

Football 244

Chapter 244 Last Minute Chaos

[Time stamps in games]

[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. He spotted Rakim's run down the left and delivered a precise, long ball into his path.

Rakim used his speed to latch onto the ball, but before he could create anything he was tackled off the ball by Lee Kang-in. Not giving up though the winger hit back with the same aggression as their shoulders clashed with each other. Both of them continued to clash with each other as they fought over the ball making their way down the hill.

Every time one of them gained the advantage in strength the other would steal the ball forcing them to re-engage. The tussle between Rakim and Lee Kang-in quickly became a focal point, capturing the attention of the crowd and adding an extra layer of intensity to the closing minutes of the match. As they grappled for control, it didn't leave any room for their teammates to help out.

[91] Eventually, Rakim managed to outmuscle Lee as they reached close to the corner flag. Using his body to shield the ball and nimble footwork he kept it out of Kang-in's reach as he manoeuvred towards the box. With a quick turn, he pushed the ball beyond his marker before whipping in a low cross aimed at the near post, where Edouard was making a darting run.

The Celtic striker got a slight touch, redirecting the ball goalward, but Neto was alert, diving low to smother the shot and prevent a last-minute goal. The Celtic crowd groaned in frustration as they watched their chance being swatted away. The players too were disappointed but couldn't linger on it as the fourth official held up an additional 4 minutes.

The clock ticked on, and the tension was palpable. Celtic, buoyed by their supporters' fervent chants, continued to press high up the pitch, committing men forward in a last-ditch effort to salvage something from the game.

[93] The atmosphere in the stadium was electric, with every touch, pass, and tackle amplified by the anxious energy of the fans. Celtic's players, driven by the roars of their supporters, threw caution to the wind, pouring forward in a desperate attempt to find a winning goal. Valencia, meanwhile, focused on maintaining their defensive shape and absorbing the pressure.

McGregor, once again found himself at the heart of the action. Collecting the ball from a quick throw-in, he weaved through the Valencia midfield, evading challenges with deft touches. Spotting Rakim free on the left flank, he played a precise pass into his feet. The young debutante deftly received the ball with his left foot turning 180 degrees using its momentum.

His spin allowed him to avoid the onrushing Torres who tried to close him down. Dribbling the ball forward he rushed towards Kang-in ahead of him facing him head-on. Performing a couple of stepovers as their distance neared but his speed did not decrease.

With each stepover, he seemed to be setting up for a decisive move as he continued to shift his shoulder. The Valencia right-back in front of him had been staying composed letting him come forward as he guided him down the wing by angling his body. However, Rakim's continued feints kept him skittish not allowing him to calm down.

As he approached the edge of the box, Kang-in lunged in an attempt to tackle, but Rakim deftly shifted the ball to his right, leaving the defender in his wake. He didn't get far though as Coquelin stood in his way blocking off his way forward. Keeping in motion his feet flashed over the ball as he tried to find a way past him.

Feeling the pressure behind him he knew that he had to make his move, thus he feinted a cut into the box before chipping the ball high into the box. The next moment he felt a soft nudge on his side as Kang-in came to a stop but his eyes were on the ball. It cut a high parabola into the box towards the path of Edouard and Scott brown Who jumped into the air along with their markers.

The ball hung in the air, the crowd collectively holding their breath as it descended towards the mass of players jostling for position. Edouard, using his strength, managed to outjump his marker, getting his head to the ball first. His header was powerful, directed towards the bottom corner of the goal. Neto, reacting swiftly, dived full stretch, managing to get his fingertips to the ball and then bring it into his grasp.

The Celtic fans let out a collective sigh, the frustration palpable as yet another chance slipped away. However, their mood changed the next second as the referee blew his whistle and pointed at the penalty spot. Not understanding what was going they watched as he walked up to Lato showing him a yellow card.

Looking beyond him the viewers spotted Scott brown on the ground clutching his head and holding onto his head in pain. Due to the VAR not being implemented yet the ref decision was final despite all the protests from the home team. Those at home quickly got to see the replay allowing them to judge themselves if the official was in the right or was simply trying to win a bet.

They watched how both Lato and Scott Brown sprung into the air following the winger's lob into the box. They didn't get far though as the Valencia Left-back swung his arm in his upward momentum striking the midfielder across his neck and face. Losing his balance he took both himself and Lato out sending them crashing to the ground.

"The defender is just unlucky, he clearly didn't mean it," Roy Townsley stated with a wry smile as he watched the Valencia players plead their case to the ref trying to change his mind. However no matter how much they spoke they couldn't convince him as he stood firm on his decision.

Only when he seemed to threaten them with a booking did they finally relent, forced to accept it. "You're right he's been doing so well throughout the match but this one mistake could see his team being knocked out of the tournament," Callum commented doing his part to engage the viewers at home who tuned into the broadcast.

Down on the field, the Scott proceeded to get treatment by the terms medics wasting the rest of the allotted extra time. The few Celtic fans who had decided to stay when Rakim and Johnson were introduced felt their heart beat crazily. They had been undergoing a rollercoaster ever since the young winger converted his first chance but now they were smiling wildly.

They could already see a win in their eyes thus deciding to chug one of their two beers before breaking off into their team's hymns. Having two beers in hand when watching your team play is the sign of a true Scottish football fan. Thus a weird scene ensued as the less-than 5 thousand remaining Celtic supporters sang their team's song in the silent stadium.

Their gruff shout-filled voices were quickly projected around the dome-shaped stadium of Mestalla stadium. Despite outnumbering the away side the home team's fans had felt like they had been living a nightmare ever since Rakim came on. From leading comfortably with an aggregate score of 3:0 to now suddenly being at 3:2 and the possibility of losing now that their opponents gained a last-minute Penalty.

(FWEEET Fweet,) "Looks like they are finally ready," Callum stated as Scott was helped off the field allowing the Ref to restart the game. He quickly ushered away all the players in the box as McGregor stepped up to take the set piece. Edouard was the team's third penalty taker but the coach had decided to let Callum McGroger take on this responsibility.

Not able to argue with the coaches and captain's decision he took his spot outside the box. Setting the ball on the spot he took four curved steps back ready to face the keeper. Neto In between the sticks

stood Ice cold as he stared into the Captain's eyes as he stood at the ready. His knees were slightly bent, arms spread wide and the unblinking stare that seemed to look into his opponent's soul.

Right now he was in a state of focus that was hard for players to reach as he seemed to be able to tune out everything but the player in front of him. The fans who had been singing now held their breath clutching their beers tightly as they all leaned forward in anticipation. A silence settled in the Estadi de Mestalla all waiting for the ref whistle and then it came.

(Fweeet,)