

Football 25

Chapter 25 Training With The Prince

Quickly following behind Kaka, he led me to a station that looked to be like a small racecourse with plastic players pinned everywhere. The plastic players were spread over varying distances from one meter to three meters. Looking at the figures that were laid out in a snake-like jungle I was slightly confused about what the next drill could be.

Kaka seemed to sense my confused look as he scratched the back of his head in slight embarrassment. Looking at him he quickly looked away in an attempt to escape my questioning glare. However, instead of explaining what to do he simply grabbed the ball from my feet and charged at the exercise. Guess he wants me to learn by observing him must be a genius thing not being able to explain their thought process.

He sped past the first opponent who had a distance of one meter between the next checkpoints. After passing the figure he suddenly slowed down for a beat before accelerating with a body feint past the next player. He did this throughout the course accelerating past short distances and slowing his pace when he had a bit of room. Watching him do the course was like watching a skilled dancer who would go from dancing fast to suddenly slowing down.

Mesmerised by his dance-like dribbling I almost didn't notice when Kaka made it back to me looking like he barely got a workout from that. Not waiting for him to say anything I took the ball and line up at the starting line. (huff) Taking a deep breath in I closed my eyes trying to calm my emotion as I tried to concentrate on remembering his movements to the best of my abilities. For some reason, I could clearly in vision his movements as he went through the drill almost as if I was watching him do it again.

(huff) Taking another deep breath my eyes shot open as my left foot lunged towards the ball quickly moving past the first figure. Trying to slow down abruptly I did not anticipate the ball to jump away from me due to how much power I put into my first lunge. Having lost control of the ball I had to restart the drill. This time I chose to go past the right side with a little less speed and more emphasising on control.

I managed to gain control of the ball after passing the figure, but I came to a stop this time. This made it a bit awkward when I tried to accelerate again as I tripped over the ball embracing my old friend on the grass. This is starting to become a habit feels like I'm more on the ground than playing football at this point.

"What am I doing wrong" I mused to myself as I made my way to the start again. Spending a while thinking about what it was, I was missing I came to a realisation. The thing that I was missing was a rhythm to my dribbling style. Just like dancing follows a certain body rhythm so does dribbling especially if I want to do what Kaka did. If I want to abruptly stop and suddenly accelerate, I'm going to need rhythm in my dribble.

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After about an hour of trying the drill continuously, I managed to complete the drill for the first time. I had finally figured out a rhythm and breathing method that worked for me. Halfway through my tries to integrate rhythm into my dribble I realised the importance of air. This may sound stupid sin we need air to breathe but sometimes hold my breath to push myself harder. Doing this caused me to be out of breath halfway through causing my rhythm to collapse and I lost control of the ball.

So, I started taking small, short breaths when doing a dribble in a one-two rhythm. After a couple of tweaks, I finally managed to make it through the course and still have enough strength to continue running. Motivated by my success in finally completing the dribble maze I jumped up for joy. Not wanting to lose the feeling though I quickly made my way to the start and run through the drill a second time this time at a faster pace. I noticed that when changing directions and sudden acceleration my body had the power to do a lot more. This was due to how my breathing aligned with my movement, breathing in when slowing down and out when stepping on the gas.

The feeling of finally being able to do the drill felt exhilarating to the point I started smiling like a fool. This must be why Kaka smiles all the time, this feeling is like getting a sugar rush or experiencing a roller-

coaster ride. After about ten more runs through the course, I started trying to bring in small skills. I started with a simple drop-the-shoulder motion before passing the figure on the opposite side.

It took me a while before this motion became a little more comfortable for me. I did end up on the floor a couple of times or ran straight into the unmoving figure which earned me a chuckle from Kaka. I had forgotten he was even there as I was immersed in my training but not wanting to bother with him, I continued to work on my feints.

In a while, I managed to somehow integrate the body feints in my dribbling rhythm with my head intact. I was thankful that I was doing this in my dream otherwise I would have so many bruises on my body some might think I got attacked by a gang of boxers. The next skill I worked on was the chop cut taking a page straight out of one of the goats of the game. Lionel Messi uses this skill to quickly change the direction of the ball and with my feints, it would be a perfect fit for me.

The skill was rather hard not because it's some complicated Manuvir it's because of how natural it felt at first. To perform the move, I have to use the side of my foot to chop at the side of the ball to change directions instead of the top of my foot which I'm used to using. It felt like I was back to the start of the session as I kept putting too much power into my chops and losing control of the ball.

Attempting to get the skill down I trained it without the feints, so I can get at least an entry-level understanding of the manoeuvre. Even with the less difficulty the simple-looking skill was a nightmare to integrate into my newly developed dribbling rhythm. In the end, I did manage to complete a couple of rounds using the chop skill. However, every now and then I would still mess up and lose control so it's a work in progress.

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Finishing a chop dribble through the maze I finally had enough and stopped to catch my breath. Not sure how long I had trained for as at some point I felt this need for improvement and speed that everything else disappeared into blurry after images. Walking over to a Kaka who looked like an abandoned puppy I felt quite sorry for completely forgetting him twice.

"I'm sorry I was just having too much fun" I apologetically told him, scratching the back of my head hoping he would accept my apology.

"It's Okay young lion I used to be like that too when I was young," he said as he stood up from the grass patting stray blades of grass off his clothes. Good thing he's not mad, I know a lot of teachers would be fuming if their students ignored them and started doing their own thing. Even if what I was doing could be considered studying the same subject. Some teachers are weird though as they will get mad if you study their subject in front of them without letting them be the ones to impart the knowledge to you.

"Young lion?" I breathe in relief as he wasn't mad at me, but I was slightly confused by the lion's comment.

"You are a lion cub that's slowly growing up," he said as he stepped forward and took the ball from me before I could react. He started juggling the ball up and down before sending me a pass in the air only for me to drop it. I tried to imitate him and somehow after three juggles, I passed it back to him. He trapped the ball with ease continuing to juggle it before he passed it back to me.

This back and forth continued for a little while till I managed to juggle the ball ten times in a row getting more comfortable with the feel of the ball. Passing the ball to him he didn't continue to juggle the ball this time as he flicked it up and started bouncing it on his head. He looked like a seal he bounces the ball on his head. What he did next blew my mind and made me want to cry for thinking my ten juggles in a row were good.

He let the ball roll down his back before flicking it up with his heel only to catch it on his neck, this whole time he didn't even make eye contact with the ball. Knocking the ball back into the air he let it drop on his right shoulder. From there he took it with his feet again and casually performed three around the world again. To finish off his magic show because that's what this looked like to me, he blasted the ball high into the sky as he looked at me.

"You will be a real lion once you can do this," he said with a wide grin that looked challenging and filled with expectations. Just as I was about to clap for him the ball came down on his right leg perfectly and he trapped it with absolute control not letting the ball level his vice grip of a foot.

"Monster" I muttered as fell onto my back at the beast in human form that was before and teaching me this whole time.