

## Football 311

### Chapter 311 Van Persie

Standing 3 steps parallel to the ball Rakim could be seen puffing his chest as he scanned the wall ahead of him. Due to where he was standing, he could easily see beyond the wall which was set up to stop either Forrest or Rogic from taking a direct shot. Zamal stood just a few steps Infront of his goal line closer to the front post as he directs his four man wall.

The set piece as closer to the left edge of the 18 yard box making it perfect for an inswing if you're going for goal or crossing into the middle. Waiting for the ref to break up some of the minor scuffles happening between both teams players he finally got the go ahead. Gauging the distance to the goal Rakim took on last breath before nodding at his two teammates who were waiting for his signal.

(Fweet) The stadium held its breath all eyes focussed on the 3 waiting for any one of them to move as the tension was killing them. Rogic was the first to move taking a direct run up but the moment he moves Forrest also got in motion from the right side of the ball. His positioning alone told the players in the wall that he was probably a fent as he had no angle for a shot, especially since he was right footed.

Thus, they didn't bother with him getting ready to stop the shot form the Celtic playmaker who was barrelling down towards the ball. How ever the unexpected happened as Rogic didn't strike the ball and instead sprinted past it heading into the free area on the left side of the 18 yard box. Seeing this one of the 4 players in the ball immediately scrambled to follow him not willing to take a risk as they expected Forres to make the pass.

However, what happened next once again left them questioning life as they scrambled to charge forward. The players who had been gearing up to drop back to impede Rogic, where left a second behind as Forrest lightly heeled the ball back to the area he had just come from. The moment they charged forward to pick up the ball their worst nightmare manifested before them.

The figure of Rakim had seemingly blitzed to where the ball was with his right leg fully outstretched gearing up for a shot. In the next moment a thunderous thud resounded as his boot wrapped around the ball sending it curling towards goal with a dangerous Velocity. The entire stadium held its breath as they watched the ball streak above the heads of the players in the box almost looking like a cross.

However, Zlamal wasn't fooled by this as he immediately back peddled towards the back post and sprung into the air as soon as he reached the middle of his goal. His arms were outstretched to the max trying to reach the ball that took a dangerous curled towards the top right corner. Stretching his fingers to the max he managed to make slight contact with the ball changing its trajectory a little just as he reached the apex of his jump.

Crashing to the ground he heard the resounding clang of the ball impacting the cross bar almost shaking the entire stadium which had been silent throughout the set piece. "He barely on and goes for goal with his first strike and what a strike it was.," Callum exclaimed the moment the ball impacted the bar and flew over for a corner.

"Indeed, that strike was magnificent, but Zlamal was equal to it doing just enough to keep things level." Roy commented as he once again saw the replay of the free kick on the screen. Zlamal barely managed to bring two finger tips to the ball but that was all that he needed to help his team and become a saviour in the eyes of the fans.

Immediately following the shot, the Hearts fans who had been on the edge of their seats, barely able to keep their nerves in check jumped up in happiness. The roar of the Hearts fans filled the stadium, their cheers echoing off the walls of Hampden Park like thunderclaps, each one a dagger to Celtic hearts. Zlamal, on the other hand, was basking in the moment, high-fiving his teammates as they gathered to regroup. He had kept them in the game, and the Hearts supporters made sure he knew it.

The Celtic fans could only stare at the replay in disbelief unable to compute how they could be so unlucky today. If the keeper had just been a second later or an inch shorter, they would be ahead, but luck wasn't on their side. The Celtic players, though frustrated, quickly refocused. Forrest jogged over to take the corner, the Hearts defence scrambling to reorganize after the chaos of the free kick. Forrest

placed the ball on the corner flag, glancing up to see Ajer and Simunovic making their way into the box once more, towering over the Hearts defenders.

Both teams players jostled for position as Forrest stepped back, preparing for the delivery. Rogic positioned himself just outside the box, ready to pounce on any loose ball that might escape the fray. The referee blew his whistle, signalling that play could continue. Forrest whipped the ball into the penalty area, the delivery sharp and dangerous, curling toward the centre of the box.

Ajer timed his leap to perfection, rising above the crowd of maroon shirts. He connected with the ball, sending a powerful header towards goal. Zlamal was rooted to the spot, beaten completely—but once again, Hearts had a saviour. Berra, standing on the line, threw his body in the way, the ball deflecting off his chest and bouncing back into play. A big Boot from Hickey a second later sent the loose ball flying out of the box before Rakim and Edouard could pounce on it.

