

Football 235

Chapter 235 Team Sheet

Rakim continued to participate in the first team training over the next two days as they prepared for their match-up in Spain. After the possession work on Monday's training things were different the next two days. Tuesday's training session focused on scrutinizing the physical condition of the players who would partake in the match. All the players went through fitness drills that tested their flexibility, agility, and stamina.

Rakim vigorously completed all the required drills, as instructed by the Coaches without complaint. When it was time for running the speed and agility cone exercises, he did so with efficiency in mind. He did his best to hold back the urge to perform skill moves knowing there was a time and place for these things.

When you're trying to prove your professionalism to a coach who didn't want you in his team messing about during training wasn't the time. Thus he remained diligent during training and only performed skill moves during practice games to showcase his abilities. He was saying 'hey It's so easy for me to get by that I chose to make my playstyle more pleasing to the eye.'

When one of the coaches asked why he felt the urge to be flashy when drilling down the wing. He responded that it was to get rid of the boredom he felt when he didn't have the ball for extended periods during a match. That's not to say that he would execute skill moves just for the sake of it, only doing it when finding himself in a tricky situation.

In the background, he continued to work hard in his personal training ramping up his callisthenics and speed drills. He understood that he would have to continue working hard if wants to reach a better stage. He refused to do weight training when the coaches offered it preferring a more dynamic form of muscle gains.

This was aimed at boosting his overall fitness without tacking on unneeded muscles. Thus while other players performed bench press exercises he did pushups. Others did leg press exercises whilst he did different variations of squats, duck walks and swim sessions. He only joined exercises on the treadmill, pull-ups, exercise ball, jump rope and rowing machines.

Like that, he managed to quickly raise his match fitness ever since arriving in Scotland. Seeing the results of his training the coaches relented and created a more tailored plan. Rakim's hard work was put to the test on Wednesday morning practice which would be the last before tomorrow's game in Spain.

The team would be leaving in the afternoon looking to arrive in time to climate with the environment before tomorrow's game. That was the problem though as the Head manager Brandon Rodgers hasn't put out the match-day squad. Thus the tension was palpable as everyone performed their best during the morning session.

As the session progressed, He noticed that the Head Manager, Brandon Rodgers, was closely observing from the sidelines, making last-minute notes and occasionally conferring with his assistants. Rodgers seemed to be conflicted about something as his eyes would subconsciously drift his way. Not minding him he continued to perform each drill with precision, making sure to stay disciplined.

Whether he made the game list didn't matter to him anymore as he realised just how many eyes were on him. At first, he had thought that he would need the Europa League to make teams interested again but that wasn't the case. His mother had told him that Ace had been receiving interested calls from clubs after his recent youth match highlights went viral.

The best case and point was when a reporter released footage of his first training session after his call-up. Rakim had to thank the guy for having a good enough lens to capture him performing his skills in 4k. This gave him more buzz validating his skill to those fans sceptical about him. When he saw this he realised that as long as he consistently performed well teams wouldn't let him remain in the Scottish league.

Realising the value he had his only focus was on getting better and performing well when he eventually made his debut. The coach didn't like him all that much so he didn't have high hopes for the squad selection but he remained hopeful. Getting to play in the Europa League at just 15 would be a dream come true.

The final part of the session involved a full 11-a-side practice match. Rakim was placed on the reserve team, which he accepted in stride. He gave a solid performance not one of his best but maintained a dribble success rate of 87%. When the whistle finally blew to signal the end of the practice match the players had worked up quite a sweat.

Just as Rakim managed to get a swig of his water he heard the booming voice of the manager at the side. "Gather around, everyone," Coach Rodgers called out, motioning for the players to join him in a huddle. "I know you're all anxious to find out who made the squad. I appreciate the effort everyone has put in these past few days. The final decision wasn't easy."

Rodgers began to read out the names, starting with the goalkeeper and working his way through the defenders and midfielders. Rakim held his breath, his heart pounding in his chest. "And our forwards for tomorrow's game," Rodgers continued, "are Sinclair, Boyo, Edouard, Dembele, James, and Rakim."

Hearing that he made the 23-man roster going to Spain a smile appeared on Rakim's face. Although he might not make the 18-man roster for the match it would still be an experience. The team would always take 23 players on away games just in case one of the players in the coach's intended 18-man roster fell ill or was injured.

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At noon sharp the players making up the squad for Celtic FC in the match against Valencia had all assembled at the stadium as it was time to head to the airport for their flight to Valencia Airport. Rakim had on a pair of Beats headphones as he handed his duffel bag to one of the staff to be sorted in the bus.

Donning a black business-style suit, white shirt, and a green/white tie. The winger felt like he was going to a funeral but still put up with the club's dress requirements. This only applied to international matches like the Europa League so had to put up with it, despite feeling like he was going to a funeral.

Luckily his father had made sure to get him good suits from various brands and colours. According to him, a man needs a suit for when he needs to suit up, pretty sure he got that quote from Barney Stinson. The distance between Celtic Park and Glasgow Airport is only a little over 10 miles taking no more than 16 minutes by bus.

They were fast-tracked through border control using a private VIP area, allowing them to quickly make their way to the club's private plane. Once everyone had settled down the plane took off heading on their 5-hour journey to Valencia. After a few minutes in the air, Rakim took a selfie with Karamoko before drifting off to sleep. Thus he was listening to some Roddy Ricch at 30,000 feet in the air.