

# THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME

## Chapter 6 - Start Of The Trials

July 19, 2010: Lubumbashi – DR Congo.

The first slither of the sun peeked over the skyline in a radiant, golden form. Brilliant gold and orange hues bled like fire in the east over the rivers, forests, and beyond Lubumbashi City.

The sun rays fell slanting through Zachary's motel-room window. He blinked a few times in an attempt to help his eyes adjust to the illumination directed right at his defenseless figure.

"What a beautiful morning," he mumbled to himself. He had slept like a baby the previous night. Although the small motel room was very cheap by Lubumbashi's standards, it had a mattress much more comfortable than the one at his grandma's house.

Zachary jumped out of bed and hurried off to wash up in preparation for the day to come.

A few minutes later, he ate a light breakfast provided by the motel and headed off to the city after handing in his key. He left his luggage in his room since he had booked it for a whole week. Moreover, he wasn't worried about thieves since there was nothing valuable to steal from his simple metallic suitcase.

After leaving the small motel in downtown Lubumbashi, he joined the crowd heading to the city center. He wanted to buy some sports gear.

The city was flooding with a sea of people moving in different directions. The higher-class strutted down the high street carrying their designer handbags and wearing their latest brands or jeans and sneakers. Whereas the lower-

class people sat down on the cold littered floor begging for money. On every street corner, buskers were singing top Lingala songs that were popular in DRC. Some sang with a marvelous talent, while others sounded like a cat in a washing machine. New and old cars, motorbikes carrying two to four passengers, and men riding bicycles were everywhere swarming like locusts.

Zachary ignored the city's chaos and kept to himself. He walked through the different second-hand shops buying the sports gear he needed for the trials. He didn't want to risk being chased away by the coaches because of inadequate preparations. Such situations had happened to him a lot in his previous life.

By midday, Zachary had bought a pair of nice second-hand boots, jerseys, and shin-guards.

He had nearly spent all the money he had won by betting on Spain winning the world cup in South Africa. With his knowledge of the future, he had made quite a few bucks when he was still in Bukavu and thought he was rich for the moment. But after one shopping trip, Zachary was nearly back to zero. But this did not dampen his mood. He was sure that he would get a lot more opportunities to make more money.

After shopping, he retired back to his motel room to rest and prepare for the ADTA's trials happening the next day. Zachary wanted to make sure that he was well-rested and not fatigued. He understood that only a well-rested player could perform a hundred percent on the pitch.

Back in his room, he went through a light Hatha-Yoga routine before opening the systems interface to check out his current progress. He was mainly concerned about his soccer-technique stats that would be scrutinized by the coaches and scouts during the trials.

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## USER STATS

->Soccer-Technique (Av. Rating: B +)

Ball Control: A +

Dribbling skills: C +

Passing accuracy: A -

Body control: B -

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Preferred foot: (Left and Right)

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After obtaining the Zizou-Visual-Juju and training with the locals back in Bukavu, his soccer-technique had stabilized at the B+ grading. He had tried to improve the grade by utilizing all means possible, but it remained unchanged despite his efforts.

The system did not offer any more rewards for the whole month but just punishments if he didn't complete the daily training schedules it had stipulated. Thus, Zachary was at a bottleneck in the meantime.

"Come what may, I will not fail." He vowed.

He was still confident that his passing, ball control, and game awareness would help him through the trials.

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Early morning the next day, Zachary hired a motorbike and headed to Kibassa-Maliba Stadium. It was the home of TP - Mazembe (his previous life's club) until 2011.

By the time he arrived at Kibassa-Maliba, there were already more than a hundred budding soccer players waiting to partake in that year's ADTA's trials. Some were seated on the pavilion seats and others on the running tracks. They had already donned their kits.

Zachary noticed some noteworthy players among them who would later become famous in Africa and beyond. Seated in the front row of the pavilion was the young Chris Luyinda that would later play for TP Mazembe, Standard Liège, and Galatasary. Zachary didn't have good feelings towards him as he had often picked on him when they were at TP Mazembe in his previous life.

There were also other would be famous names like Fredric Luamba, Nike Kabanga, and Ngonda Muzinga seated on the running tracks.