The ball was cleared high and far up the field, allowing the Hearts players a moment to catch their breath as Bain rushed out to collect the loose ball for Celtic. He quickly distributed it out wide to Lustig who had stayed behind to watch out for a for a counter. The right back calmly collected the ball not at all minding the harts striker coming towards him.

Not hesitating he raised his arm signalling a cross just as he crossed the halfway line before whipping in a high ball into the box. The players where just stepping out of the box ready to sprint back to either defend or counter when they changed their minds again following Lustig's actions. Lustig's cross sailed high into the box, drawing the attention of both Celtic and Hearts players who had barely caught their breath after the last attack.

This time, it was Edouard who made a darting run, muscling past his marker as the ball came hurtling toward him. He rose, high but came up short as the ball sailed past his head by mere inches leaving the striker disappointed. The attack wasn't over though as the ball sharply descended towards the right side of the five yard box.

It seemed like no one would get to it until everyone one spotted two figures sprinting towards the ball at break neck speed. It was Smith who was hot on his tail not allowing him to accelerate as his arm continued to pull his shoulder whenever he felt the winger would get away. Seeing this Rakim suddenly jumped forward head first crossing a meter in one fell swoop before Smith could react.

His whole body was parallel to the ground as he flew through the air like superman only ending when his head impacted the descending ball. With a dull thud he guided the ball towards the bottom left corner just beyond Zama's reach as he landed belly first on the ground. The ball slipped past Zama's outstretched arm, nestling into the bottom left corner of the net.

For a split second, silence filled the stadium as both sets of fans processed what had just happened. Then the figure of Rakim was seen jumping up from the ground running towards the sideline in celebrations. "Yeaaaaahhhhhsssss," he screamed from the top of his lungs as he sprinted all the out of the 18 yard box before sliding knee first all the way to the corner flag.

#### Chapter 312 Intermission

The score board shifted once more Hearts 1:2 Celtic followed by a primal roar erupting from the Celtic end of Hampden Park. It was deafening, a wall of noise that drowned out every other sound for a second no matter how loud. Rakim's name was on every fan's lips as his teammates rushed toward him, their faces beaming with pure joy and relief. Rakim's slide to the corner flag was a moment of pure euphoria for him as he felt adrenaline instantly flush his vein.

Slapping the corner flag the moment he reached it he jumped up in one fell swoop before performing his signature griddy. He felt the urge to pull off his shirt but luckily his teammates joined him in his celebrations each performing their own version of the Griddy. Putting an arm around Forrest and Edouard he shared his happiness with them a constant bright smile on his face.

"Thanks for missing that header pal," he told the French striker with a smile only to be pushed away in mock anger before the latter burst out in laughter. "I always leave a room at the table for my younger

brother's." he retorted before reaching out to mess up Rakim's dreads, but the latter nimbly ducked that.

"hahaha, if you're out here setting chares, I must be the one delivering it on a plate," Lustig stated with a light laugh as he joined them clearly happy at getting an assist in the finals. He had honestly just been hoping for the best when he swung in the long ball not at all expecting his young teammate to pull out a goal out of nowhere. After all he had felt his chances go array when Édouard mis timed his jump close to the front post.

"If you keep serving them up, I'll keep eating them chef. a couple more of that we can take this thing on the road bro." Rakim told the 32 year old right back leaving him stupefied but grinning, nonetheless. "Just keep it up kid, Finals are only fun when your winning," he told him tightening the grip on his shoulder before jogging back to his half.

"You got Mr Rossenborg to talk congrats kid," Édouard told him with smile before also starting his job back. Not sure how to react Rakim simply smiled towards the fans who felt much further than usual with the track separating the pitch and stands. Waving one last time he quickly jogged back to his position passing by his teams bench meeting a smiling Lennon.

"Told you I felt good coach," he told the man ruffling his hair before making his getaway with speed. "Just stay focused," He heard the couch shout in agitation, but he could easily hear the happiness in the man's voice and was thus not chewed up for messing with the guys precious hair.

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"Well folks I've said it once and I will say it again, Rakim Rex has blessed us again with a spectacular goal." Callum calmly said his voice resounding in Tv's all over the nation and beyond to those that tuned

in. Despite sounding calm those that had heard him and Roy animatedly screaming into the mike as the winger score knew just how hyped he was.

