

Football 226

Chapter 226 Mini Derby (1)

[13:00 am, Friday 08/02/2019, Pittodrie Stadium Aberdeen, U20 Aberdeen Vs Celtic]

1-0 to Celtic. Aberdeen fought back, and the game became an intense battle in the midfield. They managed to gain a few good chances but luck wasn't on their side when it came to converting them. The young 17-year-old between the Celtic sticks seemed to be on fire as he flew across his line with ease.

An Aberdeen Striker jumped up into the air to head a cross doing everything right as he managed to beat all opposition. His head made contact with the ball hitting it dead centre but before it could fly find smacked it away. He got his second chance five minutes later in the 30th minute after a speedy counterattack after a failed Celtic corner.

The through ball came just in time allowing him to beat his man and also the offside trap. Barreling down on the box set off a foot race between him and the keeper both trying to reach the ball first. He managed to reach the ball first just as he entered the box but he had no time to compose himself as the keeper came sliding out.

Not having time to think and compose himself he swung his foot mid-sprint chipping the ball up and trying to pass over the keeper. His action was the right one given the situation and he was already preparing to circumvent the goalie. However, to his utter shock, the keeper who had been sliding on the ground sprung up from the ground with cat-like agility.

Raising his hand he smacked the ball that was just about to fly over him for the striker to slot in. The chance was not over though as the ball only stayed around the edge of the box. There Aberdeen's second striker jumped up into the air beating his marker and headed the ball towards goal.

Already celebrating his goal he was left utterly shocked when the keeper scrambled on his feet and hands just in time to reach the ball. He dived forward with all his strength using his hand to push the ball just beyond his goal post. "Let's GOOOO, I'm on fire," He exclaimed jumping up from the ground as he started beating his chest.

The Keeper wasn't wrong as he continued to perform a steller throughout the match keeping a clean sheet. Not for lack of trying from their opponents who continued to threaten his goal. His job only got easier In the 55th minute, where Rakim showcased his defensive abilities, tracking back to dispossess an Aberdeen winger.

A rough but clean sliding tackle, he stripped the ball of the opposing winger before initiating a counter-attack. Sprinting up the field he played a couple of back-and-forth passes with his midfield teammates. Reaching the second third of the pitch he let loose a lofted through ball over the heads of everyone.

Jon who had come on for Dougie latched onto the ball piercing into the box with speed. Performing a quick feint he circumvented the keeper and slotted the ball into the empty net. 2-0 was the final score of the game with the under-20 Celtic team taking another win. Rakim lost his first man of the match award to Kyle his team's keeper whose performance was just world-class.

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[10:00 am, Wednesday 11/02/2019, Tynecastle Park Edinburgh, U20 Hearts Vs Celtic]

The game against Hearts was a true test of Rakim's skill and endurance. Hearts came out strong, determined to shut down Rakim's influence. Not willing to be another notch on his highlight reel they marked him tighter, some even preemptively fouled him before he could get going.

The referee's loose whistle emboldened them to continue with their physical playstyle. Oftentimes Rakim found himself tugged to the ground or pushed off balance whenever he received the ball. Despite changing his playstyle and performing more off-the-ball runs he still found himself on the ground quite a few times.

Thus the first half remained a tight affair, with both teams creating chances but failing to score. Their opponents seemed to have figured out a formula to stop the winger from getting too involved in the match. He could only play one-touch passes maintaining possession and slowly applying pressure on their opponents.

The first half concluded goalless, but Celtic's halftime team talk was all about adjustments and finding a way to free Rakim from the tight marking. Coach Andrews urged the team to use quick, short passes and exploit the spaces created by Rakim's off-the-ball movements.

The second half began with renewed vigour. In the 55th minute, Rakim found a breakthrough. He received a pass from Scott near the touchline, and as two Hearts defenders closed in, he executed an elastic dribble breaching through in between them.

With a burst of speed, he surged towards the box. A third defender came rushing in, but Rakim simply needed a quick feint and a quick flick to the side to get past him. He caught back up with the ball and continued his run his neon boots eating up yards of grass.

Seeing the Hearts goalkeeper a little too far from his line he didn't hesitate in taking a shot before entering the final third. The keeper seeing this backpedaled frantically as Rakim's shot sailed through the air. However, his effort was for nought as the ball dipped perfectly, soaring just over the keeper's outstretched hands and into the net. 1-0 to Celtic. The crowd erupted, as the boys in green started celebrating their lead.

Falling behind Hearts responded with increased aggression, but Rakim remained unfazed not holding onto the ball longer than necessary. He didn't force anything passing the ball around giving a stable performance. His patience bore fruit In the 75th minute, he showcased his skill once again when an opportunity presented itself.

Receiving a pass near the centre circle, he performed a heel-to-heel flick to evade a defender's tackle. A quick give-and-go with a nearby midfielder and he was dribbling down the left flank. Accelerated down the pitch, and with a series of deft touches, he weaved through the Hearts' midfield.

As he approached the box, he spotted Douglas making a run. Not hesitating he sent a piercing through the ball with the outside of his right foot. The ball cut a sharp banana-like arc along the ground curving dangerously around the penalty spot. His pass sliced the heart defence arriving precisely in the path of Daoules.

Diving feet first the striker deftly guided the ball past the Heart's goalkeeper slotting it into the back of the net. The game ended with a comfortable 2-0 victory for Celtic, as the Hearts players were unable to mount a counter. Rakim received his 4 Man of the Match award in 5 games gaining more attention from the fans and pundits paying attention to him.

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[12:00 pm, Sunday 15/02/2019, Lennoxtown Training Centre, U20 Glasgow Rangers vs Celtic]

The Glasgow derby against the under20 Rangers team was Rakims first Home game for the club. Sadly they weren't able to use the stadium due to the pitch needing tending after yesterday's Europa League game. The senior squad received a 0:2 thrashing at home without being able to mount an attack.

Nonetheless, the less the team would be playing at the Lennoxtown Training Centre where they trained. Despite not playing at a stadium the scene was still packed with both team's supporters coming out to watch them play. Every available spot around the pitch was taken making it almost seem like a cup final match.

The atmosphere at Lennoxtown Training Centre was electric, with both sets of fans in full voice. Both team's players knew this was a game to make a statement. Hence they wasted no time to battle it out the moment the game started.

The Rangers Academy, in recent years, has been known as the best for nurturing young talents within Scotland. This quickly became apparent as the Rangers' under-20 team started the match with high intensity. Their midfield dominated the early exchanges, pressing Celtic back and making it difficult for them to find space. Despite the fierce competition, Rakim's mood remained upbeat relishing the stronger competition.

Rangers made their first real attack In the 10th minute, creating their first real threat. A slick passing move saw their midfielder, Jamie McDun, threading a precise through ball to their striker, Alex Patterson. Patterson used his body to hold off a defender as he took his first touch in the box.

His control was superb taking out all the momentum of the pass allowing him to fire a low shot towards the bottom corner. The shot was well taken but Celtic's young goalkeeper, Kyle, made an acrobatic save, pushing the ball wide to keep the score level.