

## Football 248

### Chapter 248 Vs HEARTS

The announcement was met with mixed reactions from the fans. Some welcomed Lennon's return, remembering his previous successes with the club, while others remained sceptical, still reeling from Rodgers' sudden departure. Back at the training ground, the players gathered to listen to Neil Lennon address them for the first time.

After going through with the club's formalities and completing his media duties he decided to meet the player. Given that he would have to lead them in tomorrow's game against Hearts. Thus he decided to meet them right after so he could introduce himself to them. His arrival was met with a mix of curiosity and cautious optimism by the exhausted players.

"Alright, lads, I know it's been a tough day for you lot," he began, his voice carrying the weight sounding fully confident in his ability to helm the ship that is Celtic. "But we've got to move forward. I've been where you are now, and I know what it takes to succeed here. Let's get back to basics, focus on our game, and show everyone what Celtic is made of."

The players, still processing the whirlwind of emotions from the day listened intently. There was a noticeable shift in the atmosphere, a mixture of relief and determination beginning to settle in. Callum McGregor, the captain, stepped forward, setting the tone for the team. "Welcome back, gaffer," he said, extending his hand to Lennon. "We're ready to fight for you and for this club."

Lennon shook his hand firmly. "Good to hear, Let's make sure we channel all this energy into tomorrow's game. I will be releasing the team sheet tomorrow after the morning session." He stated with a smile trying to ease the player's nerves before proceeding to individually speak with the players. Understanding their mindsets from his playing days he addressed any concerns they had.

His approach was both firm and empathetic, aiming to rebuild trust and confidence swiftly. The character didn't last long as he allowed the players to disperse as he needed to get to work. He had little time to make up an effective team sheet that would allow him to win his first game with the club.

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As the players dispersed, Lennon retreated to his office, poring over recent match footage and player statistics. The challenge of crafting a winning strategy in such a short time was daunting, but that is the job he had signed up for. Plus having been in talks with the club management he had gotten a good idea of what he wanted to do with the team.

The only player whom he hadn't gotten a chance to really study was the club's new winger Rakim. Having watched him in the Europa League matches against Valencia he was pleasantly surprised. However, less than 10 minutes of gameplay is not enough to convince him to put his trust in the boy.

Thus he found himself spending most of his time looking over the readily available game tape on the boy. Due to how high profile he is at such a young age game tape wasn't hard to find. However the more he looked at it the more his frown increased, "interesting," was the only thing that came out of his mouth.

"Let's just give him a try," He muttered to himself after watching Rakim's side volley to score his second goal in the Valencia game. The rest of the night was long for the newly appointed manager who meticulously analyzed footage, evaluating each player's strengths and weaknesses.

His decision to include Rakim in the squad for the upcoming match against Hearts was a calculated risk. That just left him to come up with a competitive lineup to start the match off hoping for an early lead.

The following morning, the team gathered for their final training session before the match. Lennon was there early, greeting the players as they arrived, ensuring they felt his support. As the players assembled for their final training session before tonight's match against Hearts.

The air was charged with a blend of anticipation and nervous energy as the players began their warm-ups. Each player had their own quirks they needed to work out so Neil remained patient as he waited for everyone to arrive. He made sure to note down those that were not on time and those who showed up quite early.

The training session wasn't intense mainly focusing on working on last-minute possession drills. Lennon didn't change their overall playing style much choosing instead to refine the existing one for now. In his mind, there is no need to mess up the formula so close to the game. He paid close attention to every detail, from positioning to communication, making sure the team was ready to face Hearts with a clear plan.

Throughout the hour-and-a-half training session, he paid close attention to every detail, from positioning to communication, making sure the team was ready to face Hearts with a clear plan. As the session concluded, Lennon gathered the players for a brief meeting. With the team sheet in hand, he addressed them one last time before the match.

"Alright, everyone. I've finalized the lineup for today's game. I want to see intensity from the first whistle to the last. We've got a point to prove, and we need to hit the ground running. Remember, play as a unit and support each other out there." He said with an intensity that the players weren't quite expecting as his face turned red.

Posting the team sheet on the board behind him he quickly exited the room with his coaching staff. Upon his exit, a chaotic scene erupted as the players sped forward to check if they had made the team sheet. There were mixed reactions as the players reviewed their positions, Rakim especially was pleasantly surprised to find his name there.

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The time came for the match against Hearts, and the Celtic supporters packed the stands, their chants echoing through the stadium. The atmosphere was electric, a blend of hope and apprehension. As the teams lined up for kick-off, the tension was palpable.

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HEARTS STARTING XI (4-2-3-1):

(GK) Z. Zlamal 1;

(RB) M. Gordinho 26, (CB) J.Souttar 4, (CB) C. Berra 6, (LB) J. Brandon 25;

(RCDM) O. Lee 8; (LCDM) P. Harin 5;

(RM) A. Djoum 10, (CAM) S. Naismith 14, (LM) S. Clare 9;

(St) U. Ikpeazu 9;

vs

CELTIC STARTING XI (4-2-3-1):

(GK) Scott Bain 29;

(LB) Kieran Tierney 63, (CB) Kristoffer Ajer 35, (CB) Dedryck Boyata 20, (RB) Jeremy Toljan 2;

(LCDM) Nir Bitton 6, (RCDM) Scott Brown 8;

(LM) Scott Sinclair 11, (CAM) Ewan Henderson 52, (RM) James Forrest 49;

(ST) Oliver Burke 25.

SUBS: Timothy Weah 30, Johnny Hayes 15, Mikael Lustig 23, Craig Gordon 1, Odsonne Edouard 22, Michael Johnston 73, Rakim Rex 45.

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The referee's whistle signalled the start of the match, and Celtic immediately took control of the ball. The players moved with a sense of urgency and precision, reflecting Lennon's instructions from the morning's training session. All the players were doing their best to show their new manager that they could execute his instructions.

Thus they played with more efficiency than ever before doing their best to execute the game plan. Celtic started with a high tempo, pushing forward with a fluid rhythm causing quite a few problems to the Hearts home side. They struggled to find their footing as the boys in greens stomped their presence on the game.

[5] after a beautiful overlap with Sinclair Tierny found himself with green grass to dribble into. The speedy wingback wasted no time speeding down the wing performing a few deft skills to keep Lee at bay. Meeting Godinho after entering the final third he slowed down slightly as he neared Godinho who stood in his way.

Looking up for a pass he feinted a cut across the the middle before scooping the ball past the left-right back. His move was swift making it look easy as he left his marker rooted. Not getting far though he felt a tug on his shoulder sending him to the ground before he could do anything with his chance.

Before he could even complain the ref blew his whistle for a freekick as the hearts 26 held up his hands trying to plead his innocence. The ref was having non of it though as he simply called him over giving him a warning. Godinho was happy that he didn't get booked this early and simply accepted the verdict with no further huff.