"You saved my first attempt from long range ok, let me try from way up close and see what happens. In a matter of two touches of the ball has entered the history books of football as the youngest goal scorer of the Scottish cup and also the one with the least touches." Roy cemented sounding much more excited than Callum who seemed to be recovering from all the energy he had just expended.

"If you don't get the hype about this boy of just 15 yet then you probably never will folks," Callum stated with finality as the disheartened Heart's player's geared up to restart the match. The clock read [48] at this point and there wasn't much left to play for in this half, but the Hearts fans in particular felt like they were on a roller-coaster ride.

One moment they were gifted the lead with a penalty and in the next the unlucky Édouard took his luck by the horns and equalised the score sheet. If that wasn't enough their wonder kid hammered in a late goal after just two touches of the ball. Safe to say they were feeling all types of emotions and none of them were good.

(Fweet) MacLean calmly passed the ball back to Haring outside the centre circle, but before the midfielder could even figure out what to do with this hot potato a resounding whistle paused the game. (Fweet) (Fweeeeet) Two blows of the whistle and this confrontation was halted signalling the end of the first half.

The players began to file off the pitch, their jerseys clinging to their sweat-soaked bodies as they made their way towards the tunnel. Rakim exchanged a few fist bumps with his teammates, all while the Celtic fans were still chanting songs. The noise from the Celtic end of Hampden Park continued to echo through the stadium, as they took pride in their team taking the lead in the last moment of the half.

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In the Hearts dressing room, their manager, Craig Levien, stood near the whiteboard with furrowed brows. He knew they had been outmanoeuvred in the last few minutes, and the halftime break was his only chance to get the team back on track.

"Alright, heads up, lads!" Levien barked, trying to inject some fire into his squad. "We're still in this. We did good defensively most of the game and were deadly on the counter, but our concentration dropped rapidly towards the end. Especially after they equalised, we started to panic and take more solo risks. We need to tighten up at the back. No more giving them space on the wings! And when we get the ball, let's make it count. One goal, and we're right back in this."

Meanwhile, the mood in the Celtic dressing room was a mix of joy and focussed as the players went through their half time routine. Some were changing into new boots, whilst others ate a slice of orange that the staff had prepared for them. Neil Lennon watching this scene simply smiled as he started fiddling about with the whiteboard.

He was pleased with how the half ended, especially with how the team fought back for the equaliser when they went behind. However, he knew that the game was far from over and he would need more from his players if he wanted to lift his first piece of silverware for his new club.

"First of all, lads, Good response out there, we went behind, but you all fought back hard eventually producing a goal." Lennon started, his voice calm but with an edge of intensity. "But don't think for a second that the job is done. We got ourselves back on top of this game, now we have to go out there and finish it. Keep the tempo up, keep pushing them. Rakim, Forrest keeps running those channels I want to see some of that creativity you're both famous for."

Both the wingers simply nodded in response as they chugged more of the water as they steadied their breath. Despite Rakim not playing for more than 4 minutes he was feeling the drop in adrenaline the most. With the impact he had having to rest for 15 minutes could change his entire approach to the game as his body would start to relax after just heating up. He wouldn't complain though as he'd rather play even in poor form than warm the bench.

Lennon paced in front of the whiteboard, his eyes scanning the room as he assessed each player's condition. "We've got them on the back foot now, but they'll come out strong. They'll look to press higher, force mistakes. I want to see composure. No rash passes. Stay sharp, stay focused."

He pointed to the defence. "Ajer, Boyata—organize yourselves. Hearts will target you with long balls, trying to catch us out. We can't afford any lapses in concentration, not now."

As he turned to face the midfield, Lennon paused for a moment. "McGregor, Brown—control the middle of the park. Hearts are dangerous when they hit on the break, but if we dominate possession, we can starve them of those chances. And don't hesitate to play direct when it's on."

Lennon finished his speech with one final call. "Let's finish this strong, lads. We're 45 minutes away from lifting that trophy. Go out there and make sure it's ours." As the players began to rise from their seats, Forrest nudged Rakim with a grin. "Looks like we've got more work to do, kid."

#### Chapter 313 Intrusive Thought's

The second half was set to kick off as the players from both teams were already making their way to the pitch now. Rakim was one of the last players to get into a position as he had decided to change his boots last minute after noticing a tear in his Adidas classic. Switching for a more feet friendly pair of red Pumas that were his reverse boots he jogged towards his position.

