtsteiner, and Carlos Tevez if we want sure results."

And with that said, the coach didn't wait for a response from his assistant. Instead, he walked towards the touchline, ready to summon Andrea Pirlo before giving him the match instructions for the final minutes.

Chapter 510 Another Win

"Andrea! Listen well!" Coach Max Allegri said to his deep-lying playmaker after he arrived on the touchline. "The next few minutes will be crucial for us if we wish to win this game. We have got to play with a clear purpose when on the ball in order to get a goal quickly."

Andrea Pirlo nodded and said, "I'm listening, coach. Go on."

"Okay, here is the plan," the coach continued. "Now that Sampdoria has scored, they will grow confident and launch more attacks against us. So, our strategy is to wait and absorb the pressure until we catch them off guard and counterattack against them."

"Yeah, that might really work," Andrea Pirlo said, nodding pensively.

"Not so quick," the Coach hurriedly said. "There's more. At the onset of the counter, I'll expect the player with the ball to pass it to you as quickly as possible. And immediately, when you receive the ball, all our attacking players, including Zachary, Tevez, Lichtsteiner, and even Fernando, will have to start sprinting toward Sampdoria's box. I expect to see a scenario where Fernando and Zachary are bolting through the middle while Tevez is on the left wing and Lichtsteiner is on the right flank. And with such a scenario, you will have to work fast to release one of the players. Depending on the circumstances on the field, you'll utilize your vision and passing range to unleash a through ball quickly to one of those players. As long as you time your pass well, we should be able to catch Sampdoria's defense napping and score a goal. Okay?"

"Okay, I understand, coach," Andrea Pirlo said.

Coach Allegri nodded and said, "You can convey my instructions to the rest of the players on the pitch. But remember that we must use the first opportunity that comes our way effectively. After the restart, we must make our first counterattack count and get that winning goal. Otherwise, the Sampdoria players will get wind of our strategy, and they will turtle up and prevent us from easily attacking them again on the counter. Understood?"

"I understand, coach."

"Good," Coach Allegri said and nodded again. "The match is about to restart. Head back and execute all my instructions. Remember, we have only one chance."

"Okay, Coach."

With that said, Andrea Pirlo quickly chugged down some water before running back towards the pitch. And since the game was yet to restart due to the prolonged celebrations of the Sampdoria players, he immediately went around, conveying the coach's instructions to the rest of his teammates. For secrecy, he, of course, didn't shout them out loud but whispered them in the ears of most of the players until they all understood the coach's strategy for the last few minutes.

FWEEEEEEE

With the referee's whistle, the game restarted, with all the fans expecting that Juventus would immediately go all out to get a goal. However, a few minutes after the restart, they all realized their predictions were totally wrong when the Old Lady players decided to turtle up and absorb the pressure. And instead of doing their utmost to launch attacks and score, the Juventus players played defensive football that confused many watching the game.

"What has happened to Juventus?" Paolo Favero, a Juventus fan, exclaimed after noticing that his team was playing total defensive football. "Are the players tired? Are they satisfied with only a draw? Why have they stopped attacking?"

"Beats me!" Luca Maroni, his friend, said with a shrug. "Maybe, they are guarding against conceding another goal. You know, a draw is always better than a loss."

"Are you for real, man?" Paolo exclaimed. "You want us to get a draw against Sampdoria? Then, what happens when we play Inter or AC Milan?"

Luca shrugged but didn't answer. At that moment, his eyes were on the pitch, taking in a scenario where Sampdoria had just launched another attack on Juventus.

With renewed confidence after scoring the equalizing goal, the Sampdoria players played beautiful short passes from one end of the field to the other as they tried to stretch Juventus' defensive shape. They also dictated the tempo for minutes until they found a passing angle and sent forth an abrupt through ball forward to release Pedro Obiang, their left midfielder, on the left wing.

"This is not good."

Luca heard another fan grumble as Pedro Obiang controlled the ball. But Luca's eyes remained glued on the pitch, and he watched the Sampdoria man make a spirited run that allowed him to spear deeper into Juventus' half. And when the angle opened up, Pedro Obiang released a teasing cross toward Juventus' box, where a few Sampdoria players were lurking.

