

Football 173

Chapter 173 Semi Final (7)

As Ben was carefully assisted off the field, the Eagles' focus snapped back to the task at hand. The game had to go on, and the Eagles were determined to channel their concern for their injured teammate into victory. This especially holds true since he won them the chance to break the 2:2 deadlock with this penalty. The match, which had briefly slowed, was reignited with renewed intensity as the official motioned for the set piece to be taken.

Coach Bauer, while concerned for Ben, knew that he couldn't let his boys play with a man down. So he mentioned Lucas on the bench to get on the field and replace his now-injured teammate. Since the moment Ben went down he had told him to warm up just in case Ben's injury was serious and his instinct proved to be right.

He quickly recalibrated his strategy, urging his players to maintain their formation and pressure. "Keep the line tight, and stay focused on the match" he shouted from the sidelines, his voice cutting through the cool tension in the air. The Bears were forced to replace their CB after the referee's urging and the Eagles players' less-than-pleased looks.

Lucas jogged onto the field, his eyes set with determination as he took his position ready to prove himself. The crowd's murmuring rose in anticipation as Tom stepped up to the penalty spot. There seemed to be a disagreement between him and Rakim over who would take the set piece but the older boy won out in the end.

He planted the ball carefully on the ground, his gaze fixed on the goal ahead. The Bear's goalkeeper positioned himself on the line swinging his arms wildly as he jumped up and down. He was trying his best to get into the striker's head as he imitated what he had seen professional keepers do on TV. His eyes darted between Tom and the ball, attempting to read his intentions. The air was thick with tension, each spectator holding their breath as the drama of the moment unfolded.

Coach Bauer, standing arms crossed, watched intently from the sidelines eagerly awaiting the ref's signal. After every player exited the Bears box he seemed ready to signal the go-ahead for the penalty. Tom took a few steps back, his cleats pressing lightly into the grass, his mind clear. He had practised shooting penalties hundreds of times during training and this was no different.

When the referee blew the whistle, signalling for the kick, a hush fell over the grounds. Every pair of eyes was locked onto the two players in the box who faced off with each other. This scene resembled an old Western revolver duel as both players waited to see the other twitch.

With a measured run-up, Tom struck the ball cleanly with his right foot. The ball shot towards the goal, low and fast. The goalkeeper, reacting with a desperate dive to his right, stretched as far as he could. But the ball was perfectly placed, just beyond his fingertips, nestling into the bottom corner of the net.

Before the crowd could even cheer Tom spun around, his arms outstretched, running towards the sidelines as his teammates chased after him to celebrate. They engulfed him in a joyful hug near the corner flag, their shouts of elation ringing out over the field. The plan at halftime was to take back the lead and they had succeeded.

The score sheet now read 2:3 with the Eagles back in the lead punching their ticket for the finals. Lucas, who had just entered the game, was among the first to reach Tom, patting him on the back enthusiastically. He felt a weight off his shoulders as the burden to help the team take the lead was no longer on him.

As a fresh pair of legs, he could now fully focus on showcasing his skills and prove his talents to those watching. As a more unconventional player with a physique on the thinner side, he is not a coach's first choice. However, now is his chance to prove his worth on the attacking side now that his team's main playmaker is off the pitch.

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With the Eagles now leading 3-2, the match resumed with the Bears looking visibly shaken. The goal had shifted the momentum entirely in favour of the Eagles. Coach Bauer's side switched to a more defensive strategy, aiming to protect their lead. The midfield tightened up, with Finn dropping deeper to assist the defenders.

The Bears attempted to rally, pushing players forward in search of an equalizer. However, the Eagle's defence stood firm, repelling each attack with disciplined positioning and timely clearances. As the Eagles settled into their new defensive formation, the Bears launched a relentless attack, trying to exploit any gaps left by the shift. In the 42nd minute, the Bears' winger launched a deep cross into the penalty area, aiming for their tall striker who had positioned himself between the Eagle's central defenders.

The crowd held its breath as the ball sailed through the air, but Finn, showing remarkable awareness and agility for his size, managed to head the ball away just in time, preventing a potentially game-changing header. This clearance sparked a quick counter-attack led by Lucas, who was still trying to leave a mark in the game.

With fresh legs and a point to prove, he darted down the left flank, outpacing the weary Bears' right back. He showed remarkable acceleration as he seemingly glided along the field. A quick stop-and-go was all he needed to shake off the right back who had managed to backtrack after being beaten.

Approaching the penalty area, he looked up and spotted Max making a clever run towards the far post. He also heard Rakim calling for them all just a couple of yards in the middle, but he wasn't planning on taking the easy option. After all, if he wanted to stand out he had to make big plays so with a deft touch he curled a low cross towards Max. But a desperate sliding tackle by the Bears' substitute centre-back sent the ball spinning out for a corner.

As the corner kick was set up in the 44th minute, the Eagles' sense of urgency was palpable. This could be their chance to further solidify their lead and effectively seal their spot in the finals. Lucas jogged over to take the corner, ignoring the pointed look he was receiving from Rakim. The winger clearly wasn't happy about how the last play turned out and now he was taking away his corner from him.

Surprisingly he didn't raise his voice at the midfielder but instead walked back choosing to roam outside the box. He quickly indicated for the taller Finn to go into the box leaving him and Max to watch out for a counter. With both wingers being speedsters and Max remaining as last man there was nothing to worry about.

Both teams lined up, their taller members positioning themselves near the penalty spot, creating a formidable presence in the box. it wasn't orderly in the least as a chaotic battle for a favourable position ensued between both parties. Lucas at the right corner flag eyed the chaos calculating the best trajectory. With a deep breath, he delivered a swinging cross into the heart of the melee.

The ball arced beautifully toward the far post, where Jake was lurking looking for his opportunity. Leaping over his defender he swung his head to the ball with as much power as his neck could muster. In a split second, the ball trajectory changed towards the goal but the Bears' goalkeeper's reflexes were impeccable.

Like a guardian angel, he guarded his goal managing to spring a plan to the ball redirecting it to the post. With a loud Bang, the ball sailed in the air flying out of the box in a lofted arc. As everyone craned their necks to see where the ball would end up with some even subconsciously chasing after it. What met their eyes sent shivers down the spines of the Bears players.