

Football 301

Chapter 301 Offers

Lisa stepped into the car waiting outside, her thoughts already shifting to the next meeting. The meeting with Tottenham had gone just like she had expected but she knew the coming clubs would likely offer similar promises. She would just have to look for the most promising ones and disswade any thoughts of a long term contract. Her next stop Chelsea,

As the car cruised through London, she leaned back against the leather seat, mentally preparing herself. Chelsea, unlike Tottenham, had a reputation for acquiring young talents and rotating them across various loan systems. They'd claim it was to develop players, but Lisa saw it for what it was: a stockpile of assets. Rakim wasn't going to become just another player in their bloated system, loaned out to some far-off club for years.

By the time she reached Stamford Bridge, Lisa had already prepared her questions, her strategy firmly in place. A few polite smiles and exchanges later, she found herself in a similar conference room, this time with Chelsea's recruitment team.

"So," began the Chelsea representative, a well-dressed man with a sharp demeanor. "Rakim's recent rise in value is well-deserved. We've been watching him for a while now. He fits perfectly into our vision of dynamic, pace-driven football." He slid a folder across the table toward her. "This contains our development plan for him—both on the field and in terms of marketing. Chelsea is not just a club, Mrs. Rex, it's a global institution."

Lisa opened the folder and scanned it, noting the detailed breakdown of their "vision." She'd seen enough marketing plans to last a lifetime. What mattered to her was the focus on his development, not just his marketability. Her attention zeroed in on the parts that mattered—development, game time, his future on the field. However, no matter how much she looked through the folder there was no mention of such details in teh preliminary plan.

"And where exactly do you see Rakim fitting into your squad?" she asked, her voice steady but firm.

"Ah, well," the man hesitated slightly, "we believe Rakim could benefit from some time with our sister clubs on loan before making his impact here. It's common practice to nurture talent in environments where they can get the necessary experience and then bring them into the fold when they are fully prepared."

Lisa's eyes sharpened. "And during this loan period, will he be exempt from your marketing campaigns?" She question as he gaze quickly turned sharp already figuring out that they wanted to sign her son for the star power he currently has but weren't willing to risk fully committing. Following her question she directly closed the folder in her hands seeing no point reading the rest if they weren't serious about their offer.

"Mrs. Rex, that's an unreasonable request," the man replied, his tone suddenly defensive. "We'll be investing in his future, after all. And that includes developing his image."

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For the next few weeks Lisa continued to have meetings with clubs who wanted to sign Rakim due to the hype of the Titan-fit launch. Their attitude quickly changed after realising that if they didn't have a well thought out plan she wouldn't even listen to them. Most big clubs were under the impression that every young player wants to join their teams but she quickly made them realise it was them who should be thankful if he joined them.

Her biggest bargaining chip were his image rights and she made it clear after continued stagnation in negotiations that they would be taken off the table. Usually not so well known players and young talents looking for a break would sign away all their image rights to the club they played for. However in

Rakim's case he was popular enough on social media to not need to do so without adequate benefits from the club.

Simply signing away his collective image rights was already a big enough concession for the simple fact he could open up the US market. With the states being the biggest market in the world it was quite sad how unpopular the biggest game on the planet is. However with most of Rakim's fans being based on the US he quite literally held the keys to open up the gates into the market for whatever team he joined.

"These are the clubs who have reached an agreement with Ace Academy and have shown genuine interest in acquiring your talented son," Lisa said with a light smile before pulling out a few documents from her binder and placed them on the coffee table. She didn't rush to give her opinion choosing instead to enjoy her time as she watched her son look through the documents.

Spreading out the five files his mother had prepared for him Rakim read the information with interest wanting to see what she wrote about the clubs. During his one month hiatus of professional football he had been hearing loads of rumors regarding teams who wanted to sign him. Some were more bizarre than the others as some of his more ambitious fans wanted him to join LA Galaxy so he could focus on his Metube career.

Anyway opening the first document a familiar Blue N logo appeared in front of him instantly letting him know which team it was. Napoli preliminary offer was a 4 year offer with comprehensive development plans and a promised sporadic match time offer. It was still in the preliminary phases of the negotiation's but they had offered Ace Academy 18M as transfer fees meaning 20% would go his way based on his contract with them. If Rakim was being honest though he didn't expect this offer from Napoli who had just finished second in the 2018/19 Serie A race.

"Honestly based on the preliminary meeting Napoli was the most sincere in their offer," Lisa spoke up after seeing her son linger on the document in front of him. "Carlo Ancelotti that Italian coach even met me personally and started analyzing your match tapes listing out ways he could use you. Despite only speaking a little English he was so passionate that I could still understand everything he wanted to convey."

Rakim looked up, a hint of surprise in his expression. "Ancelotti? Are you sure, Mom. But I don't know, Serie A isn't exactly what I had in mind. I only speak a little Italian." What he didn't say was the fact he feared that his legs would be broken in the defensive minded Italian league. The only good thing about joining Napoli would be the fact he wouldn't have to go against Senegal beast by the name of Koulibaly.

The next two teams were from the Bundesliga, first was RB Leipzig as part of the Redbull conglomerate initiative to sign young talents. Their initial offer was a 3 year contract with comprehensive plans that would see him make his Bundesliga debut and participate in media events. Unlike most teams they were more interested in his skills on the field as they build their brand on performance rather than star power.

The next offer was from the Bundesliga giant's Bayern Munich which honestly excited him when he realised it. They had been his favourite team since he first started walking in the path of a footballer. He practically mirrored half his playing styles on the left wing after Arjen Robben so he would be lying if he said that the fan inside him was doing front flips.

However, upon further thought he quickly realised that the chances of him joining their main squad was slim if major changes didn't take place. Despite dampening his expectations he still eagerly read the offer of both teams and it looked like they wanted him to spend a month on trial with the first team. After that month they would decide whether to keep him on or send him on a loan spell, depending on how fast he adapted to the German culture.

"Joining them might be a bit of a headache... Your Dad's family owns some of the team's shares,"

Chapter 302 Choices

"Joining them might be a bit of a headache... Your Dad's family owns some of the team's shares," Mum said as soon as I finished reading the report she had prepared for the German giant's. "Don't get me wrong they're not major shareholders that can influence the happenings in the club, but you will probably interact with them sooner or later."

Her mentioning Dads Family threw me for a loop since despite living with them for almost a decade I've never met Dads side of the family. From what Emma has told me neither has she, as Dad had completely cut off contact with them.

So, them owning shares in my favourite football team is a little weird but given their wealth it's not all that surprising. Anyway, it's not like I have to interact with them as I've not once had to do so with the Celtic board or shareholders.

However, no matter how much I thought about it the Likelihood of drama arising because of this is high. I love my grandparents since they're so supportive but from what I've gathered they are the exception not the norm. After all, not all grandparents encourage their grandchildren no older than 13 to go to a Highschool party.

"Let's just put a pin in it until we know what their offering," I told her not willing to dwell on the topic for longer than I have to. Since they haven't bothered to show up in our life I'll reciprocate the sentiment.

"Okay, the last two are from the premier league and the Eredivisie," Mum said before motioning to the prominent logos of Chelsea FC and AFC Ajax. "Right." I leaned back, letting the club logos sink in. Chelsea had been circling for a while, but Ajax? That was unexpected. Even when I was at the height of my popularity before the shooting they never came knocking seemingly not trying to fight with the big teams.

Mum watched me closely, her fingers drumming lightly against the table. "I know you prefer Spain but both teams have shown great interest in actually using you in their first squad." She stated before proceeding to lay out how both teams plan from me following their preliminary meeting. "As we expected all teams are interested in your commercial value but Ajax in particular plans on preparing you for a bigger stage in the next two years."