It was another goal-scoring chance for Sampdoria, and the players in the box reacted appropriately. The Juventus players leaped high, hoping to outsmart their opponents and clear the ball. On the other hand, the Sampdoria players jumped high, hoping to attack the cross and score the winning goal. The players of both teams were obviously doing their utmost to help their respective sides gain the advantage.

Fortunately for the Juventus supporters, Leonardo Bonucci, one of the Juventus defenders, came out on top during the battle for aerial superiority within the box. He outjumped everyone else before heading the ball and clearing it away from the crowded Juventus box.

"This is a chance..."

Luca Maroni's heart skipped a beat as he watched the ball rise above many players before descending toward the right side of the box, where Andrea Pirlo happened to be standing. And before Luca could catch his breath, the highly-experienced Maestro controlled the ball while spinning around to escape the entanglement of an opponent.

But that was just the beginning of Pirlo's magic on the pitch. He prodded the ball forward and past another opponent before unleashing a raking pass toward the right wing. And with that lightning-fast through ball, he managed to find Stephan Lichtsteiner, the attacking wing-back, who had long started making a spirited run toward the other side of the pitch.

On the right flank, Stephan Lichtsteiner's spirited run was as breathtaking as ever. He didn't even halt to control the ball — but just took it in his stride as he continued bolting towards the other side of the pitch like a predator on the hunt. And when he finally stepped into the final third, he sent forth a lofted cross all the way over the field and toward the left flank, hoping to find Zachary.

As it was a counterattack, most Sampdoria players had not yet retaken their defensive positions. As such, Zachary managed to control the ball under no pressure before continuing toward Sampdoria's box at breakneck speed. He cut through the left wing like a whirlwind and soon started approaching the box like a raging Tsunami.

There were, of course, a few Sampdoria players who'd returned or remained back, barring Zachary's way toward the box. But with a slight shift of pace and a couple of well-timed side steps, he sent them packing and left them in the dust. He then stepped into the box and rounded the keeper, who'd come out of the goal to meet him, before burying the ball into the net to score Juventus 2nd goal during the 83rd minute.

"GOAAAL! Zachary has done it again!" Luca Maroni yelled as the ball homed into the back of the net. He was over the moon as he jumped and hugged the other Juventus fans around him to celebrate Juventus' second goal for the night.

"This counterattack was truly spectacular," he said to Paolo Favero after the cheers started fading. "I can literally feel goosebumps all over my skin just recalling the counterattack. Within seconds, Pirlo found Lichtsteiner on the right flank, who, in turn, found Zachary on the left wing. And from there on, Zachary executed his magic on the pitch and scored the goal. This counterattack was surely for the record books."

"Yeah," Paolo agreed. "We've become more lethal on the counterattack with Zachary, Lichtsteiner, Tevez, and Pirlo playing together on the pitch. When they combine, they turn into monsters on the counter, and I don't think there's an opponent out there who can stop them."

"Zachary has scored his 14th goal in his 14th Serie A appearance this season," Luca said. "He's averaging a single goal for every game he plays. Doesn't this mean that he could potentially score 38 goals by the end of the season?"

"Don't underestimate his abilities," Paolo scoffed. "There are days when he will bag a brace or a hat trick. So, going by that, he might score more than forty goals in the Serie A this season."

After the goal celebrations, the game continued with the Sampdoria players going all out in search of an equalizer. They showed glimpses of brilliant football as they launched a series of attacks on Juventus' defense over the next few minutes. And due to their relentlessness, they even forced all the Juventus players to fall back and execute the 'park the bus tactic' during the last five minutes of gameplay. For sure, they were doing all they could to get the equalizer against Juventus before the game ended.

However, the efforts of Sampdoria remained fruitless, especially since they lacked the creativity to break through a defensive-minded Juventus team that was hell-bent on protecting their lead. They could not create a meaningful goal-scoring chance or even get an opportunity to take a shot on target during the game's closing stages. As a result, they lost the match against Juventus by two goals to one when the final whistle sounded after five minutes of added time.
