

## Football 182

### Chapter 182 Cup Finale (2)

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

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.

The Eagles' supporters erupted into cheers, applauding Mike's crucial save. The game resumed with a corner kick which didn't amount to much ending up comfortably in the hands of Mike. He didn't waste time and quickly sent the ball back into play. As the Eagles regrouped, the Ascenders pressed high, eager to capitalize on their near-miss.

'10'

With ten minutes on the clock, the Eagles found themselves under intense pressure. The Ascenders dominated possession, stringing together a series of quick passes that tested the Eagles' defensive resolve. Ole, the captain, shouted instructions, urging his team to stay compact and disciplined.

Coach Bauer at the side was happy after seeing him stay calm under pressure and take control. He had been worried since his boys had never played in a match with so much at stake. So seeing his captain left him relieved allowing him to focus on the progression of the match.

In the midfield battle, Rakim, Max, and Lucas worked hard to disrupt the Ascenders' rhythm. Their relentless pressing paid off when Rakim intercepted a sloppy pass, launching a counter-attack. He

quickly fed the ball to Lucas Scott, who deftly dribbled past an opponent before being brought down with a heavy challenge. The referee blew his whistle, awarding the Eagles a free kick luckily he wasn't injured.

Rakim stood over the ball, eyeing the options before him but in the back of his mind, he had a desire for a goal. With a quick glance at the positioning of his teammates, he decided to go for a direct shot. He took a deep breath before closing in on the ball and struck it cleanly, sending it curling towards the top corner.

His technique and power were on point as the ball followed the intended trajectory. The Ascenders' number one was alert though leaping into action the moment the ball passed over the bar, tipping it over the bar with a fingertip save.

The crowd applauded their effort with mixed emotions from both sides, as the Eagles prepared for the ensuing corner kick. The setpiece was taken quickly as the Eagles tried to capitalise on the startled IMG players. However, they were quick to switch on, after all coming from a dedicated sports institute thought them to be calm.

Max sent a low cross into the middle of the scramble in the box managing to locate Luca's outstretched leg. His shot didn't go far though bouncing against a few bodies before ending up in the safe grasps of the keeper's gloves. He wasn't quick to restart play choosing to remain on the ground for a while to give his team a chance to catch their breath.

'15' The match wore on, and it was clear that both teams were evenly matched. The Ascenders maintained a high press tactic, forcing the Eagles to remain vigilant in their defence. This is especially the case since the Eagles are an attacking team making them susceptible to sudden attacks.

Ole marshalled his backline with authority, shouting instructions as he observed the flow of the game. Luckily Henric, Jake, and He were tall enough to swat away ariel attacks often intercepting crosses and clearing the ball. This created a delicate balance barely kept at bay by both team's defence.

At the twenty-second minute mark, the Ascenders number 8 Carlos, made a dangerous run down the left flank. His speed and control had Jake the Eagles right back startled as he scrambled to backpedal to stay in front of the number 8. A couple of yards before the Eagle's box his pace slowed a little as he performed a few feints and stepovers.

After seeing Jake take an unsteady step Carlos suddenly cut inside, weaving past him and pierced into the space between Jake and Ole. Dribbling a few steps into the box he unleashed a powerful shot from just inside the box. The ball rocketed towards the top corner of the goal travelling in a straight line.

Mike was quick to react to the shot already in a favourable position but in the end, it wasn't enough. Despite the fact he managed to bring a hand to the ball it only changed the trajectory slightly. The next second he heard the net of his goal bulge and the crowd cheer in excitement and he knew that he failed to save the shot.

However, the biggest indicator of the shot outcome was the number 8 running to the sideline to celebrate. Waving his arms in excitement he shouted in celebration as his teammates joined him to revel in the moment. The scoreboard now read 1-0 in favour of the Ascenders, and the Eagles found themselves in an early deficit.

The Eagles stood in shock for a moment, but the more vocal players like Ole and Lucas were quick to encourage the team. "Keep your heads up! We've got plenty of time!" were some of the shouts that could be heard from the boys trying to encourage their teammates. After their opponent finished their celebration they went back into position to restart the match.

The referee blew his whistle to signal the restart, and the Eagles wasted no time getting the ball back into play. They moved with purpose, determined to equalize as soon as possible. Ole took possession of the ball outside his box as the wingers and Tom charged forward into the opposing half. It didn't take him long to spot Rakim making a run down the left wing and sent a precisely, lofted pass in his direction.

Ole's pass arced beautifully through the air, landing a yard in front of Rakim's feet. He stretched out his foot controlling the ball with a deft touch just before an ascenders player could clear it. Skipping past him he began his charge down the left flank with a purpose as his dreads flutter in the air.

He could feel the adrenaline pumping through his veins like electricity spurring on his every step. The cheers from the crowd quickly became background noise his focus entirely on the ball and the blur of players around him. The Ascenders' right-back, a sturdy player wearing the number 2 was quick to intercept him sidestepping in an attempt to lead him away from the goal.

Rakim feinted to his left, then cut sharply to his right, accelerating past the defender with frightening speed. His manoeuvre left the defender behind and momentarily off-balance as he continued down the flank. With a quick glance up, he spotted Tom making a run into the box deciding his next course of action for him.

Adjusted his strides he whipped in a low but hard cross using the outside of his right foot adding some backspin. Tom, chased by two markers had positioned himself perfectly swinging his foot at the oncoming ball. He managed to make contact with the ball first firing a shot towards the goal.

The ball flew towards the bottom corner, but the Ascenders' goalkeeper was alert. Diving low to his right, he managed to get his glove to the ball sending just wide of the post. The crowd gasped in disbelief mirroring the striker's disbelief at seeing his surefire shot miss. The next moment they erupted in applause for both the attempt and the save showing their appreciation.

Tom simply shrugged his shoulders in disbelief trying to voice his confusion to Rakim's questioning glare. The latter simply shook his head and quickly went to the sidelines to get a drink of water. The Eagles were awarded a corner kick and Max jogged over to take it since it was his side.

He raised his arm, signalling his teammates, and delivered a high, curling ball into the box. Henric, the tallest player on the pitch, rose above everyone else, his eyes fixed on the ball. He connected with a powerful header, sending the ball rocketing towards the goal.

The Ascenders' keeper was beaten, but the ball crashed against the crossbar and bounced back into play. Chaos ensued in the box as both teams scrambled to gain control of the loose ball. In the melee, Ole managed to get a foot on it, sending it back towards the goal. However this time it didn't reach the goal ricocheting off a defender and out for another corner.