

## Football 189

### Chapter 189 Cup Finale (9)

The IMG number 3 latched onto the ball at the edge of the final third but didn't push to continue forward. Cutting out all his forward momentum he used it to perform a sudden change in direction. Damian who had been following after him bypassed him by yard before coming to a sliding stop. None of this matters to the number 3 who ignored him and charged diagonally towards the goal.

The crowd's anticipation reached a fever pitch as the number 3 inched ever so close to the Eagles box. Performing a quick step over he dodged a tackle from the retreating Finn. Now at the box's edge, things moved rapidly as he nudged the ball to his side before drawing back his leg. He brought it down with a force but it turned out to be a feint as he nudged the ball past Damian's outstretched leg.

The eagle defender seemed to have tracked back for a last-ditched effort at stopping him. Not wasting any time he fired off a curled shot at goal as a shooting lane opened up for him. The ball spun through the air, slicing past defenders and aiming for the top corner. The goalkeeper's eyes widened his muscles tensed and he immediately leapt with all his might.

Stretching every fibre of his being towards the ball he held his breath as his eyes trailed after the ball heading his way. The crowd held its collective breath, a silence falling over the grounds. The tension was not for those of feint hearts as the ball curled around the outstretched gloves of Mike. But the next moment the loud dong of the post was heard allowing the eagles and their supporters to breathe in relieve.

They had survived this dangerous situation at the final minute of the game. To bring finality to the situation the referee blew his whistle 3 times signalling the end of the match. None of the two league champions managed to emerge victorious during regular time. Thus, the game would be heading into penalties to determine which team would leave as state champs.

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Rakim felt like he was suffocating as he walked to the centre circle with the rest of his team. They had discussed who would take the 5 pens and in which order. Coach Bauer and those on the bench tried their best to motivate them but all that fell on deaf ears in Rakim's case. The pressure his teammates put on him started to feel like an anchor weighing him down.

When the coach had asked them who wanted to take a penalty most of them shirked back remaining silent. Only Max, Rakim, and Tom seemed to want to take one but the expectant eyes and encouragement started to weigh on them. At least Rakim felt that way as he tried his best to relax and just think of it as any other set piece he had practised.

He dreaded penalties since they greatly depended on luck and understood that even the best players in the world could miss them. He was not an exception to this rule that counted double for those on the shooting line up who reluctantly took a spot. Knowing that all his hard work over the season would be wasted unsettled him. Especially since someone else's actions could be the deciding factor for a winner to emerge.

This is probably the first time he felt such intense emotion whilst playing the game of football. Everything has come easy with enough hard work, as he has seen progress in his skills. The fact he was having fun whilst training helped things but now the feeling of everyone's expectations weighed on him.

Cheers of encouragement, pats on the back, and simple good luck only served to agitate his nerves. Thus he decided to just close his eyes and try his best to block out all the noise. Ignoring his teammate's chatter and the official's decisions on which side they would shoot in he kept his eyes shut.

He vaguely heard Mike say "I wish you all the best of luck. Just pick a side and stick to it," Before proceeding to hug him and the rest of his teammates before marching off towards the goal selected by the referee for the penalty shootout.

Moving on from the winger who had his eyes closed and an arm around Henric next to him things finally got started. However, the sheer height difference between the two teammates made this scene quite comical. The proceedings moved forward quickly, and soon, the referee called upon an IMG player to take their first penalty.

Their players shouted encouraging words after the player whilst the Eagles remained silent hoping he would slip on his run-up. Better yet sky his shot, or maybe a strong gust would divert his shot to a post. Anything they could think of they prayed for as the blue number 7 jogged towards the spot.

A wave of silence swept across the ground as the number 7 finally entered the penalty box. Rakim also opened his eyes wanting to see the shot for himself. The boy walked up to the ball that was already on the spot and readjusted it for himself not leaving anything up to luck. when he was satisfied he took 3 long strides back and towards his left.

Not long after the the referee gave him the go-ahead as he was eyeing Mike's positioning. The keeper tried his best to make himself big jumping up and down on his line and waving his hands in an effort to distract him. {\*FWEEEEEEE\*} The referee's whistle sounded the next moment breaking the two's standoff.

The number seven acted immediately as he closed in on the ball with haste using an angled run-up. He took a final jump step with his stabilising foot before smashing the ball sending it towards the goal. His shot was low and hard heading for the bottom right corner. Mike was onto him diving in the right direction but he jumped high and the ball slipped underneath him.

Seeing his shot go in a jubilant smile graced the shooter's face as he jumped up in excitement. Not to be left behind his teammates at the halfway line and their supporters also cheered loudly. He returned to celebrate with them with a little pep in his step feeling much lighter after having accomplished his goal.

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IMG 1 : Red Oak Prep 0

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Max next up to shoot ignored their celebration and calmly walked up to the penalty box. He would be shooting his team's first penalty so the nerves were there especially after their opponents went ahead by 1. He trusted his skill though so he didn't lose his composure despite the keeper's antics in front of the goal.

He seemed to be trying his best to distract him but all his attention was on the pretty redhead sitting in the stands behind the girl. Ever since spotting her his nerves vanished and impressing her became his primary goal. That is despite the girl wearing an image kit clearly here to support her school team.

He didn't mind though as love knew no bounds especially if his feelings were sincere. Plus his dad had told him that good footballers get all the girls so if he won then how could it possibly not work out? So whilst the keeper was trying to get in his head he was sending a flirtatious signal to the girl behind him.

Thus despite how tense this moment was he adjusted the ball and calmly took four steps back. Upon receiving the ref signal he calmly took his run-up which was an unhurried jog. What was even more spectacular was the fact he kept eye contact with the girl the entire time.

As he reached the ball he brought his foot under it lofting it lightly towards the goal. The shot was taken in such a relaxed manner that it almost caused a heart attack to those watching as they forgot to breathe. The ball soared straight down the middle for a chip but the keeper had already committed to jumping left.

He could only watch as the ball nestled itself into the back of the net without any fuss. He couldn't be blamed for that mistake though as Max's age had always been towards his left side. So the only logical thing was to take the risk and jump that way. Never could he have imagined that the eagle's number 7 would go for the middle.