"Welcome back, everyone, the second half of the Scottish cup is about to kick off, the score is Hearts 1 and Celtic 2, In what has been an exciting meetup between these two giants of the Scottish football



league." Callum announced the moment the broadcast restarted immediately doing his job of entertaining the viewers.

"Indeed, Callum it has been an exciting matchup between the two so far. We had plenty of goals, a pitch invader and a last minute goal and all that in just the first half," Roy intoned with a smile as some of the highlights flashed on the screens bringing a smile to viewers faces as they say the girl duke the two stewards.

The players were all on the pitch now as MacLean stood over the ball waiting for the referee's whistle. The referee made sure that everything and everyone was ready before he blew his whistle to kick-start the match. "There's the whistle and we are on the way once again." Callum stated as MacLean quickly sent the ball rolling to Haring who immediately sent the ball rolling back to the defender behind him.

They didn't rush to attack and were instead passing the ball around near the centre as they avoided the charge of the Celtic players. The boys in green wouldn't make things easy for them though as they had just been instructed to play calmly and retain their defensive shape and that's what they did. Hearts looking for a way through soon realised it wouldn't be easy and decided to pull back in an attempt to drag out the Celtic FC's defence.

It worked in dragging their midfield forward as Rakim found himself unable to get near the ball to even press his marker. Every time he attempted to accelerate towards Smith the latter would simply pass it away not allowing him to even get a whiff of it. Forrest faced a similar treatment as the Hearts back line cleverly moved the ball around not allowing them to get close.

It was in such an occasion when Rakim pressed forward along his wing to shut down Smith who was receiving the ball when things changed. The Hearts right back simply knocked the ball past them oncoming winger before sending a crisp pass to Edwards who dropped back into space. The Midfielder cleverly turned with the ball's momentum indirectly dodging the tackle of Rogic as he manoeuvred past him.

Releasing a quick pass towards Clare the winger deftly picked it up mid stride and immediately started dribbling down the wing with speed. In a matter of moments, he picked up speed eating up yards of grass as he crossed the halfway line. Seeing him approach at break neck speed Hayes angled his body showing towards the wing as he performed quick sequence of side steps as their distance neared.

Clare seeing this performed a few stepovers trying to bait the Celtic left back but was left disappointed when he didn't bite. Seeing that it wouldn't be easy he glanced up seeing MacLean making a run and decided to use that to his advantage. Swinging his foot in a passing motion across of Hayes towards the middle he hit the ball forcing the defender to scramble to adjust his footing.

However, the expected pass never came as Clare's left boot snaked in front of the ball knocking it back towards his right. Pushing the ball forward with a burst of energy he accelerated past Hayes speeding towards the corner flag. Clare's burst of speed left Hayes scrambling as he charged down the wing, but the Celtic defence quickly reacted. Ajer shifted over to cover the space leading to the box, and Rakim, who had finally managed to track back helped in shutting down the path back.

Cleared had no plans on going back though as he glanced up briefly checking on the situation in the box before delivering a driven low cross into the box.

The ball zipped past Ajer's outstretched leg, heading straight toward MacLean, who had timed his run perfectly. MacLean took a quick touch to control the ball, but Simunovic, sensing the danger, threw himself into a sliding tackle, disrupting the striker's shot just as he swung his boot. The ball deflected off Simunovic leg and spun out toward the edge of the box.

The danger wasn't over for the Celtic fans though as the maroon figure of Haring appeared at the edge of the box pouncing on the loose ball, setting himself up for a long-range shot. The crowd held its breath as he unleashed a thunderous strike aimed for the top corner. Bain wasn't left with any time to second guess and had to react instinctively to the shot and he did.

Without hesitation he jumped towards his right fully stretching out his body, his breath held as his gaze zeroed in on the oncoming ball. He wasn't managed to fully get a hand on the ball, but he did just enough to send it crashing off the crossbar. The Celtic fans roared in relief as the ball rebounded into play. Forrest was first to react, sprinting forward to collect the loose ball.

[55]

After Celtic regained possession of the ball, they chose to slow down the game focusing more on their possession play rather than trying to force an attack. Keeping a cool head, they pass the ball around their midfield trying to pull and stretch the Hearts defence looking for any gaps to exploit. Rakim after swiftly turned on his axis after receiving a crisp pass from Hayes using some nimble footwork to dodge Edwards.

