

Football 269

Chapter 269 Vs Dundee

The next few days after his post had been a whirlwind for Rakim as everyone seemed to go crazy. Since no one other than the people handling the TitanFit deal and those involved in the planning knew about it everyone else made up their own conclusions. From debating which club he had signed for to the more realistic endorsement deal he might have signed everyone seemed to want to know.

Lis had to reassure the people at Ace Academy that he hadn't signed for a team as they had gotten quite worried that they had been cut out of the deal. She reassured them that it was for an endorsement deal and that it had to be kept silent for now. However, this also served as a wake-up call for them, encouraging them to start talks with teams who wanted to sign him. Their wait-and-see approach till the end of the season was no longer acceptable given that if Rakim's team facilitated the move on their own they would lose a chunk of their benefits.

The Celtic organisation as a whole took the news differently. Whilst most would panic over losing the chance to sign a player with Rakim's potential they seemed to just accept it. They realised that they couldn't hold onto him and simply used the chance to boost their social media presence and shirt sales. Their decision remained the same even after realising that the player had simply signed an endorsement deal. In their minds, the money needed to sign him was far too costly for them and the immediate benefits are much more important.

The same can not be said for the teams who had been waiting for the season to end before entering talks to sign him. Now they too started contacting his mother and Ace Academy to understand the situation and from what little he was told 8 teams had inquired about him. No offer was yet to be made but he realised that as he was approaching the last month of the season offers would soon fly in.

Moving past that Rakim spent a couple of days letting his teammates know that he wasn't leaving before the end of the season. The game on Sunday against Dundee kept them preoccupied as Lennon seemed to be trying out new tactics. Since the League title had already been secured he felt like he could just focus on forming a good game plan for the upcoming season.

Realising that he won't be able to utilise Rakim in the next season he decided to bench him for the next. It pained him to do this since he'd grown to love his playstyle but keeping his job was his most important responsibility. Thus as Sunday approached he worked tirelessly with the team he assumed would be his starting lineup for the next season.

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[Sat, 17/03/2019, 2:10PM]

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Dundee XI:

S. Dieng

LB: J. Horsfield (29), CB: G. Kusunga (5), R. McGowan (15), D. O'Dea (6), N. Ralph (3)

LM: J. O'Sullivan (7), CM: M. Woods (4), E. Robson (16), RM: S. Wright (10)

ST: K. Miller (20)

VS

Celtic XI:

GK: Bain (29)

RB: J. Toljan (2), CB: K. Ajer (35), M. Lustig (23), LB: K. Tierney (63),

CDM: C.McGregor (42), S. Brown (8)

RM: J. Forrest (49), CAM: M. Johnston (73), S. Sinclair (11),

ST: O. Edouard (22)

Subs: Jonny Hayes (15), Timothy Weah (30), Filip Benkovic (32), Vakoun Issouf Bayo (10), Dorus de Vries (24), Oliver Burke (25), Rakim Rex (45),

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The tension in the locker room was palpable as the players laced up their boots and adjusted their kits. Despite being benched, Rakim felt the usual pre-match adrenaline coursing through him as he sat among his teammates. Neil Lennon, the gaffer, was in the middle of his team talk, emphasizing the importance of maintaining their momentum and putting into action what they had been working on during training.

"Like I've been saying these last few games are about setting the tone for next season. So we need to show our depth, and ability to adapt." He told his troops motioning for the board with the player's formation. He started going over the details of the tactics they had been working on and what he wanted the players to do.

The talk lasted a whole 10 minutes before he was forced to end it since the match would start at 2:30. By the time he was done with his talk the players were fired up and understood their assignment. Especially the starting players seemed to be ready to use this chance to secure their starting positions for the next season.

As the players made their way out of the locker room and onto the pitch, the atmosphere inside Dundee Scot Foam Stadium at Dens Park was electric. The fans were already in full voice, their chants echoing through the stadium, creating a sea of green and white. Even though Rakim wasn't starting, the energy was contagious, and he felt a surge of pride as he stepped out onto the grass, even if it was just to head to the bench. Smiling brightly he didn't forget to wave at the nearby fans behind their team's bench, even doing a light Griddy after seeing a fan hold up a plack with him doing the move on it.

The match kicked off promptly at 2:30 PM, with Celtic taking control early. As expected, they dominated possession, their quick passing and movement putting pressure on Dundee from the first whistle. Lennon's tactics were clearly focused on maintaining possession and probing for openings in Dundee's defence, which was set up in a compact and defensive formation.

From the bench, Rakim observed every move, analyzing how his teammates were executing the game plan. He noted how Johnston and Sinclair were combining well on the left flank, with Edouard making smart runs to pull the centre-backs out of position. McGregor and Brown acted as midfield anchors ready to fish out any high balls and break apart any counters.

On the attacking front, they helped to slow down the game when needed and acted as long-range threats. controlling the midfield, dictating the tempo of the game, and ensuring that Dundee couldn't settle into any kind of rhythm became their role. As the match progressed, Celtic maintained their grip on the game.

The early exchanges saw them pushing forward relentlessly, probing Dundee's defensive line with intricate passes and sharp movement. James Forrest, operating on the right wing, was particularly dangerous, using his pace to stretch the defence and whip in crosses that kept Dundee's backline on their toes.

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Around the 15th minute, Celtic nearly broke the deadlock. A clever one-two between McGregor and Sinclair allowed Sinclair to burst into the box. He cut inside, feinting past a defender, and unleashed a curling shot aimed for the far corner. The ball seemed destined for the back of the net, but Dundee's goalkeeper, S. Dieng, reacted brilliantly, diving at full stretch to tip the ball around the post.

The near miss drew gasps from the away crowd, who could sense that a goal for their team was imminent. Lennon on the sidelines shared their enthusiasm as he could be seen on the sidelines encouraging his players. Despite not scoring he was already satisfied with seeing his team implementing his tactics so well. The Dominance they held in the game was proof of that especially the attacking-minded play that he worked hard to implement.

Dundee, though outclassed in possession, showed resilience. They were content to sit back and absorb pressure, looking to hit Celtic on the counter. Their first real chance came in the 22nd minute when a misplaced pass by Lustig in the Celtic half was intercepted by Dundee's midfielder E. Robson. He quickly released a long ball over the top for K. Miller, who had been lurking on the shoulder of the last defender. Miller's experience showed as he deftly controlled the ball and raced towards goal, with only Bain to beat. The crowd held their breath as Miller struck the ball low, aiming for the bottom corner.