That didn't surprise me much since the Dutch team is renowned for producing some of the fiercest players in the top 3 leagues. However, if I am being honest, I never imagined myself playing in the Dutch league, not because I look down upon it just never crossed my mind. I would get to play champions league football if I joined them though so that's a plus in their favour but the same goes for Chelsea.

I don't know how I feel about spending another two years developing my skills in the high intensity pressure cooker that is Ajax. Much like the German wasps they follow a philosophy of high intensity pressure for most of the match requiring a lot of physical output from their players. That is probably the reason they mainly focus on young players who can keep up with the high demand of their tactics.

Personally, I don't mind that kind of pressure every once in a while especially for important games and competitions. However, doing it week in week out throughout an entire season over at least 3 competitions will eventually take its toll no matter how you look at it. But I wouldn't mind playing under such a system for a little bit if it will make me a better player.

"Just like Bayern where both their star wingers are retiring, Hazard is set to leave the club this summer." Mum stated after seeing I was done checking the information on the Dutch Giants and their preliminary plans for me. They pretty much laid out a 12 step plan on goals they want me to reach and some of aspects of my game they want to improve.

"Is it confirmed that he will leave this summer, I thought that was all just hype like last summer," I questioned her since I've learned to not believe whatever the media says until they present actual proof.

"Yes, he is, I met his agent Bico-Penaque when I visited Chelsea headquarters, they put in their notice to transfer, and the club is accepting offers. The most likely move for him will be Real Madrid especially with Zidane at the helm." She responded with a smile going into detail about how the deal was most likely going to be the highest transfer this summer.

That definitely piqued my interest. Hazard leaving Chelsea was big news, but the idea of him heading to Real Madrid and opening up a spot at Chelsea made things more real. "So, they're preparing to bring someone in to fill that gap..." I muttered, my mind spinning with possibilities. If I were to join Chelsea, I'd have to step into the shoes of someone like Hazard who has been amazing Stamford Bridge since the age of 21.

Mum tilted her head, gauging my reaction. "You're right, it's a big move. But from what I've gathered, Chelsea is looking into a few young wingers to step into that forward role. They have Willian for now, but he is also past his prime and they are starting to look outward."

"Right, so they want me to be part of that transition," I said slowly, piecing it together.

Chelsea is probably looking for any means to bolster their attacking threat after their main talisman leaves. From what I have gathered their line-up is solid, the midfield is top tier with Jorginho, Mason Mount and arguably the best CDM in the world currently playing N'Golo Kante. With the German Rudiger and the French Zuma very little will get by them, so the only thing they will lack is a reliable left winger to support Pulisic and Giroud.

Mum nodded, her gaze steady as if weighing my thoughts before I even voiced them. "Exactly. They're restructuring, and they want you to be a part of that process. It's a big opportunity, but also a lot of responsibility."

Chelsea wasn't just a club—they were one of the biggest clubs in the world, competing on multiple fronts, and with that came intense pressure. If all of that pressure wasn't enough, I would have to deal with the British media at the heart of London. Although I love the spotlight, dealing with the BBC is like arguing with an ex-wife, you lose either way.

"You think they're betting on me filling that kind of role?" I asked, the doubt creeping into my voice despite my best efforts to stay cool.

Mum didn't hesitate. "I think they're betting on you making an impact to what ends leaves to be determined, as I am not sure if it's the commercial appeal that's driving them or genuine appreciation for your talent." Her words hit hard. No fluff, no sugar-coating. Just the truth. And she was right, as usual. The Commercial incentive that I bring to them after their number one player with the most shirt sales is obvious to see.

"But Ajax..." I started, my voice trailing off as I looked back at the logo of the Dutch giants. The contrast between the two offers was glaringly easy to spot. Ajax wanted to invest in my future and the London blues wanted an immediate player and if that wasn't an option for a commercial cash cow. It is a more of a sink-or-swim environment. Immediate impact, high expectations. The kind of pressure that could either make or break a player.

Before I could delve deeper into contemplation Mum spoke up again bringing an end to my musings. "Anyway, these are just preliminary talks things will heat up when the transfer window open, plus you will have another chance to impress them at the UEFA European Under-21 Championship's this summer. You decided who you want to represent yet?"

Chapter 303 The Roar of Hampden

[25/05/2019, Glasgow]

The rumble of the crowd grew louder with every mile the team bus travelled. Hampden Park loomed on the horizon, draped in green and maroon banners, with thousands of fans flooding the streets around the stadium. Celtic's green and white dominated one side, while Hearts' maroon surged on the other, creating a sea of colour under the overcast Scottish sky. The buzz of anticipation was palpable, mixed with the tension and excitement for what would be the final trophy of the season.



Both teams fans were convinced that their side deserved this honour and didn't shy away in letting the other side know. Luckily the tension didn't escalate to more than a shouting or singing match as the neon vest of police officers served as adequate warning. After all no one wanted to miss this game after spending a boat load of money to get a ticket the moment their team qualified.

Inside the Celtic team bus, Rakim sat by the window, his headphones on but he wasn't really listening to the music. His eyes were fixed on the distant sight of Hampden, that now seemed like a gladiator arena at the top of Mount Olympus. It was a stage that would allow him to win his first professional piece of silverware allowing him to already be better than a certain English striker. The magnitude of the occasion wasn't lost on him—this was the Scottish Cup final, the biggest stage in Scottish football outside of the league.

His muscles tingled with that familiar pre-match tension, ready to explode after spending the past month Soley focused on improving them. No one had seen his results other than the occasional workout videos he posted but he knew full well just how big his transformation was. After the month of targeted training, he finally managed to raise his strength stat slightly making all the torture he put his body through worth it.

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[FOOTBALL SINGULARITY SYSTEM]

USER: Rakim Rex

AGE: 15yrs

TALENT ASSESSMENT: Grade - S

Singularity Points: 12400

Position: Winger

(Evaluation: A wunderkind in the truest sense, who has proven his ability to the world throw a boulder into a still pond)

[ USER STATS: Under 23 Grade]

>Physical Fitness: A

Balance and Coordination: S

Speed: B++

Agility: A+

Strength: C+ ->(B-)

Stamina: C++ -> (B-)

>Football Technique: S

>Game Intelligence: A

>Mental Ability: S+

>Singularity Skills: MR ShowTime: Grade -A

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Looking at his improved stats a bright smile couldn't help its self from appearing on his face. His strength and stamina had been something that had been holding him back for a while, so seeing them both improve a sense of achievement filled his chest. The moment his strength stat upgraded it caused a chain reaction in his stamina allowing it to reach the B- grade.

From what he could feel the rest of his stats where also on the brink of reaching the next level as long as he continued to work on them. Now though he couldn't wait to see how much his hard work would carry over into an actual game. Pulling his Titan Hood over his head he could feel his excitement bubbling over reedy to erupt just looking for an outlet.

Looking around him, he saw his teammates with serious expressions looking solemn as if they were being sent to war. In a way they were being sent to a battlefield, but they were to fussed for his liking. Thus, he decided to find a way to make them relax and get their mood up and enjoy the moment. No matter how old you are you should still enjoy every opportunity you get to win a major trophy.

"Yo James let me pick out a song," he said directly stretching out his hand to the blond figure next to him. Since he was the one connected to the buses Bluetooth speakers, he didn't hesitate in handing him his phone, that was still on the Spotify app.

Scrolling through his playlist, Rakim quickly decided to search up a song in the search tab, Nipsy Hustle Racks in the middle is the song he finally settled on. Rakim tapped on Nipsey Hussle's "Racks in the Middle" and felt the bass immediately take over the bus. Heads turned, and a few eyebrows raised at the sudden shift in mood, but as the beat kicked in, the vibe began to change.

A couple of teammates exchanged glances before they broke into faint smiles, but Rakim didn't care as he went live on his Instagram. The iconic sound off the late Nipsey Hussle who had died no more than two months ago reverberated through the speakers.

[Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

Yeah, I was ridin' 'round in the V-12 with the racks in the middle

I was ridin' 'round in the V-12 with the racks in the middle

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

Ay]

As the beat flowed through the bus, Rakim's live stream quickly picked up viewers. His followers were used to these spontaneous moments, and his energy was infectious. Comments started flooding in:

@Biggestfna: Yo, Rax look-in' ready!

@Jonny'sToe: Wasn't this guy supposed to be getting ready for a cup final?

@HulksGreenFiest: You better score if you're playing NIP before the game. RIP King

@RakimsWife: You look cute as always, can't wait till I get you alone so we can \$\$\$4~@£\$£\$£\$£\$%£63

@NoToSnitching: Em I didn't see shit but if yall want to call the Feds I'll point them in the right direction.

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Rakim smirked at the screen, giving a quick wave to his fans as he read some of the comments before flipping the camera to show his teammates. A few of them began to bob their heads to the rhythm, loosening up some of the tension in the bus. Others directly got up from their seats singing along to the song already knowing the words by heart given how popular Nip had become after his death. Whilst the Celtic players loosened up and started enjoying themselves to the music the situation at the stadium was just as energetic.

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[Commentators' Booth – Hampden Park]

The sound of thousands of fans filled the stadium as Callum McDonald and Roy Townsley sat in their commentary booth, looking out over the sea of maroon and green. Callum adjusted his headset, speaking to the millions of viewers tuning in to the biggest match of the Scottish football calendar.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to Hampden Park, where today two giants of Scottish football meet for the final piece of silverware this season: Hearts and Celtic in the Scottish Cup final," Callum began. "Roy, there's a special energy here today, isn't there?"

Roy nodded, leaning into his microphone. "Absolutely, Callum. Hampden is packed to the rafters, and it feels like the entire country has their eyes on this game. For Hearts, this is a chance to win the cup after a 7 year drought after their win in the 2011/12 season. While Celtic will be looking to complete yet another treble to their trophy cabinet. But both teams have had their ups and downs this season. It could go either way."

Callum shifted the conversation to the tactics. "What do you think we'll see from Hearts today? They've been solid defensively in recent matches, but they'll need to be more than that against Celtic."

"Hearts will likely go with a 4-3-3 setup, and I think they'll look to absorb pressure and hit Celtic on the break," Roy replied. "Watch for Steven MacLean up front—he's a physical presence who can unsettle defences, and they've got pace out wide with Mulraney and Clare. The key for them will be to frustrate Celtic, force them into mistakes, and capitalize on any set-piece opportunities."

Callum glanced at his notes. "And Celtic?"

"Celtic will stick with their 4-2-3-1, with Scott Brown controlling the midfield. But all eyes will be on Rakim Rex. He's been missing from the team sheet since he amazed the world on the Glasgow derby and from what my sources tell me he has been undergoing specialised training when not busy promoting his brand."

Roy grinned taking a second to water his throat before continuing. "I for one am excited to see what the young wunderkind will do to amaze the world again. His speed, his close control—if Hearts give him space, he'll punish them. And with the likelihood of Edouard playing up front, they'll have plenty of firepower. I expect them to dominate possession and try to pin Hearts back early on."

Chapter 304 The Roar of Hampden (2)

[Outside Hampden]

The bus slowed as it neared the stadium, a wave of noise washing over the team as they entered Hampden's perimeter. Fans pounded the sides of the bus, chanting and waving flags, some yelling out Rakim's name, and that of the other players, trying to get their attention. The energy was electric. Rakim could feel the vibration of the chants echo through his bones as he looked out at the sea of green and white. The supporters were here for them, but the noise from the maroon side of the stadium was just as relentless. Hearts' fans were giving their all, ready to see their side make history.

Rakim leaned forward slightly, peering through the window. His heart racing now, matching the pace of the pulse outside. This was the moment he had been waiting for since he first kicked a football as a kid. The time and place were different but the moment was just as special as it had been in his dreams no matter how far-fetched they were.

After all it's not like he can force aliens to invade earth and force them to play a football match against them on the grandest stage of them all, The Moon. Making the Galactic XI might be far-fetched to be a reality but playing in a real cup final is a close second to that dream. He could see the stadium's towering structure now, with banners fluttering in the cold Scottish wind. The fans, the colours, the sheer magnitude of the event—it was surreal.

"Game faces, lads," Scott Brown exclaimed as he straightened his suit, breaking the temporary silence in the bus. His voice was calm, but there was a sharp focus to his eyes. Brown had been here before, multiple finals, but he still relished this moment every time it presented itself before him. The calm before the storm when the bus rolls to a stop and his teammates shove any fears and worries down as they realise that it's game time.

Hearing the familiar sound of the bus rolling to a stop just outside the team entrance just outside Hampden Park. The low hum of the engine cutting out as the doors hissed open and the following noise from the fans outside surging in, hitting the players with a wall of sound. It was game time. Rakim took a deep breath standing up from his seat as he pulled back his black and red Titan Hood to show his full face.

Despite being dressed in a smart black suit the hood didn't take much away from his look and in fact made him look more the part of an athlete rather than a businessman. Slinging his duffel over his shoulder he followed the rest of teammates as they filed out one by one, some adjusting their suits, others fixing their focus ahead, ready to get the job done.

As they stepped off the bus, the cold air bit at his face. A gust of wind carried the chants and cheers from the stands, blending into a roaring symphony that made his skin tingle. Fans on both sides clamoured for a glimpse, some waving banners, others capturing the moment with their phones. A few screamed Rakim's name louder than the rest, urging him to deliver something spectacular.

Signing a few shirts and cards from some of the fans he passed he made sure to interact with the few who wore Titan-Fit apparel. He felt like it was the least he could do since they had spent their hard earned money to support him and his brand. Thus, the least he could do was stake a few pictures with them and show them the love they show him, but he made sure to keep things professional.

Making sure to only interacting with guys who seemed like gym lads, and some females who didn't have the crazy eyes. He still made sure to limit physical contact with the girls not wanting weird rumours about him popping up on the net. Even if they would most likely portray him as the victim given his age. It just wasn't something he was ready to deal with especially since he hasn't dated anyone in both his lives, which is sad if you think about it.

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The team had just finished the last of their warm ups after getting changed out of their match day suits. They had done most of their warmups on their own training grounds given the convenience of the commute. So, when they reached the stadium, they only spent about 20 minute to get a feel for the park and stretched out those last niggles in their body that were bothering them.

Coach Lennon stood near the whiteboard, his eyes scanning the room, assessing the players' mental readiness. He didn't have to say much. The team had been drilled for the entire week just to get them ready for this match. "Alright, boys. No speeches today. You all know what this means. Let's get out there and leave everything on that pitch," Lennon said, his voice low but firm. He paused, locking eyes with each player, making sure the message was clear. "This is our game."

The players roared in response slapping each other on the back before they changed out of their warmup tops and started to gear up. The atmosphere quickly grew tense with no one talking as they simply got ready to get the job done. The final adjustments were made. Shin guards strapped. Boots tied. The Celtic badge was pressed against their chests they rose to their feet.

The room fell silent as Scott Brown stood at the door, ready to lead them out. "Let's bring this cup home," Brown said, voice booming. The door opened, and the tunnel loomed before them. The din from the crowd returned, louder than before, shaking the very foundation of the stadium. Rakim didn't stick around with them join the rest of the subs as they made their way onto the bench before the pre match proceedings.

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[Ding: it is detected that the host has made the roster for his first professional cup final corresponding mission being issued.]

[Ding: Help your team win the Scottish Cup

Rewards:

+1000 Singularity Points Shop Update

(Note; a player aiming to be remembered in the sport needs the corresponding silverware to prove their worth.)