Cutting inwards he was looking for a passing lane or an area to drive into, but the hearts fans were doing a superb job locking down the area. He took a second too long to think about it, and Smith was already pouncing towards with Edwards ready to back him up. Reacting without hesitation the wing pulled the ball back turning with the momentum performing a crisp Marseille turn.

With that action he managed to escape from the two and immediately sent the ball back to McGregor not seeing a way forward. The midfielder took on the ball calmly as he started moving up the field quickly crossing the halfway line. It was only then that he was challenged by MacLean who had been sitting back not willing to chase the ball as the boys in green played keep away.

A quick one-two with Brown and he managed to slip away from him as he barrelled down the middle of the park. He looked left and right trying to find a teammate to pass it onto but couldn't find anything that's when a thought suddenly popped into his mind. It was one of those intrusive thought that you unusually wouldn't act upon like when you're driving on the highway and suddenly think, "What would happen if I pulled the steering wheel hard to the right?"

It was one of those thoughts as he just happened to see the Heart's Goal keeper standing at around his penalty spot. So, without hesitation from about 40 meters out he swung his leg putting all his power into a cannon of a shoot. The ball left his boot with a loud bang instantly taking off into the air narrowly missing Haring's head who saw his life flash before his eyes as strong gust of wind blew by him.

#### Chapter 314 Heroic's

"He's looking for a pass, but the Hearts fans are doing a good job shutting down any passing avenues. Oh, he shoots from way out there!" Roy commentated with excitement and a hint of astonishment not quite believing what he was seeing. "Yeah, but what is the goalie doing Roy, he's out of position," Callum instantly added after realising just how far off his line Zamal was and that this seemingly hopeful shot was a genuine threat.

The ball soared through the air like a missile, spinning toward the Hearts goal with terrifying speed. Zlamal, the Hearts goalkeeper, scrambled to backpedal, eyes wide as he realized the danger too late. Never in his life had he wished for longer legs or to be fast than he did at this moment as he felt like he was moving in slow motion.

His heart thundered in his ears, drowning out the roar of the fans, who's face's seemed to blur together. The shot dipped sharply at the last second seemingly trying to mock his effort as it homed in on his goal. He desperately jumped back stretching out to the max, trying to reach the ball but he was too far to reach it.

However, Luck seemed to still favour him though as the ball impacted the woodwork rattling the goal as it flew out of the park. A loud groan was instantly heard in Hampden Park drowning out the sighs of relief from the Hearts fans who felt their heart stop beating for a second. The shot from the Celtic CDM had come as a surprise for everyone instantly awakening those who were feeling sleepy from the current games stalemate.

"Oh, would you believe that? Off the crossbar!" Roy exclaimed, his voice echoing the disappointment of the Celtic supporters.

"Zlamal got lucky there, Callum, but he won't get a second chance if Celtic keeps testing him like that."

"That was a thunderbolt from McGregor," Callum replied, his voice still filled with astonishment. "And it came out of nowhere! Celtic's never been afraid to take risk's but I'm pretty sure not even Lennon knew he would try that."

The Hearts goalkeeper scrambled back to his feet, his heart still racing from the close call. Zlamal glanced around at his defenders "WTF are you guys doing? You just gone give him a free shot at my goal. Wake the TF up and do your job, if you're tired get the fuck off the pitch!" He bellowed a tirade of curses and instructions at his teammates instantly causing them to feel embarrassed. Some of them felt indignant not understanding why they were getting a tongue lashing when they didn't do anything wrong.

"Haring, Edwards, And Djoum, have you guys signed out of work and haven't told us? If your tired or lost the will to fight get off my pitch, if not show some fight in the midfield and stop letting those bastard embarrass you." Hearing themselves be singled out the three midfielder instantly felt their rage rise but they couldn't find it in themselves to argue back. They had indeed taken a back seat strictly following the coaches instruction and not doing more than they have too.

None of them wanted to mess up and felt it was safer to strictly stick to the coaches instruction rather than try some heroics. Because unlike popular belief that the defence is what causes a team to lose its actually the midfield. A poor midfield can instantly ruin the rhythm of a good team and mor importantly a single mistake in their can cost a team dearly.

Seeing that his teams midfielder got the message form their keeper and he got his chance to vent Berra the team's captain spoke up. "Thats enough Zlamal, they get the message and will do better," he told the keeper with a smile slapping him on the back as he guided him back to his goal as he had marched to the edge of his box in his rage filled rant. "Right boys?" Berra asked the rest of his player who were watching this to wish he instantly received an affirmative response.

