

## Football 243

Chapter 243 Vs Valencia (6)

[Time stamps in games]

The scoreline had levelled the aggregate at 3-1, and Celtic's path to progression was still dim but the goal was a matter of honour for the team. Lee Kang-in, who had been caught off guard by Rakim's burst of brilliance, now focused intently on the game. The young South Korean's expression had shifted from surprise to determination as he intently listened to the instructions of defensive leader Diakhaby.

He instructed the back line to remain alert in the last minutes, keep their composure amidst the chaotic atmosphere and tighten their defensive organization. Like that, they managed to stabilise the game for the next 3 minutes keeping the slightly braver Celtic side at bay. Despite going level on today's score line they had already given up and it was taking them a bit of time to flip that switch again.

[84] The final minutes of the match were tense and frenetic. Celtic's equalizer had reinvigorated their supporters, who now created a cacophony of noise, willing their team to find another breakthrough. The momentum had clearly shifted, and the away side sensed a chance to turn the game around completely.

Lee Kang-in, despite his earlier surprise, showcased his resilience and class. He worked diligently alongside Coquelin, Torres, and Soler to regain control in the midfield, seeking to disrupt Celtic's rhythm and restore Valencia's dominance. The pair's efforts to reassert control became crucial as the clock ticked down.

This worked well to douse the enthusiasm of some of the Celtic players who wanted to attack. Seeing the home side go back to play a possession game they were forced to fall back, since not all of their teammates followed them. Rakim, Johnson and Edouardo all of who had fresh legs were the only ones to continue to press the Valencia back line.

[87] Edouard got lucky managing to intercept a sloppy pass from Lato to Guedes. Bringing the ball under his control at the touchline in the second third sent a swift pass to Brown in the middle. The midfielder calmly took control of the ball as he shoulder-checked the charging Parejo.

Not minding the downed Valencia number 10 he dribbled the ball forward playing a one-two with McGregor. Bringing the ball forward with full steam he entered the final third as he scanned his options. He wanted to play the ball forward to Johnson but the young striker's positioning was off.

He seemed to be anticipating a through ball and was jumping the gun before Scott could even raise his foot. Next, he spotted the fluttering white hair of his team's young winger as he faced off with Kang-in. As Rakim jogged forward following the backline he started performing a variety of footwork as he continued to change the angle of his approach.

If Scott hadn't seen him do this in training he wouldn't know what kind of pass to play, since the winger didn't make eye contact with him. The boy's field of vision was just that wide allowing him to react the moment the pass was played. He still didn't choose to send the ball his way as he spotted Edouard making a run beyond Lato.

Sending a defence-splitting through ball into the space between Diakhaby and Lato with the outside of his leg, He liberated the winger sending him on a chase. Edouard's speed was evident as he closed in on the ball, his stride eating up the ground between him and the goal. Lato, clearly struggling with fatigue, could only watch as the French forward accelerated past him.

The stadium, filled with a mixture of anxious Celtic fans and wary Valencia supporters, held its collective breath. As Edouard raced towards the ball, the tension in the stadium became almost palpable. With a deft touch, he connected with Scott Brown's pass sending the ball ahead of him as he reached the side of the box.

Looking up he spotted two green figures amongst white jerseys surging into the box at different angles. Not hesitating he sent a grounded cross into the mayhem of players charging in hoping for the best. The ball whizzed across the face of the goal, threading its way through a sea of feet that lounged at it.

The Celtic fans held their breath, eyes fixed on the ball hoping that one of their players could get a boot to it. As the ball arced across the six-yard box Johnson along with the two Valanecia centrebacks were the first to lunge forward. Sandwiched between the two defenders the young striker managed to make contact with it but was not able to direct it towards the goal.

Instead, the ball was flicked upward as it continued its course forcing Rakim and Kang-in to adjust. The ball was around waist height taking an awkward curve seemingly heading back out of the box. The moment Rakim saw this change he pushed himself off his marker who had been to his left ready to clear the cross.

Using that momentum he pushed himself off the ground using his left foot as he drew back his right leg. Years of yoga and Taekwondo made this set of movements second nature, thus he swung his foot full force hitting the sweet spot with a dull thud. The ball rocketed off his foot as he followed through his kick, sending an unstoppable missile headed for the back of the net.

The dagger of a shot nestled itself into the back of the net spinning wildly as it tried to escape its hold. The net bulged for a second as the ball finally settled into the back of the net, and the stadium erupted into a deafening roar. Celtic fans, who had been on edge, now burst into jubilant celebration, their cheers echoing throughout the arena hardly believing what was happening.

This time Rakim decided to celebrate his goal swept away by the burst of emotion he was feeling. He had spent years imagining himself scoring goals in front of a crowd not much different from here. Thus he no longer hesitated after scoring a stunner of a side volley, similar to that of one of his idols Zlatan in the 2012 Euros.

Running towards the sideline he began lightly bouncing on his heels as he moved forward swinging his arms before forming two Ok signs with his hands as he brought them to his eyes. He performed The Griddy all along the touchline as his teammates rushed to join him. The crowd roared even louder, their voices blending into celebration and disbelief.

Rakim dancing as he shook his deeds was captured in 4K by the nearby Cameraman and became an iconic moment for the supporters watching at home. Their Celebration didn't last long as they still needed a goal if they wanted a chance to move on to the next round. In the [88] the scoreboard changed once again reading 1:2 in favour of the Glasgow side.

The referee signalled for play to resume, and as the Valencia players took their positions, their expressions were a mix of frustration. [88] Valencia kicked off, desperate to regain control. Parejo, the experienced captain, attempted to calm his team, urging them to focus and stick to their game plan.

The ball moved swiftly between the Valencia players, who were now more cautious with their approach, mindful of Celtic's renewed energy and urgency. They aimed to maintain possession, using short, controlled passes to draw Celtic out of position and then exploit any gaps that appeared.

[90] As the game edged closer to full-time, Celtic intensified their efforts, pushing forward in numbers. McGregor, the midfield dynamo, intercepted a pass intended for Soler and quickly launched a counter-attack.