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'Let's just hope I get to actually contribute in this match,' Rakim thought to himself as he pulled up the system mission that had popped up the moment he was announced as part of the squad. Although not part of the starting XI he would still be a part of the action if given the chance by the coach.

{Just relax and take in the moment, they dint come around every day in players career,} Eva suggested wanting to get her host to calm down as he was getting too caught up in his thoughts. He had been fine the whole day as he went through his pre match program but the moment he rested his mind began to wonder.

'Your right,' Rakim nodded before getting up from his seat to stand with the rest of the subs for the pre match ceremony. The tension before the final was electric as Rakim stood with his teammates, the roar of the fans reverberating through Hampden Park. The stands were a sea of green and white on one side, maroon and white on the other, creating a kaleidoscope of passion that seemed to fuel every breath he took.

The Scottish national anthem boomed through the stadium speakers, sending a down the spine of everyone. He scanned the pitch, watching as the starting eleven lined up for the pre-match ceremony. Standing Infront of his bench with the rest of the substitutes, Rakim could feel the weight of expectations placed on them. Even though he wasn't starting, this was still his moment.

The commentators' voices echoed faintly, around the stadium as Callum McDonald and Roy Townsley began their analysis of the upcoming game. "Celtic going with their familiar 4-2-3-1 formation today, with M. Johnston stepping in on the left wing in place of Rakim Rex, whom we had expected to start. Callum announced, his voice sharp with excitement. "Meanwhile, Hearts are sticking to their 4-3-3, hoping to hit on the counter. It's going to be interesting to see how both teams adapt to the intensity of this final." As the pre-match formalities wrapped up, the crowd settled for the kick-off.

Chapter 305 Final

Hearts line up: 4-3-3

(GK) 1 Z. Zlamal

(RB) 2 M. Smith

(CB) 4 J. Souttar

(CB) 6 C. Berra (c)

(LB) 51 A. Hickey

(CM) 22 R. Edwards 52'52nd minute

(CM) 5 P. Haring 81'81st minute

(CM) 10 A. Sutchuin-Djoum

(RW) 9 S. Clare 52'52nd minute

(ST) 18 S. MacLean

(LW) 23 J. Mulraney

VS

Celtic Line Up: 4-2-3-1

(GK) 29 S. Bain

(RB) 23 M. Lustig

(CB) 5 J. Simunovic

(CB) 35 K. Ajer

(LB) 15 J. Hayes

(RCDM) 8 S. Brown (c)

(LCDM) 42 C. McGregor

(RM) 49 J. Forrest

(CAM) 18 T. Rogic

(LW) 73 M. Johnston

(ST) 22 O. Edouard

Match Officials

Referee: William Callum

Assistants: Alan Mulvanny, Ralph Gordon

Fourth official: Don Robertson

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The names of both teams' starting eleven were quickly displayed on the large jumbotrons at the side of the field as the fans waited for the match to begin. They didn't have to wait long, though, as William Callum, today's referee, blew his whistle, signalling the start of the Scottish Cup Final.

From his position on the bench, Rakim felt the vibrations of the crowd's cheers rumble through the air like distant thunder. He could see the action unfolding on the pitch, as the players started testing each other. Hearts kicked off, immediately pushing the ball back to their centre-backs, Souttar and Berra.

They exchanged a few quick passes, testing the waters before sending the ball wide to Hickey on the left flank. The young left-back sprinted forward, his eyes scanning for options. The game was off to a tentative start, both teams sizing each other up as they fought for early control. Celtic's midfield, anchored by Scott Brown and Callum McGregor didn't make things easy for them as they pressed hard, forcing Hearts into hurried decisions.

As Hearts attempted to transition into attack, Brown stepped in, intercepting a sloppy pass meant to ignite Mulraney into a run forward, pass with a well-timed tackle that sent the ball flying to Forrest on the right wing. Forrest, seized the opportunity he skipped past Djoum who had rushed to close him down before dashing down the flank. He outpaced Mulraney who had quickly switched into his defensive duties before swinging a cross into the box aimed at Edouard, who positioned himself between the defenders.

Edouard rose high above Souttar, his eyes locked on the ball as it arced toward him. With a deft flick of his head, he directed it towards the far post, where the net rippled in anticipation. The Celtic fans erupted, their cheers echoing throughout Hampden Park. But Zlamal, the Hearts goalkeeper, had other plans. With cat-like reflexes, he dove to his right, fingertips grazing the ball just enough to send it sailing wide of the target.

The deflection sent it into the corner, resulting in the first corner of the match. Despite the loud groan from the Celtic fans about missing the opportunity to go ahead Their players didn't look too bothered.

They got off to a great start, simply wanting to complete their coaches' pre-match tactics and it was working for them.

"Corner!" rang out from the announcer's box, and Rogic stepped up to take it. The players jostled for position in the box, each one aware that this set piece could change the game's momentum. Rogic's corner was a well-placed inswinger, curling toward the near post. Hearts' defenders scrambled to maintain their positions as the Celtic players surged forward, each one eager to find a pocket of space. Edouard, still buzzing from his earlier attempt, muscled his way to the front, but Berra stood firm, blocking the path.

Both leapt into the air connecting with the ball at the same time but Berra won the duel of strength sending it flying out of his box. Clare who had been marking Forrest at the edge of the box was the first to spring into action heading the ball forward before chasing after it. Not to be left behind the Celtic winger chased after him looking to quickly dispose of him so they could launch another attack.

Clare wasn't to be outdone though as he deftly flicked the ball down away from the reach of his marker. Using his body to hold him off he came to a quick stop letting Forrest's momentum carry him forward. Not hesitating he cut across from the winger sending a swift pass to Haring in the middle lane who rushed forward ready to initiate a counter.

Haring took a few quick touches, his eyes darting as he sought options ahead. He spotted MacLean making a clever run into the space between Ajer and Simunovic. With a pinpoint pass, Haring sent the ball soaring toward MacLean, who expertly controlled it, spinning away from the approaching defender. The crowd held its breath as MacLean advanced, but just as he prepared to unleash a shot, he stumbled slightly on the uneven turf, losing precious momentum.

Ajer seized the opportunity, sliding in to challenge, but MacLean regained his balance just in time. With a swift cut back to his left foot, he aimed for the bottom corner, only to have Bain, the Celtic keeper, anticipate his move, diving low to parry the shot away. The ball ricocheted off Bain's gloves flying wide out of the box into the waiting feet of the on-rushing Djoum.

He didn't waste time in picking up the loose ball brimming with confidence but Brown was on him with a fierce momentum not giving him a moment to think. Shoulder checking the hearts number 10 he attempted to steal the ball, but Djoum was quick to react. With a deft display of footwork he feinted going forward before turning 180 degrees to the back of Scott.

Not hesitating he set a swift pass across the mouth of the 18 yard box into the path of Clare who had drifted forward. The Hearts number 9 didn't hesitate in striking the ball first time avoiding the sliding challenge of McGregor. Clare connected sweetly, sending the ball rocketing along the ground towards the far post.

The stadium held its breath, but just as it seemed destined for glory, Ajer made a last ditch lunge deflecting it with a desperate lunge. That sent the shot wide, leaving the Celtic fans exhaling in relief. In just [5] minutes of game time Celtic realised that this game wouldn't be easy as Hearts were finding their rhythm ready to bite back when given a chance.

Hearts continued to push forward, emboldened by their near miss. Their midfield, trio especially became active working together to break up any Celtic attacks. With both Clare and Mulraney willing to track back and support their teammates, made things easier for them. For a while no one could tell who would end up on top as both midfielders fought for dominance at the centre of the field.

As the clock ticked past the tenth minute, it was Edwards who made a pivotal play. Intercepting a loose pass from McGregor, he quickly turned and slotted the ball to Djoum, who had drifted into space just outside the box. The crowd surged in anticipation as Djoum, with a deft touch, shifted the ball onto his stronger right foot. With the Celtic defenders closing in, he unleashed a curling shot aimed for the top corner.

