

Football 184

Chapter 184 Cup Finale (4)

In the 29th minute, the match resumed with the same kind of intensity as the Eagles chased a late equaliser. Despite the score being 2:1 in favour of the IMG squad you couldn't tell by the flow of the match. The Eagles continued to chase down their opponents with vigour from the moment play restarted.

It was in a moment of their relentless pressure they managed to win the ball back from the opposing right-winger. He had taken a heavy touch after a hasty pass from his right back who escaped the charge of Rakim. His poor touch left him open for Ryan to take hold of the ball and launch another Eagles attack.

Not releasing the ball the right back sped down the flank, and Rakim ahead of him drifted towards the centre opening up the wing. Having learned his lesson from moments ago the right-back subconsciously followed after him. Rayn didn't hesitate and charged into the space quickly reaching the side of the box.

Not hesitating he swung his leg sending an arched cross into the box towards the rushing forwards. The ball soared through the air, its curved trajectory heading for the penalty spot. The ball soared through the air, drawing the eyes of everyone in. The IMG defenders scrambled to mark their men, but it was too late.

Leaping, high above the defenders, Tom connected with the cross, his forehead making clean contact with the ball. The powerful header sent the ball hurtling towards the goal. The IMG goalkeeper, caught off guard by the sudden turn of events, dived desperately to his left, but his fingertips barely missed the ball ever so slightly as it flew past him.

Lucky for him he heard the rattling of the bar and the groaning of the way crowd as the ball out of the park. The near miss seemed to invigorate the Eagles even more as their hunger for a goal grew. Their

fans erupted into cheers, rallying their team for another attack. Ryan, undeterred by the missed opportunity, jogged back to his position, exchanging a quick nod with Tom.

IMG attempted to slow the game down, trying to hold onto their slim lead in the dying minutes of the first half. Their midfielders began to play a more possession-based game, passing the ball around to disrupt the Eagles' rhythm. However, the Eagles' high press continued to unsettle them, forcing errors and turnovers.

They managed to win a few goal-scoring opportunities with the occasional long-range attempt. Lucas after beating his marker sent a powerful shot from outside of the box. His shot contains power and precision but he was out of luck as the IMG Keeper managed to palm it away. Before Tom could reach the rebounding ball one of their defenders cleared the ball.

After that chance, there were three more shot attempts from Tom, Rakim, and Max but none could threaten the keeper. The referee added 3 extra minutes but in the end, the score remained at 2:1 in IMG's favour. Hearing his whistle the Eagles and their supporters could only sigh in disappointment. They came so close to aching the equaliser, but in the end, they had to wait to continue their hunt.

~~~

As the teams returned to the pitch for the second half, the tension in the stadium was palpable. The Eagles, now trailing 2:1, knew they had 30 minutes to turn the game around. The coach's halftime talk had pressed on the importance of the match and both teams were ready to deliver. The whistle blew, and the second half began with the same intensity as it had left off.

IMG had control of the ball first; this time, they didn't panic but chose to build up play calmly. They were ahead and didn't need to rush thus they let their opponent do the chasing as they waited for a counter.

The Eagles, however, continued their high-press strategy, forcing the IMG players to remain alert and cautious.

They pressed high up the pitch, trying to continue where the first half left off. In the 35th minute, the Eagles got their first chance of the second half. Jake managed to intercept a through ball intended for IMG's left winger. He quickly passed it to Tom who had his back turned to the goal as he held off his marker.

The striker didn't bother turning nor fully control the ball, instead, he laid the ball off for the oncoming Lucas. Similar to their shooting drills in training the young attacking midfielder didn't even have to think as he fired off a shot towards goal. He unleashed a powerful shot from 30 yards out sending the ball sailing dangerously towards goal.

Everyone held their breath for a good second only to see the white of the IMG's Keeper glove palm the ball out for a corner. Ryan took the resulting corner, sending a curled ball into the box with pace, igniting a scramble. The ball wasn't high and fell to the feet of Tom, who surprisingly found himself unmarked. Swinging his leg out of sheer instincts he fired off a shot.

But the players in front of him were just too dense as it was blocked by the foot of a non-suspecting defender. The rebound fell to Rakim, who tried to place it into the bottom corner, but the IMG goalkeeper was quick to react, diving low to his left to make the save. They were only able to sigh with relief when their left back cleared the ball with a mighty kick.

IMG, realizing the danger of sitting back, began to push forward more aggressively. Switching from zonal marking to man-to-man defence they piled on the pressure. The match quickly became more physical as both teams struggled for supremacy. Especially in midfield where Rakim and Max were forced to play more compactly in order to help Lucas.

Their opponents seemed to have realised the two-wingers habit of starting wide and thus chose to break through the middle. In the next 3 minutes, the official had to stop the game quite a few times to give out a warning and the occasional yellow card. one such instance, was when Max and his marker jumped up for an Ariel duel. However, the IMG midfielder who towered over him somehow ended up on top of him by the time they landed.

This was just one of the few times the official had to stop the match to gain some semblance of control. However, no matter how much he asked the players to calm down they were just too eager for a victory. Their clash came to a fever pitch in the 40th minute when the IMG players created a dangerous chance.

Their playmaker, wearing the number 10, threaded a precise pass through to their striker, after nimbly weaving past Max and Lucas. Escaping his marker their number 9 found himself one-on-one with the Eagles' goalkeeper. Jake between the sticks was already rushing off his line spreading his arms to close off any path towards goal.

Seeing this the IMG number 9 tried to chip him, but he managed to react in time getting a hand to the ball and sending it out for a corner. The corner was taken quickly as one of the opposing players sent a whipped cross. Luckily Henric managed to rise above the crowd clearing the ball to safety.