

THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME

Chapter 10 - The Crucial Day I

Twilight had just melted away. Gone was the open blue sky that had blessed the previous day. Above lay an unbroken layer of white and grey, brilliant where the sunshine broke through and dark where it didn't.

"It may rain in a few hours," Zachary intoned as he withdrew his gaze from the sky.

"What are you worried about." Kasongo gave a slight smile and said, "We'll be done with the trials by then. The scouts will only stay here a few hours."

They were at the center of the pitch amongst the 26 other players that had passed the physical fitness test the previous day. It was already 8 AM. Every single player on the field had already donned their soccer attire. They were only waiting for the arrival of Coach Damata and his team to start the official soccer trials. Zachary wasn't bored since he was accompanied by his new friend.

"That makes sense," Zachary concurred as he took a look around the stadium. "Are you sure the scouts will be coming today?" He inquired, creasing his brows. There were no coaches or scouts to be seen anywhere on the field or in the stands. He was beginning to think he had misheard the actual date of the trials.

"Relax," Kasongo stated confidently. "They'll be here. I'm sure," he laughed.

"I forgot to ask," Zachary intoned, locking gazes with Kasongo. "Did you move out of the hotel yesterday?"

"Of course," Kasongo patted his chest. "I have already moved into the Rabi Hotel," he said, looking pleased with himself.

"What the f**k!" Zachary's eyes widened. "What difference is there between the Rabi and Hollybum hotels?" He yelled, attracting a few gazes from the surrounding players.

"One is named Rabi, the other Hollybum," Kasongo replied seriously, counting on his fingers to emphasize his point.

"For Christ's sake," Zachary took a few steps towards the short guy. "How many four-star hotels are in Lubumbashi? Your father only has to check those that charge more than 100\$ a night to find you. Can't you see that?"

"That is indeed true," Kasongo blanched. "I'll move to a different one after the matches conclude today," he assured. Gêtt the latest chapters on [no/velbin\(.\)com](http://no/velbin(.)com)

"Forget it, man," Zachary sighed. "I'll help you select a hotel after the trials. I don't understand why I'm even helping you." He grumbled. He didn't want to see a talented player die prematurely.

"Thank you," Kasongo laughed. "From the moment I saw you, I knew that you were an honorable person. What can I do to repay you? Should I link you to my sister? She is cute." Kasongo whispered.

"If she is as short as you, don't bother," Zachary harrumphed.

He was about to continue his conversation with Kasongo when he heard a few players on the field yelling. "The coaches are here. The coaches are here..." They sounded like kindergarten kids that had just seen an ice cream truck.

Zachary ignored the excitement around him and turned towards the gate of the stadium. Coach Damata was leading a group of about 50 people towards the stands of the stadium.

He noticed that there were about twenty Caucasians in the crowd. They wore sunglasses and large hats to shield themselves from the non-existent sun. That was what he assumed. There was also an aged man and a young girl, not much older than himself, among them. The rest seemed to be fellow Congolese, possibly from the teams in the Linafoot National League. He could recognize a few from Lubumbashi Sport and Racing Club de Kinshasa. All the scouts he had been expecting were finally here. His mood lifted.

"I told you they would be here," Kasongo's voice sounded from behind him.

"Are they all from the ADTA?" Zachary asked. The African Development Talent Agency was the organization that usually sponsored students to the French and Belgian academies.

"Of course not," Kasongo intoned. "These are scouts from the sponsoring organizations behind the ADTA. Some are even from the actual academies in France."

"You better perform your best today," Kasongo warned. "I don't think they will return here after today."

"Are you sure," Zachary creased his brows. "Where did you get all this information?"

"I have reliable sources. My info is completely legit." Kasongo smiled.

"All right." Zachary was excited. He felt rejuvenated after the hearty meal he had had the previous day.

"Be sharp," Kasongo whispered.

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After Damata led the group of scouts to the stands, he jogged to the pitch together with his fellow coaches.

The scouts were all seated close to the running tracks of the stadium. The Caucasians amongst them held very high tech cameras. Some had binoculars and notebooks. The African scouts, on the other hand, had their arms folded over their chests, with stern expressions on their faces. They looked like they were ready to punch someone. They carried no equipment whatsoever to keep track of the players on the field.

In seats at the very bottom of the stands, a young blonde girl holding an overly long Nikon camera was conversing with an aged man, also a scout.

"Grandpa," she began. "Why did we come here. Do you know of any world-class talents here? We should have traveled to either Nigeria, Cameroon, or Egypt. At least, they've been winning the African Cup of Nations. I think we're wasting our time here."

"Kristin," the old man smiled. "Remember, if you want to become a good scout, never overlook any place. Sometimes, real gems are concealed in obscure places. All we have to do is unearth them." He lectured.

"Will we really find someone talented here?" Kristin inquired. "Because if we don't, the other shareholders will push you out this time around."