Bain however was unbothered by the shot as he was able to read its trajectory and simply watched it sail wide past him. He was just about to quickly restart the game when he was interrupted by the sharp

whistle of the referee blowing his whistle to stop the game. Looking over to see what happened he watched his team's Wunderkind being embraced in a hug by a fan. The fan took a quick picture before she bolted across the field with gusto followed by the match stewards hot on her trail.

Chapter 306 Trakstar

"Well, what do we have here? I can't believe my eyes! We've got a pitch invader, folks! And she's got pace!" Callum exclaimed after managing to catch his wits at the sudden interruption to the game that was just about to heat up in Heart's favour.

The blonde woman, no older than 20, sprinted onto the field with surprising agility, weaving past James Forrest near the right wing, close to Celtic's bench. Forrest did a double-take as she feinted to the right, then cut left in the direction of Bain, the Celtic goalkeeper. Creating some separation from the two stewards that had initiated the chase. Three more stewards stormed the field to assist the two already chasing her, but they seemed to be no match for her speed as the players watched this scene in disbelief.

Roy also chimed in upon seeing how well she was doing at keeping her perusers from catching her. "Well, she's outpacing the lot of them! Look at the footwork, it's like she's been taking tips from the players!"

She stopped briefly, posing for a quick snap with Callum McGregor, who stood there baffled, offering no resistance. He honestly couldn't believe what was happening and didn't even realise that she was videoing and not taking a picture. She noticed a steward closed in, but she wisely used the stunned McGregor as a human shield, slipping away just in time. Two more stewards appeared spreading their arms wide, ready to catch her. The crowd seeing this roared in excitement as if witnessing a breakaway run in the final minute of a match.

"She's got the stewards twisted inside out! Oh, what a move—straight out of an NFL playbook with that spin!" Callum animatedly exclaimed sounding way too happy at seeing the stewards hit the deck.

She channelled her inner wide receiver, as she looked left feinted in that direction before cutting right, leaving the two stewards grasping at thin air. However just as she was about to get by them, she noticed them catching their balance despite wearing dress shoes on a grass surface. Thus, she decided to perform a quick spin move back to the left completely escaping their grasp and breaking their ankles in the process.

What followed was her pointing her camera that had been filming the entire time at the tumbling guards before she hit the jest as the two that had been chasing her were closing the distance. With a quick glance over her shoulder, the blonde caught sight of the two stewards closing in fast. Their heavy steps echoed across the field, but her focus remained razor-sharp. She didn't panic.

Instead, she kept the camera steady, capturing the chaos behind her as she continued her run. With the remaining stewards closing in fast, and the Celtic supporters in the stands roaring in approval as though she was one of their own. "This is unreal! It's like watching a 90th-minute counterattack! The crowd is loving it. She's leaving these stewards for dead!" Roy commented as he watched the scene unfold.

The crowd's energy surged, cheering her on as though she were a player making a last-minute breakaway. Forrest, still recovering from the shock of her initial pass, raised his hands in disbelief as she hurdled over yet another steward, who had assumed an odd sumo stance to block her. The poor guy lunged forward, expecting to grab her, only to tumble to the ground as she soared over him with near-perfect form.

The girl had seemed to have channelled her inner track star and put her long legs to use as she hurdled over him with ease. The guy who was just doing his job trying to catch her was met with nothing but air and thus tumbled forward given that he was already in motion. Safe to say he stopped being a fan of Newton when he so himself become a meme on national television.

"Oh no! He's gone for it, and she's left him on the floor. That's another one down! Someone checks the replay on that, he might have broken his Pride with that miss!" Callum exclaimed with glee but sounding way too serious that even prompted some of the people at home who were recording the match to go back and check.

Her final act of rebellion came when she dashed into the Celtic box. With Bain having just placed the ball for a goal kick, the girl cheekily slotted the ball in-between the keepers legs and into the net. Hampden Park erupted in laughter and applause, a deafening roar from the Celtic faithful as if she had just scored the game-winning goal in the Scottish Cup final. Bain however had a mixed expression on his face as he had expect here to come over and take a picture with him not humiliate him.

"She's done it! She's put it in the back of the net! This crowd is losing their minds! Forget the cup final, this might be the highlight of the day!" Roy commented now genuinely invested in commentating on the girls pitch invasion, finding it rather amusing.

After her mock goal, she vaulted over the advertisement boards and onto the track surrounding the pitch. But the stewards weren't giving up. In a last ditch effort to save face two more stewards jumped out form the crowd she was approaching trying to earn their paycheques. Both had their arms stretched wide as they closed in from both sides with speed.

However Just when it seemed she was cornered, the blonde pulled off an unexpected move that seemed to freeze the twos braincell's —she came to a complete stop. instead in an unplanned hug almost kissing faces. "No way... she's stopping? What's she thinking?" The two stewards, unable to halt their momentum, collided into each other with a comedic thud, embracing in an unintentional hug that sent the crowd into hysterics. Their faces were just inches apart, and the stadium cameras caught every second.

"(Hahah), Well, that's an awkward one! Oh, this is turning into a circus!" Roy state in-between laughs as they watched the two guards faces light up on the large jumbotron. Without missing a beat, she slipped into the crowd, disappearing into a sea of green-clad Celtic fans. They quickly shielded her, singing one of their beloved anthems at the top of their lungs, jumping up and down to celebrate her antics. The stewards stood around, completely disoriented as they tried to locate her in what is practically a where is Waldo situation.

"Well, Callum, we came here to see a football match, but I think we just witnessed a performance of a different kind. Absolutely incredible scenes here at Hampden Park!" Those were the only words that Roy could think of when he thought of this moment.

The pitch invader may have vanished into the crowd, but her presence lingered as a ripple of laughter and disbelief coursed through Hampden Park. The match officials, standing by with their whistles, were momentarily frozen, unsure whether to resume the game or wait for the chaos to fully settle. The players, some grinning and others shaking their heads, gradually moved back into position.

Callum's voice crackled through the speakers once more, bringing the focus back to the football. "Right, folks, back to the action! Hearts had momentum, but will this unexpected break have thrown them off? Let's see if they can get back into their rhythm." On the field, the Hearts players gathered around their captain. Their body language had shifted after the interruption—some appeared restless, others eager to reclaim the control they'd started to build.

After spending a few moments making sure the interruption was dealt with the officials signalled the players to go back into position. Not wasting time, the referee blew his whistle to restart the game, however, it was clear that the disruption had only heightened the crowd's energy. They were ready to see something big happen as Celtic kicked off with a long ball down the right wing.

Chapter 307 Edouard's Bad Luck

Edouard was standing over the ball now waiting for the referee's whistle so he could restart the game. His mood was a gloomy one not knowing what was going on with him today he already had 2 clear goal scoring opportunities one in the 10th minute and another in the 14th. However, he was unable to convert them for the team, it was almost as if all his luck had suddenly left his boots.

The first chance came after the pitch invader exited the field and the match resumed. Hearts' momentum was doused with cold water after her action giving them a good chance to capitalise on it and try it, they did. Forrest chested the ball from Bain down using his silky footwork to create some separation from

Mulraney. A quick give and go with Rogic in the centre of the field and he was racing down the flank hoping his teammate would connect with him.

Rogic didn't disappoint sending a pinpoint lob over the head of Hickey Heart's Left Back who had been too far up the field and was now scrambling back. James didn't miss out on the chance accelerating to his max speed showing why he is one of the fastest wingers in the league as he blew past Hickey. Stretching his foot out on the descending ball he deftly brought it under his control hardly losing speed.

Eating up 5 more yards and he arrived at the side of the box as he looked into box trying to spot a green jersey to bless with an assist. However, all he saw was maroon figures scrambling back into their box and converging on him. Just as he was about to change his mind and dribble into the box himself, he heard the familiar voice of his team's striker.