But Zachary ignored the rest and focussed on the one player who had benefitted the most from the ADTA trials in his previous life.

Leaning on the pavilion's wall was a young boy who would go on to shock the soccer world some twelve years later. He was Steven Mangala, the player who joined a high-performance soccer academy right after the trials at the age of fourteen. By the year 2022, he would already be renowned as the next Samuel Eto scoring many goals and becoming one of the best African talents in that era.

But too bad for DRC, Mangala rejected the national team's call before changing citizenship and playing for Belgium during Zachary's previous life. He was cursed by many Congolese fans all day and night but continued scoring goals like a machine. Mangala was the perfect example of what Zachary had wished to achieve in his previous life.

[I will also succeed this time. With the system, I will soon fly into the skies.]  
Zachary vowed inwardly.

He found a place to sit and put on his jersey and boots. Follow the latest novels *on no/velbin(.)com*

But his solace was soon disturbed by some annoying brats. He stood up and turned around to look at two guys who had been close friends to him before he got injured. They were Patrick Luamba and Tony Majembe that were his former classmates, and also from Bukavu. But after his accident, they distanced themselves and started making fun of him at school on a daily basis.

"Yo. Isn't this our famous captain - Zachary Bemba." Tony, a tall lanky youth, sighed. He had a physique similar to that of Peter Crouch.

"Sure it is," the bite-sized Patrick chimed in.

"What is he doing here? He should be back in Bukavu eating potatoes and milking cows."

"Maybe, he is here to see us impress the scouts and join TP Mazembe."

"That should be the case..."

[Empty tins make noise.] Zachary sighed.

"Patrick, Tony," He intoned while glaring at the two boys. "What's it that you want? Do you need another beating?" He asked while taking a few steps towards the two scoundrels. Zachary was already taller than most of the other boys his age and thus looked intimidating.

The two took a few steps back, seeming a bit panicked and occasionally stealing a few glances at Chris Luyinda in the pavilion.

[He must have put them up to this.] Zachary concluded while observing his former rival. Luyinda was always the bully in whichever team he joined. Zachary was not surprised that he was already sending his sycophants to bully him.

"Do you want another beating?" Zachary creased a brow as he glared at the boys. He wanted to make a stand and ensure that he was not disturbed by any other brats during the trials.

"You can try," Tony stammered. "But, are you sure that you want to assault an ADTA registered candidate before the trials?" He asked.

Zachary frowned and was about to give the boys a piece of his mind but then stopped. He was interrupted by a few coaches that started emerging from the dressing room and lining up on the grass in the center of the field.

All the players hurriedly exited the pavilion and congregated on the soccer pitch before the coaches.

"Good morning to you all..." A plump aged man with a long goatee bellowed. Zachary was familiar with the coach. He was Samson Damata, one of TP Mazembe's youth development staff. He was a no-nonsense man who had trained several professional players that went on to play for the DRC national team in its golden years.

"I presume that everyone here has already registered as a participant in the 2010 Lubumbashi Trials. If not, I suggest that you leave right now before I call security." Coach Samson Damata added.

None of the players turned to leave.

"Okay then," Samson intoned after a few seconds. "I guess everyone here has registered then." He patted his small belly.

"But we don't want to know your names as of yet," he yelled. "Because most of you won't be here tomorrow," he added, voice turning dramatic towards the end.

The voices of the youths started babbling anxiously like a mountain river. Zachary remained quiet. He was already in the know that the trials of 2010

would be different. In the past, TP Mazembe coaching staff would allow every soccer player who had registered to participate in the final soccer-trials. But for this year, only a select couple of dozens would remain after undergoing screening due to the presence of the French scouts.

"Quiet," Coach Damata bellowed, instantly silencing the youth.

"I won't waste my time explaining our decision to you. But you have to know that we only want twenty-six players from your group. The rest will have to go home and wait for next year's trials."

"We shall only be testing one thing. That's your physical fitness. You will never become a pro as long as you are not fit. So, our test simple." Coach Damata paused while grinning.

All the young players gathered on the pitch became nervous.

"You will have to run thirty-two laps around this field. Those with the fastest times get to stay for the main trials." Coach Damata stated.