"Don't worry," the old man replied. "One of the coaches is a friend of mine. He already informed me that there are two or three promising talents here. The only challenge will be snatching them from the French teams."

"Two to three talents?" Kristin frowned. "Do you have a file on them, grandpa? Why haven't I heard anything about this?"

"Well, here you go," the old man handed two files to the girl. "You haven't been around for the past two days. While you were touring the game parks and watching buffalos and chimpanzees, I was busy doing my job."

"Don't bring up the topic again, grandpa," Kristin implored. "How can you travel to Africa and leave without seeing the wildlife? You missed out on all the fun."

She opened the files about the players.

"Stephen Mangala, Zachary Bemba, and Paul Kasongo?" She spoke softly, lisping slightly. The African surnames were difficult to pronounce. "There's basically no information about them in the file!" She looked towards the old man by her side.

He spread out his arms. "Welcome to Africa," he smiled. "Information about young players here is non-existent. We'll see just how good they are from their performance in the match."

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After the coaches returned to the pitch, they led the twenty-six players through light warm-ups before anything else. Everyone stretched and ran short distances to warm their muscles. When they finished the exercises, they returned to the center of the field to listen to instructions from the coaching staff.

"A good morning to you all," Coach Damata greeted, smiling.

"Good morning, Coach Damata," the voices of the players boomed in a chorus, returning the salutation. They all seemed enthused by the presence of the scouts in the stands.

"I see you're all on time," Damata grinned. "Keep up the good spirit of sportsmanship," he urged solemnly before continuing.

"We will begin a trial match shortly. We've grouped you into two teams that will face off."

"Please note the match will only last sixty minutes. So, you will get less than forty minutes to impress the scouts if we factor in time for substitutions. Try to do your best within that timeframe." He concluded.

The coaches had already separated the players into the green and red teams. Coach Mande laid down the charts with team formations on the running track, giving a chance to the players to learn their positions before heading to the pitch to commence the match. Zachary squeezed through the crowd of players to glance at the team charts.

->GREEN TEAM (4-4-2, Diamond.)

Goalkeeper; No. 1, Jackson Lunanga.

Right-Back; No. 2, Yannick Bangala. Left-Back; No. 3, Daniel Kidinda.

Center-Backs; No. 4, Nike Kabanga. No. 5, Samba Farouk.

Defensive-Midfielder; No. 6, Wagaluka Francis.

Attacking-Midfielder; No. 8, Paul-José Mpoku.

Left-Winger; No.11, Joel Ngandu. Right-Winger; No. 7, Edo Kayembe.

Forwards; No. 9, Stephen Mangala. No. 10, Ben Malango.

{*Subs; Leonard Busibwe, Dan Lusaka.}

->RED TEAM (4-4-2, Diamond.)

Goalkeeper; No. 1, Samuel Baraka.

Right-Back; No. 2, Awax Bondeko. Left-Back; No. 3, Patrick Luamba.

Center-Backs; No. 4, Miché Mika. No. 5, Frederic Luamba.

Defensive-Midfielder; No. 6, Chris Luyinda.

Attacking-Midfielder; No. 8, Zachary Bemba.

Left-Winger; No.11, Tony Majembe. Right-Winger; No. 7, Paul Kasongo.

Forwards; No. 9, Beni Badibanga. No. 10. Emmanuel Luboya.

{*Subs; Mpoyi Mohamed, Nathan Tambwe.}

Zachary sighed in relief after seeing the match formation charts.

The coaches seemed to have created the line-ups basing on the historical data of the players. Zachary was on the red team together with the likes of Paul Kasongo, Chris Luyinda, and his former friends, Tony and Patrick. The other side had most of the would-be superstars from his previous life. Joel Ngandu, Ngonda Mzinga, Stephen Mangala, and several others were all on the red team.

He had been placed in the number eight position, just behind the strikers, by the coaches. The number eight suited him well since it involved distributing through passes and deadly assists to the strikers. His Zinedine-Visual-Juju would come in handy in that position.

Paul Kasongo was on the right-wing, whereas Luyinda was a number six in the defensive midfielder position. Tony would be attacking from the left-wing with Patrick stationed behind him as a left-back. The rest of the players in green bibs were too obscure for Zachary to recall.

Zachary's red team appeared weak on paper. However, he wasn't going to let any obstacle come between him and a soccer academy recruitment. He was ready to do his best during the match.

"Come collect your bibs and head to the pitch," Zachary heard Coach Mande yelling from the sidelines. "The substitutes should also come here. They'll get a chance to play later in the match."

All the players hurriedly rushed towards Coach Mande. They picked up their bibs before positioning themselves on the pitch in the 4-4-2 diamond formation. Coachability and following instructions were some of the required qualities in soccer. So, all the players arrayed themselves properly in their assigned positions, waiting for the whistle.