"James Pass," Edouard shouted as he arrived on the right side of the D at the top of the Hearts 18 yard box. He had just cleverly lost his marker who had scrambled back to close down the area allowing him some breathing room to manoeuvre and now he just needed the ball. Lucky for him Forrest wasn't the selfish type and immediately released a sharp pass in-between the gap of Hickey, and Berra who were converging on him trying to shut him down.

Edouard crisply received the ball with his left foot directly setting up his stronger right for a shot. No player was in his 2 meter radius allowing enough time to place the shot despite the maroon jerseys rushing towards him as if he was about to shoot their mother. That didn't bother him though as a slight smirk appeared on his face and fired off a shot hitting the ball perfectly. It was a powerful shot, but it was also well placed toward the far left corner forcing the keeper across his goal.

The stadium held its breath already seeing the ball enter the net as Zlamal had been too close to his near post just in case Forrest decided to shoot. Even though it was unlikely from that angle, but in the off chance he did, no amount of excuses would save him if he managed to score. Thus, he was left scrambling across his line as he watched the ball fly towards him but out of his reach.

He knew he couldn't save it but dove in the air anyway wishing he could grow longer in the air, or a strong breeze would help him out. It seems like God had heard his player or maybe Edouard had aimed too well as in the next moment a dull thud resounded around the field. The ball ricocheted off his cross bar losing all its momentum as it popped up in the air falling towards Souttar on his five yard line.

Crashing to the ground he breathed a sigh of relief only to jump up in panic as he saw the ball smack his stunned defender in the face and fly back towards his net. Like a cat coming in contact with water he jumped up with power he didn't know he had and pounced on the loose ball tucking it safely towards his body as he once again fell to the ground. (Ughhhhh) the loud groaning of the Celtic fans resounded through the stadium as they felt their emotions toyed with.

They had been expectant when their striker took the shot but were quickly disappointed when he hit the woodwork. They regained hope once again with Souttar's smack in the face only to be disappointed once again when Zlamal performed his job of stopping them. Whilst the Celtic players were groaning in disappointment, the Hearts fans breathed a sigh of relief calming their racing hearts. Immediately after they clapped in happiness at, they keepers performance that saved them from going behind.

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[20]

Despite missing the chance to go ahead Celtic didn't relent in pushing their advantage not allowing Hearts to settle back into the game. Playing their characteristic possession game with Lennons blend of Attacking tactics they stretched and compacted their opponents in an attempt to find a break through. Their patience paid off when Johnston sent a long pass back to Ajer after failing to beat Edwards and Smith's encirclement.

Maybe it was the fact that they hadn't touched the ball in 3 minutes or simply wanting to contribute to their team but for some reason Clare, MacLean, and Mulraney all simultaneously charged forward. They tried to apply pressure on the Celtic backline trying to force them into a mistake and it worked as Ajer was forced to play a hasty pass to Simunovic on his right. Lucky for him his Croatian Defensive partner remained calm meeting the oncoming ball completely disregarding MacLean's charge.

He put his boot through the ball almost as if he was trying to hit a phantom ball behind it sending a weighted carpet pass forward. The ball zoomed across the pitch crossing 30 yards in the blink of a moment before anyone could even react instantly reaching the feet of Edouard who hadn't been expecting a pass at that moment. Taking a shaky touch, he did his best to hold off Souttar before flicking the ball to his right behind the back of Smith who was now facing Johnston.

The winger was only lightly faking a run not expecting to actually get the ball, but he didn't complain as he instantly accelerated past Smith. The Hearts right back scrambled to turn on his axis before chasing after Johnston trying his best to make up ground. But it was too late the winger had already reached the byline in 4 long strides before he sent a teasing cross into the box.

The ball flew teasingly into the box homing in around the area close to the back post right into the path of Forrest and Hickey who both leapt into the air. Both players fought in the air for superiority, but Hickey came out on top reaching a higher apex heading the ball. However, he was unable to direct it away from his box as the ball flew to the area in front of his team's penalty spot.

To his horror it was flying right towards Edouard who was fighting shoulder to shoulder with Souttar. Not hesitating the striker swung his foot trying to take the ball on the volley knowing his marker wouldn't let him control it. However, he underestimated the man's strength as just as he raised his foot their shoulders clashed deviating the angle of his swing. What followed was a thunderous shot heading towards the goal and up, way up and away trying to blast off at the speed of light.

Chapter 308 GOAL!!!



Following Edouard's trying to strike heaven, Heart's quickly stabilised their form. Immediately they began to fight back gaining some presence in the game as if they had woken up from a fog. Their earlier form from before the interruption seemed to have returned as they became active.

Possession of the ball instantly became equal between both parties with Celtic only having a slight edge over the hearts players. Despite this they were unable to comfortably break into the Hearts final third. It was in the [27] minute when Celtic found themselves in a tricky situation.

McGregor played a quick one two with Scott escaping the guard of Haring. Dribbling forward with gusto he quickly crossed the halfway line looking to initiate an attack. Not hesitating he sent a crisp pass towards the waiting feet of Rogic a couple yard to his left.

The Celtic playmaker calmly took control of the ball, but he miscalculated when he turned to the right. Waiting for him was Edwards who didn't hesitate in challenging for the ball. Send Rogic tumbling to the ground calling for a freekick he didn't hesitate in passing the ball forward.

It proved to be a wise decision as William Callum Today's referee didn't see anything wrong with his challenge and motioned for play to continue. Clare received the ball just past the halfway line turning with its momentum as he charged forward. Accelerating he quickly picked up speed trying to cross the middle third of the pitch as quickly as possible.

Johnston stepped up to meet him, but he performed a simple one-two with Haring to circumvent him as he continued to pick up speed. Running another 3 yards he came to a sudden stop as McGregor came sliding in with vicious efficiency. Lifting the ball above the Celtic 42 he continued his run officially entering the final third.

The hearts fans watching him go were already on their feet already seeing themselves scoring from this opportunity. It was also at this point that Clare finally looked up scanning for his striker to play in. He didn't have to look long as he spotted MacLean angling a run into the box left side of the box making sure to keep him in his field of vision.

Making eye contact with him he didn't hesitate sending a swift pass into the box with the outside of his right foot. Like a knife cutting through butter the ball curved along the ground splitting the defenders that tried to get in its way. Almost as if it had a homing beacon the ball arrived perfectly into the feet of MacLean the moment he entered the box.

Not hesitating he dribbled forward creating slight separation from Simunovic as he charged into the box trying to get a better angle from Bain who was already just a meter in front of him. The keeper had sensed the danger and charged off his five yard line the moment Clare released the pass instinctively knowing who it was going too.

Seeing MacLean moving to his left he didn't hesitate in spreading his arms wide and pouncing on the ball, trying to kill the danger in the cradle. Panicked at the keepers pounce Maclean acted on instinct and nudged the ball further to his right trying to manoeuvre past Bain. Although he succeeded what met him next was his world spinning as he was taken to the ground by the keeper who couldn't stop mid jump.

(Fweeet) Sir Callum didn't need to see more before he blowing his whistle and pointed to the spot. "BOOOOO" he was instantly met with deafening boos from the Glasgow greens who didn't hesitate in letting their feelings be known.

What they say about alcohol giving a man 10 times the courage proved to be true, as people who were pillar of their community found themselves screaming profanities. Most of them didn't even know what or why they were saying what they were saying. They were simply displeased and needed an outlet which came in the form of calling the ref a Wanker, MF, Bas\*\*rd, Pu\*\*y, and much more. The highly intoxicated ones even called out the ref for a square go trying to let their fist do the talking.

(AN: Square go is the Scottish version of Square up or put them hands up. Simply put I don't like what you said or did and I want to give you a chance to put your hand's up before I beat your ass.)

