

Football 245

Chapter 245 Bitter Sweet

[Time stamps in games]

(Fweet)

As the referee's whistle echoed through the stadium, the tension reached its peak. Callum McGregor took a deep breath, his eyes locked onto the ball, then glanced briefly at the keeper. He took a deliberate run-up, each step purposeful and measured. The stadium, filled with fans from both sides, seemed to collectively hold its breath as the moment of truth arrived.

McGregor Decided to ignore Neto's stare and play it safe by picking out a corner and striking the ball hard. Aiming low to the left the ball shot off his boot, skimming just above the ground with a slight spin. Neto between the sticks whose eyes were still wide open reacted with lightning speed. He dived to his right, extending his arm in a desperate attempt to reach the ball.

Everyone held their breath as they tried to follow the ball's trajectory but it was too quick for them to follow. However, for the two players in the box time seemed to slow down for a brief moment. Neto's outstretched fingers brushed against it, altering its course just enough.

The ball hit the inside of the post and ricocheted back out into the penalty area. The groans of Celtic fans and the relieved cheers from the Valencia supporters mixed into a single, resonant sound. They didn't dare to alter their eyes from the box though still anxious to see what would happen next.

The ball was loose in the box, and the players scrambled to react. Edouard, quick on his feet, rushed towards the rebound. In an effort to make up for his mistake, Lato swooped in, clearing the ball with a powerful kick upfield. The danger was averted, causing Valencia to breathe a collective sigh of relief, whilst in the Celtic stand Beers were flung in the air in frustration.

Callum McGregor put his hands on his head in disbelief, falling onto his knees as his world seemed to shatter. He didn't even mind the plastic beer cups raining down from the stands as he heard the shrill sound of the whistle. His heart sunk to the depth of despair as the referee ended the game signalling the end of his 2018/19 Europa League journey.

The final whistle was a cruel punctuation to Celtic's European campaign. Callum McGregor remained on his knees, the weight of the missed opportunity pressing down on him. The disappointment was palpable, not just on the pitch but throughout the stands. The visiting fans, who had travelled in hopes of witnessing a miracle comeback, were left to grapple with the harsh reality of the night's events.

Especially after hope arose with the quick successive goals by the winger making his professional debut. They got to dream for a second already tasting the sweet taste of glory only for it to be snatched from their grasp. Safe to say their emotions right now were a mix of sadness and anger as they tried their best to keep their emotions under control.

Being the team's ultras of the team they had stayed when everyone left the stadium. This wasn't due to their stinginess of not wanting to waste their entry fee but their love for the club. So they took this loss particularly hard and were unable to hold back throwing the nearest beverages in rage.

The plastic cups, harmless in intent but filled with frustration, rained down as a symbolic gesture of their heartbreak. Despite their actions, there was an unspoken respect for the team's effort which they chose to ignore at this moment. The Glasgow players on the pitch felt the sting of the loss as acutely as the fans in the stands. For many, this was as high as they would reach on the international stage in their career.

The Valencia players breathed a sigh of relief and started celebrating this match that had unexpectedly become a challenge. They had come into this match as the clear favourite but somehow found themselves struggling towards the end. Surviving in the last moments they valued the win that much more not able to hold back the bright smiles on their faces.

However, their eyes subconsciously moved towards the young 15-year-old winger who had caused them that much trouble. He was lying on his back near the left flank with the ball next to him as he had chased it down the moment it was cleared. However, by then it was too late for him to try anything else as the match had ended.

Kang-in who was nearby as he had followed after him, walked over to check on him after celebrating with his nearby teammates. Wanting to console this sunny kid who had made quite an impression on him he stopped in his tracks as he reached him.

Although he had part of his arm over his mouth he could still see it, the boy wasn't sad but had a broad smile. Despite his teary eyes, he was smiling with clear happiness discernable on his face. "Are you ok?" he asked the boy but what he wanted to ask is are you sane?

"huh, yeah I'm fine, congrats on the win bro," Rakim responded after taking a second to squint his eyes from the sun's glare. Seeing it was the friendly guy who was tasked with marking him he calmed down.

"Thanks," he responded before extending a hand to help Rakim to his feet. "You played really well out there. Gave us quite a scare." Rakim accepted the hand and got up, dusting off his shorts. "Appreciate it. Today luck was on your side. It's just one of those games," he replied with a shrug, still keeping a light smile on his face not taking this loss too hard.

For him, this game was his debut in the footballing world and that's all that mattered to him at the moment. Finally reaching this point and performing well against a major Spanish side was all he could wish for. Despite understanding the importance of the Europa League to him it was just another match.

Not having worked hard with the team to get this far it didn't matter as much to him. His scoring 2 goals to bring the team some hope was the only thing he could do. However, the real reason was the fact he is still salty about the reception he received from the fans. Chatting for a short while as their adrenaline settled down Rakim was finally called over by his teammates.

As the Celtic players slowly gathered themselves, the atmosphere in the Estadi de Mestalla began to shift. The Valencia supporters, elated by their team's victory and progression in the Europa League, were still celebrations. The contrasting emotions between the two sets of fans created a unique soundscape.

The Celtic players, visibly drained and disheartened, trudged their way to the corner where their fans were gathered. It was their job to show gratitude to the fans who had travelled this far to support them by acknowledging them. Tears filled the eyes of some players, while others wore stoic expressions, masking the heartbreak they felt inside.

Seeing their players in front of them caused the fans to calm down a little as they clapped in condolence. Despite the disappointment of the result, the fans stood up showing their love for the club. The players clapped back, silently thanking them for all their support. This scene lasted for 10 minutes before the players made their way back to the changing rooms.

Rakim wasn't chosen for interviews despite his stellar performance which he didn't particularly mind. He was feeling bitter-sweet at the moment and right now the only person he wanted to talk to was his family. He stuck to texting though not willing to upset his sad teammates.

[Ding: Post-Match Review]

>Goals scored: (2) = 200Sp

>Assists: (0) = 0Sp

>Cards: 0 (Yellow) = 0Sp

>Final Match score: 3:2 Loss = -10Sp

>Match Rating: 8.9