

Football 270

Chapter 270 Vs Dundee (2)

Bain, however, was up to the task, spreading his legs wide and knocking the ball away as he made a crucial save. The rebound fell kindly to Dundee's J. O'Sullivan, who tried to follow up, but his shot was blocked heroically by a slide tackle from Kieran Tierney. He had sprinted back to cover and it had paid off allowing him to make this crucial block.

Both he and the keeper received a standing ovation from the travelling Celtic fans who had felt their heart drop for a moment. Lennon in particular could be seen holding his head in panic as saw his plans for the match go down the drain the moment Miller was through one one-on-one with his keeper. After all, even though he wanted to use these last few matches to train the team with the new tactics losing was never acceptable.

A manager has to produce results no matter what, especially when managing the best club in their respective league. There is a different kind of pressure one feels when helming a battleship than that of a regular battle boat trying to challenge for the crown. Any form of weakness perceived by a manager in such a role will lead to uncertainty in their leadership ability. Thus Lennon was quite nervous as he shouted instructions for his players trying to settle his racing heart.

As the match progressed, the intensity on the pitch only heightened. Celtic continued to dominate possession, probing Dundee's defence with relentless energy. In the 30th minute, a slick pass from McGregor to Johnston on the right wing opened up a new avenue of attack. Johnston whipped in a dangerous cross, which found Edouard at the near post. The striker's header, though well-directed, was too close to S. Dieng, who barely had to move to catch the ball in his hands.

Lennon's tactical adjustments were evident. He urged McGregor and Brown to push forward more, creating a diamond in the midfield that could stretch Dundee's defensive lines and exploit any gaps. This shift in tactics bore fruit in the 39th minute when a clever combination between Brown and Edouard allowed Brown to break free on the edge of the penalty area. The captain unleashed a fierce shot, but once again, Dieng was equal to the task, tipping the ball over the bar.

Despite their defensive struggles, Dundee managed to stay in the game, thanks to their disciplined backline and a bit of luck. However, the more they defended the more infrequent their counterattacks became, despite showing potential a few times. None of the chances were allowed to develop though as the nearby Celtic players would swarm the ball holder to win the ball back.

In the 43rd minute, after another failed attack by S. Wright down the flank all that came off it was a throwing after a sharp slide tackle from J.Toljan. N. Ralph took it throwing it long finding the head of Miller in the box. The striker using his body to hold off Ajer, managed a header that sailed towards the back post catching Bain by surprise. Luck was on his side though as it skiffed off the far pole before heading out for a throwing causing the crowd to groan in disappointment as the chance passed by them.

The near miss from Miller sent a shiver down the spines of the Celtic supporters. The narrow escape seemed to galvanize Dundee, who began to push forward with more intent as the first half drew to a close. The Celtic defence, though mostly solid, had shown cracks under pressure, and Dundee sought to exploit these in the dying minutes of the half.

In the 45th minute, Dundee was awarded a free kick just outside the penalty area after a clumsy challenge by Lustig on O'Sullivan. The Celtic defenders lined up to form a wall, while Bain in front of his goal crouched slightly, ready to react. E. Robson stood over the ball, eyeing his target. The referee's whistle blew, and Robson took a few steps before striking the ball with precision.

Surprisingly the shot curled over the short side of the wall, catching Bain off guard who was expecting it to go the long route. Now that he was standing closer to the far post he willed his legs to react as he skimmed towards his right post but it was too late. The ball dipped dangerously toward the top right corner forcing him to take off early hoping to reach it in time.

Diving to his right he stretched his hand out to the limit trying to extend his gloves to the ball that seemed dead set on entering his goal. It wasn't enough though as the ball passed by him at just an inch

of a difference sending his net rattling. Before he could even hit the ground the home fans behind his goal exploded with a defining roar of jubilation.

The roar of the home fans echoed throughout the stadium, a deafening celebration of Dundee's unexpected lead. Robson's teammates swarmed him near the corner flag, elated by the goal that put them ahead just before halftime. The Dundee bench erupted, with the manager applauding his team's perseverance.

On the other side, the Celtic players looked stunned. They had dominated much of the first half, controlling possession and creating chances, yet they found themselves trailing. Neil Lennon paced the touchline, clearly frustrated but urging his players to keep their heads up. His words were for naught as by the time Dundee finished their celebration and the match restarted the referee blew the whistle to signal the end of the first half.

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The Celtic players quickly gathered the away team's locker room, the air thick with tension. None of the players knew how they had ended up in this situation since they had been dominating most of the match. The feeling of frustration as they looked for that missing thing that tripped them up most of them naturally thought of blaming Lustig for the freekick.

However, they knew that they should have converted the chances and were now suffering the side effects of not being able to do so. The saying that a predator that plays with their food goes hungry fits their current situation. However whilst most of the players had gloomy expressions two of them were happily whispering to each other.

"That number 3's Agility is poor and his explosive speed isn't any better, you should easily beat him with a quick feint, try to bait him in though he'll bite 80% of the time," Rakim told Forrest in a whispered tone

letting his teammate know what he had observed during the first half. "If you can force him to put his left foot first it'll be even easier for you, just don't let him get physical he'll snap you like a twig,"

"Hey I'll let you know I've been hitting the gym hard," James retorted with a frown flicking his younger teammate's ear before flexing his biceps. The unimpressed look of the 15-year-old seemed to hurt his pride prompting him to pull him into a headlock.

"Ok ok, You're strong too I get it, let me go you smell old man," Rakim exclaimed in disgust as he started tapping in surrender drawing in the gazes of the players in the locker room.

"Don't you forget it, and for your information 27 is young for someone as handsome as me," He retorted with a content smile as he let go of Rakim before proceeding to flex his muscles not at all caring at the gazes of his teammates.

Just as he was about to continue his discussion with Rakim, he noticed that his teammates were still staring their way. "Why are you all so gloomy, lighten up as long as we play like we did at the start of the game we won't have trouble finding the back of the net. Let's just take the good points and build upon it set-piece goal will happen no matter how good you are." His words had an immediate effect on the gloomy atmosphere in the room.

Being seasoned players they immediately realised that his words held true and that they should be thinking of ways to improve instead of looking for someone to blame. "(Ahem) Corner we should tighten up the middle of the park whenever they counter, they cant handle us on the wing," Scott Brown was the first to break the silence as he started discussing what he and his midfield partner could improve upon.