Whilst the fans were trying to intimidate the ref into changing his call, the Celtic players surround the man trying to plead their case. However, the stoic Callum was having none of it as he continued marching towards Bain and reached for his pocket. Seeing this Scott put his hand on the man's trying to stop him from pulling it out his book.

"Is that necessary that Willi, it's an accident in the heat of the moment," He jokingly told him trying to calm him down not wanting to get his keeper booked on top of a penalty. "C'mon Scott you know I like you but I gotta book him still," He responded with a slight smile before stepping past him and raising a yellow card at Bain who was dusting himself off from the collision.

MacLean had already jumped up from the ground seeing no reason to milk thing when he already received his deserved penalty. Without further ado Bain was booked for his dangerous challenge becoming the first player to enter the officials books. Ref Callum had to spend an extra few minutes to clear up the scene before MacLean once again stood in the Celtic Box face to face with Bain.

The stadium got really quiet at that moment as every pair of eyes was focused on the two engaged in a standoff. (Fweet) Following the refs whistle the striker took a deep breath his gaze still locked with Bain trying to read him. An extra moment is all he needed before taking a curved run quickly closing in on the ball before letting loose a powerful shot.

"Oh, looks like he's going for power," Roy found himself exclaiming as he watched the ball rocket towards the top right side of the goal. Bain guessed correct diving towards his left leaping into the air trying to reach the ball. However, there was just too much power in the shot, and it rocketed past him piercing the top right corner.

"He goes for power and dose not disappoint putting his team in the lead in a thunderous way, The score now read's Hearts 1 and Celtic 0." Callum exclaimed as the stadium erupted in the triumphant cheers of the Hearts fans celebrating their lead. The Celtic half of the stadium instantly fell into despair not believing what they were witnessing.

However, no matter how much they wanted it to be a dream they were left disappointed and had to accept reality. Especially seeing the cheerful faces of the hearts players celebrating at the corner flag. "In the words of my grandmother when you play with your food you can expect it to be snatched away." Roy commented with light hearted tone as he started to analyse the build-up that led to Heart's going ahead.

"They had every possibility to go ahead with Edouard in particular squandering two great chances. They have no one but themselves to blame for this." Callum mercilessly commented not willing to make any excuses for his side who had been less than their usual clinical self in the front court.

"Sigh you can't score them all," Roy commented trying to lighten the mood as the match was set to restart with Edouard standing over the ball at the centre of the field.

Chapter 309 Redemption

[32]

The roar of the Hearts fans still echoed around the stadium as Celtic lined up for the restart. Edouard stood over the ball, his expression stern, ready to make amends for the chances he'd missed earlier. He could vaguely hear the shout of Bain telling his defenders to remain sharp as he clapped his gloves. Despite feeling like the world was against him Edouard remained professional and passed the ball back to the feet of Rogic.

Rogic controlled the ball, glancing up to survey his options. The Hearts players had already fallen back into a compact shape, clogging the midfield and forcing Celtic to work harder for space. It was only their striker who put in effort to win the ball as he came charging towards him. Rogic felt the pressure building as the Hearts striker closed in, his boots pounding the turf.

He sidestepped with a smooth feint, drawing the striker just far enough to flick a pass to McGregor, who was positioned deeper in the midfield. McGregor took the ball under control and quickly scanned the field, noticing Celtic's wingers hugging the touchlines, trying to stretch the compact Hearts defence. He wasted no time in sending a crisp pass to Forrest on the right flank knowing it was easier to break a defensive team on the wing.

James calmly received the ball bringing it under his control as he started dribbling forward but to his dismay Mulraney made no effort to close him down. He simply held his position waiting for him to get close enough so he could be surrounded by nearby Hearts players. Seeing this Forrest performed a few stepovers as he accelerated towards him trying to get him to bite but Mulraney remained composed.

Simply angling his body towards the flank as Forrest approached, he performed text book defensive skills. The Celtic winger wanted to take him on but upon seeing Djoum and Hickey tightening up the angles he knew if he took the bait, he'd most likely lose the ball. Stopping in the last moment he was forced to pass the ball back to Brown before he could lose it to the hearts players in front of him.

Forrest wasn't the only one to stumble under the Hearts defensive tactics as the boys in green found themselves struggling to break into the final third of the pitch. Hearts new compact defensive style changed the entire flow of the match as despite Celtic having the bulk of possession they couldn't launch an attack.

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[37]

McGregor moved the ball quickly to Brown in the centre of the park, the Celtic captain raising his head to assess the Hearts defence. Their compact shape still held firm, every gap seemingly filled by a maroon shirt. With no obvious openings through the middle, Brown pivoted and knocked a diagonal pass back to Ajer, urging his teammate forward.

Ajer advanced cautiously, nudging the ball ahead as Hearts retreated, but the moment he crossed the halfway line, Clare and MacLean burst out from their positions, closing him down. Ajer didn't hesitate, sending a sharp ball into the feet of Edouard, who had dropped deeper to create space. Edouard turned swiftly, holding off the tight pressure from Haring with his body. He flicked the ball out wide to Johnston on the left wing, who surged forward with purpose. The Celtic fans in the stands urged him on, sensing an opportunity.

Johnston took the ball in stride, accelerating as he bore down on the Hearts right-back Smith. Smith didn't commit, holding his ground, waiting for Johnston to make the first move. The Celtic Winger feinted to the inside but then pushed the ball down the line with a sudden burst of speed. He managed to beat Smith for pace, driving towards the byline, but as he looked up to cross, Souttar slid in from the side, executing a perfect block to send the ball out for a corner.

"Brilliant recovery from Souttar!" Roy exclaimed. "He was calmly waiting for his opportunity when the winger was facing Smith and didn't disappoint when he got the chance."

[39]

The Celtic corner was a rare opportunity to break through Hearts' stubborn defence. Rogic jogged over to take the corner, positioning the ball with deliberate care. The tension in the stadium once again rose

as Celtic fans held their breath, hoping for an equalizer. Players jostled for position inside the box, with Ajer and Simunovic making their presence known, towering over Hearts' defenders.

Rogic surveyed the penalty area before stepping back. With a smooth motion, he whipped the ball into the box, the delivery spinning dangerously towards the far post. Ajer timed his run perfectly, leaping above the pack of maroon shirts, meeting the ball with a powerful header. The ball rocketed towards goal, but Zlamal was equal to it, diving low to his right to make an excellent save. Berra didn't disappoint him as he launched the ball up the field ending the danger that they were in.

"Great effort, but Zlamal keeps his side ahead with an impressive stop!" Callum McDonald exclaimed, his voice rising with the excitement of the moment. Zlamal's quick reaction was met with cheers from the Hearts supporters, their relief visible as the danger was cleared. The Celtic fans could only stare at the man in anger at denying them yet another goal, but they were forced to accept it in the end.

Seeing his team struggle in the match Lennon stepped up to the sidelines and started shouting instructions. His players were too rushed for his likening and he let them know that wanting a more controlled approach going forward. His instructions worked wonders for morale as he watched them ping the ball about with much more calmness.

[42]

Scott dropped back towards his defensive line picking up the ball from Simunovic before slowly dribbling forward. He could hear his teams fans shouting for him to attack and he wanted to give them that, but it was proving harder than usual. Crossing the halfway line, he faked a pass to McGregor before nimbly accelerating past MacLean.

He was just about to continue or send a pass to one of his wingers until he spotted a passing lane open up. Edouard noticed this too raising his hand and immediately started running towards where he

expects the ball. He wasn't left disappointed as Brown didn't hesitate in pulling the trigger sending a weighted pass through the figures of Hearts players.

The ball travelled at speed that left the Hearts player a second behind when they attempted intercept it. In the next second it reached the Celtic striker as he rushed in-between, they are of Souttar and Smith. Edouard didn't break the momentum of the ball instead piercing into the box with it leaving the defenders a step behind.

