

Football 181

Chapter 181 Cup Finale (1)

[IMG Soccer stadium, Sunday/17th, April/2011]

"Good morning kids, It's a good day for some soccer let's all have some fun out there," A referee in his mid-thirties told both teams at the centre circle making sure he had their attention. "You have all come a long way to prove you're the best under 9's team in the Florida division. Let's keep it clean and put on a good show for your schools and family." He continued with a more serious tone scanning both team's crowds who looked eager to play.

He proceeded to inform, them that they would go straight to penalties if a winner did not emerge after 60 minutes. He also let them know that he would let them play continue after a foul if he saw an advantage. By the time he was done most of the kids were already bored but he didn't have a choice but to go through the formalities.

Especially since the game would be taped allowing parents to purchase a copy. So he quickly went through all the formalities before the game could finally proceed. "Stand for the national anthem," he stated a lot louder and went to stand between both teams with his two linesmen. One of the League Cup officials at the side echoed his words to the crowds in the stands who proceeded to stand.

Not a movement later the IMG Academy school's band club members started playing the national anthem on their instruments. Ever since their school's team qualified for the final two weeks ago they had been practising. This was due to the fact their school was hosting the match as the home team due to having a better league record.

With the League Cup being a competition between the two Florida leagues the team with the better record got to host the match. Although IMG lost their league by a single point their overall record was better on paper having fewer losses.

"O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,

What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,

Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight

O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?

And the rocket's red glare, the bomb bursting in air,

Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,

O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave

O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

The crowd sang the national anthem in unison following along the marching band's music. Some of the players wished to rush through the song barely managing to hold themselves back. By the time the song was done, everyone was pumped for the match to start.

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Blowing his whistle three times the official indicated for everyone but the two teams starting 11 to exit the pitch. Not a moment later both teams headed to their benches and the starting player took off their tracksuit hoodie. Soon both teams entered the field ready to play the game and the Eagles formed a circle in their half.

"Alright guys, let's give it our all," Ole said, trying his best to encourage his team. The young captain's voice was steady, but his eyes betrayed a flicker of nerves. His teammates gathered around him, forming a tight circle, each face a mix of excitement and determination.

"We've trained hard for this," he continued, his voice gaining confidence with each word. "Let's show everyone what we can do. Remember, play smart, play hard, and most importantly, have fun."

The Eagles nodded in agreement, their energy palpable after a quick 3 count, they exclaimed eagles letting their war cry be heard. They broke the circle after the collective cheer, running to their position ready to play. Conversely, the IMG team simply went to take their positions without much fuss.

The referee checked his watch one last time and positioned himself at the centre of the field. He signalled for the kick-off, and the game began with a sharp blast of his whistle. The ball was quickly in motion, darting between players as both teams scrambled to gain control.

From the side-lines, parents and friends shouted encouragements, their cheers blending into a cacophony of support. The Eagles were quick on their feet, passing the ball with precision, while the

IMG Ascenders countered with an aggressive defence. The red and blue jerseys clashed on the left flank when Rakim found himself surrounded by 3 blue jerseys.

His head moved left and right quickly, scanning for an escape route which he could utilise. The defender to his right didn't bother waiting for him to make up his mind as he decided to lunge for the ball. However, before he could touch the ball Rakim dragged that ball back with his right. The next moment, he charged past the player knocking the ball forward with the outside of his foot.

Not holding onto the ball he sent a crisp pass to Ole who drifted forward from his back four lines. The Eagles were playing in a 4-3-1 formation which they learned to love over the year. The back line consisted of Ryan Garcia 3 (Lb), 5 Ole Wagner (CB), Henric Eriksson 99 (CB), Jake Smith 4 (RB), and Mike started between the sticks. The midfield consisted of Rakim Rex 22 (LW), Lucas Scott 19 (CAM), Max Taylor 7 (RW), and at the front was Tom.

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Ole found himself in possession of the ball, his heart pounding loudly in his chest. He scanned the field, looking for an opening but the Ascenders quickly closed in on him. Spotting a gap just in time, he deftly manoeuvred past a defender and passed the ball to his teammate, Max. Max received it with ease and sprinted down the wing, utilising his speed to head for the goal.

The Tigers' goalkeeper tensed, ready for the shot as he started slowly heading off his touchline. Meeting a defender on the flank he feinted left, then right, before heading back left and slipping past the confused player. He wanted to go further but quickly realised that the nearby defenders were getting closer by the second.

Not willing to risk it he swung his foot and launched the ball towards the net. It soared through the air, a blur of black and white, before hitting the goalpost with a resounding thud. The crowd gasped, and the IMG players quickly cleared the ball away, narrowly escaping an early setback.

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The game continued relentlessly, with both teams showcasing their skills and determination. After a failed Eagles attack the Ascenders launched a counter-attack. Their midfield maestro sent a driven pass forward looking for his striker. His pass held true directly bypassing a few legs meeting its intended target.

Their striker, Jamie, calmly received it and broke free from the defence with a quick Cruyff turn and dribbled towards the Eagles' goal. The crowd held its breath as Jamie entered the box and took his shot.

The Eagles' goalkeeper, Mike, moved quickly and dove to his right, stretching out his hands. The ball brushed past his fingertips but veered just wide of the post. A collective sigh of relief swept through the Eagles' supporters. Mike quickly got back on his feet, pumping his fist at his completed save.