Moving it just a step beyond his right foot he scanned the goalies position, instantly noticing how he was trying to shut down the near angle as he charged out. He didn't mind this though as he had already chosen where he wants to send the ball. No longer hesitating he swung his right foot smashing it powerfully with the inside of his foot sending it sweeping towards the far right corner.

As Edouard struck the ball, time seemed to slow down. The stadium collectively held its breath, watching as the ball arced towards the far post. Zlamal lunged, fully extending himself in a desperate attempt to parry it away, but he was too late. The ball nestled into the bottom corner of the net, rippling the side netting as Edouard wheeled away in celebration.

The Celtic fans erupted into cheers, their voices drowning out the groans of the Hearts supporters. Edouard's teammates rushed to him, swarming around him as he pointed to the sky, relief and joy etched on his face. The score now read Hearts 1 and Celtic 1 bringing them back on level terms allowing them to breathe a sigh of relief as some of the pressure that had been on them dissipated.

"Edouard makes amends!" Callum McDonald shouted into his mic, barely audible over the noise. "A cool, composed finish from the Celtic striker to finally break down this resilient Hearts defence!"

"That was textbook from Edouard," Roy Townsley added. "He timed his run perfectly, and the pass from Brown was inch-perfect. You can't give a player like Edouard that kind of space in the box—he'll punish you every time."

On the sidelines, Lennon clenched his fist, a mixture of relief and satisfaction washing over him as the equalizer brought Celtic back into the game. The momentum had shifted, and now his team was back on level terms.

Chapter 310 Paramedic's In Action

[43]

Forrest picked up the ball Lustig in his own half after the latter cleverly dispossessed Mulraney off the ball. Not hesitating the Celtic 49 dribbled up the field quickly eating up yards as he reached the half way line. Djoum was there to meet him ready to stop him at all cost but Forrest faked a cut inwards before accelerating past him on the flank with a reverse elastico.

"He leaves Djoum grasping at air as he continues his run," Callum commented as he watched Forrest cut inward after passing Djoum to avoid the challenge of Haring. Sending the ball to the feet of Rogic, the playmaker didn't hold onto it choosing instead to flick it onto Johnston who came cutting in. The winger picked up the ball mid stride skipping past Edwards who came lunging in as he crossed into the final third of the field.

Approaching the box with speed he was met with a two man wall in the form of Smith and Souttar. performing a few step overs, he feinted going towards the wing until he heard a shout, "Pass," coming from Edouard as he broke free from the guard of Berra's Guard. Seeing this Johnston didn't hesitate in trying to play the pass seeing it as his best option, but he noticed both Souttar and Smith moving to shut down that passing lane causing him to change his mind.

Just as his boot connected with the ball, he swept it up pulling it back towards him as he whirled back towards the wing. Slotting the ball through the open legs of Smith who was caught off guard he instantly put on the jets trying to chase after the ball. Smith seeing this turned on his axis as trying to get after the ball but in his haste, he didn't pay attention to where he placed his foot.

Thus, a scene that left the already standing Celtic fans enraged unfolded as Smith's leg was placed in-between Johnston's strides. The next moment the winger who had been moving at his max speed found himself crashing to the ground with a dull thud. His foot that was caught was twisted unnaturally, instantly causing a searing pain to shoot up his right leg.

"ARGHHHH" his pained wails were instantly heard throughout the park as his hands wrapped around his leg hoping to alleviate the pain. However, no matter how much he screamed in pain or tried to stretch the pain wouldn't stop. Every time his leg contracted, he would feel the pain and no matter how much he tried to keep his foot straight his thigh muscles and quads were so tight that they forced his knee to bend.

(Fweet) William Callum today's official wasted no time in blowing his whistle as he sprinted towards the scene. From where he was standing, he was able to see things clearly thus despite the Hearts players' best efforts to persuade him he firmly ignored them. Arriving at the side of the two still downed players he immediately picked out a yellow card from his book ready to show it to Smith the moment he stood.

However, upon seeing the pain the Celtic winger was in he immediately motioned for the fourth official to let their team's medics come on. Not wasting time two medics sprinted onto the field as coach Lennon worriedly paced around his coaching area. "Rakim, Karamoko, and Ntcham go warm up," he bellowed orders at the 3 but his gaze remained fixed on Johnston who was receiving treatment.

"Can you move it?" One of the medics asked the player on the ground who was still writhing in agony as his partner applied a cooling spray on his muscle. "Argh no it hurts too much Dr John," He retorted between pained gasps hoping the good doctor would do something quick to stop the pain. It was almost like his hard honed muscles' memory was working against him at this moment.

"I See, give him some pain killers," Dr John told his colleague before motion a quick X with his hands letting Lennon know that the winger would not be continuing this match. "We already guessed it from how nasty that fall looked but the medics have now confirmed our worst fears Johnstons will not be continue this match," Callum commented with a sombre tone as they watched two more paramedics run onto the field with a yellow stretcher.

"I would have been surprised if he could have continued, that fall look 's nasty but from where I am watching it wasn't a malicious challenge from Smith." Roy intoned as he analysed the replay that was shown on the screen where they clearly saw that smith didn't mean it. "It just one of those unfortunate accident's, Smith had his focus on the ball and Johnstons just got unlucky in this altercation." Callum retorted in agreement with his partner.

"Accident or not he is still entering the William's book," Callum stated as they watched the ref pull out his yellow card holding it out towards Smith who took it on the chin not protesting in the slightest. He had seen just how bad his opponent was and despite not meaning it is just something that happens in this game.

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[Rakim Pov]

"Kid I want you to keep things simple when you get on, we have about 3 or so minutes of added time. So just see it out and when you get the chance go for goal, also try and activate Rogic and Edouard they need to get more involved in the match." Listening to coach's instruction I continued ever now and then but my gaze remained focused on the happening on the field.

They were still waiting for Johnstons to be carried off the field who received a thunderous applause from the fans present showcasing their sportsmanship. The fact we were on level terms had probably a lot to do that because if the hearts team were behind, I can't see them calmly clapping for one of our players. After all the Scottish fans are some of the most passionate club fans, I've met with them regularly organising fights between both teams fans whenever they played someone in the league.

"You listening?" Lennon asked brining me out of my thoughts. "Yeah, just keep things calm, pass the ball and score. Don't worry coach I feel great today, plus it looks like it's going to rain." I retorted as my gaze travelled upward to the clear clouds that were doing their best to block the rays of the sun. "(Sigh) just have some fun out there," he told me before crisply slapping my back in encouragement.

The moment Johnstons was carried off the field and towards the tunnel the fourth official immediately held up his board indicating a change. Not hesitating I jogged onto the field touching the ground with my hands once as the stadium announcer called out my name. My smile only widened when almost the entirety of the Celtic fans Yelled REX followed by the announcers prompt.

"You excited kid?" Rogic asked me the moment I joined him Infront of the ball that was set for a set piece. "Honestly can't wait to kick the ball you should let me take the free kick," I Jokingly retorted not at all expecting him to agree as the main set piece takers of the team are pretty guarded over their role. It was mostly between, Sinclair, Rogic and Scott brown who take them depending on the positioning, anyone else needs to go kick rocks.

That is why Rogic response left me stupefied, "Sure why not." he nonchalantly said and from looking at his serious expression he meant it. "Okay no take backs, or I won't pass you a single ball even if your free on goal," I quickly told him before bending down to set it in the position I wanted it to be at. "(sigh) I'm too old to baby sit brat's, James come over here and do your job."

Was all he said sounding genuinely annoyed as he took five steps back to act as if he was going to shoot. Forrest wasted no time coming over Joining me as we started discussing wat to do with this opportunity in front of us. "Can't believe you got that stingy guy to agree to let you take the set piece." He stated with a slight pout probably jealous and also wanting to hit it.