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The game resumed with a new intensity. Zlamal's outburst had lit a fire under the Hearts players, who now pressed higher, with renewed urgency in their movements. Haring, Edwards, and Djoum, stung by the criticism, looked sharper, cutting off passing lanes and snapping into challenges with more aggression.

Celtic, however, were unfazed. McGregor, fresh off his near wonder goal, calmly controlled the ball in midfield, dictating the tempo as if he hadn't just rattled the crossbar moments earlier. He exchanged quick passes with Brown, pulling Hearts players out of position as they tried to press.

"McGregor has been the heartbeat of Celtic's midfield today," Callum noted, admiration in his voice. "It's going to take something special from Hearts to disrupt him."

Just as Callum finished, the ball was worked out wide to Rakim, who had been biding his time on the left wing. Receiving the ball with his back to Smith, he quickly spun on his heel with a reverse Croqueta, leaving his marker a step behind as he sped past him. Cutting inward he scanned the field, searching for an opportunity in the field of marron in front of him.

Rakim spotted Forrest's diagonal run, but with defenders closing in, threading the pass seemed too risky. In a flash, he switched gears, dragging the ball back and burning down the touchline, leaving Edwards in his dust. "Rakim's off! And Edwards struggling to keep up!" Roy's voice rose with excitement.

"Yes', Look at Rakim go!" Callum shouted, his voice nearly cracking with excitement. Rakim's pace was electric, instantly causing the heart beats of the Celtic supporters to quicken as he crossed into the final

third. The ball seemed to stick to his green Puma boot's as he continued to switch what feet was in contact with the ball.

Despite the pace he was moving at he deftly controlled the ball approaching Smith at a dangerous Speed. The Hearts right back had been unable to keep him under control always hesitating on due to his tricky skills. Since he was already on a yellow card, he didn't feel like risking getting sent off and that caused him to be overly cautious which was not something you want to be when facing a dangerous player like Rakim.

In this case it was similar as instead of stepping up to close the distance he continued to drop back trying to guid Rakim towards the corner flag. However, the winger had no intention of letting him do so as he performed a quick stepover before feinting a cut towards the middle. Seeing this smith panic and immediately lunged forward trying to block off the route forward but the expected contact never arrived.

Instead of breaking through Rakim transitioned into a silky reverse elastico and he skipped past the Hearts right back who had already committed to the challenge. Reaching the side of the box he didn't hesitate in launching a crisp cross into the box. The ball was sent curving towards the back post into the area where Edouard was running towards.

Edouard timed his run perfectly, rising high just beyond the five yard line. With his eyes locked on the ball, he positioned his body in front of Berra who had been tracking him ready to deliver a powerful header. Souttar scrambled to turn and try to intercept the ball but immediately realised that it was too late. Edouard's header connected cleanly, sending the ball rocketing downwards as he couldn't control it more than that.

Zlamal, in-between the sticks were still rattled form McGregor's earlier effort, and could only react instinctively, throwing himself across the goal. His outstretched fingers brushed the ball just enough to send it skimming past the post. The entire stadium seemed to gasp in unison as the ball flashed wide.

"Unbelievable save!" Roy exclaimed, half in disbelief. "Zlamal keeps Hearts in it with a fingertip touch!"

## Chapter 315 Spark

Edouard landed with a frustrated grimace, hands on his hips, shaking his head. All he could do was smile in frustration at having yet another of his goal attempts stopped by this keeper. He knew that the keeper had just been the better in this duel, but a part of him couldn't accept that fact, especially when he heard the loud groans of his team's fans, whom he had yet again disappointed.

Football is round, and he couldn't linger on his feelings as the match quickly resumed. Both coaches decided to make some changes in the [59] minute just before the corner kick. Levein directly committed three changes at once, knowing that his team desperately needed an injection of fresh legs.

First to leave the field was Sean Clare who had been one of the better-performing players of the Hearts players. However, his stamina quickly dropped in the second half making his presence in the match almost non-existent. Craig Wighton replaced the winger after receiving rigorous instruction from the Hearts manager.

Peter Haring was also subbed off making room for the Australian Oliver Bozanic in hopes of giving the midfield more edge and creativity. The last change of the manager was that of Conor Shaughnessy who came on for Michael Smith who was struggling to deal with Rakim. Lennon didn't lag behind either as he brought on Nir Bitton for Jonny Hayes and Oliver Nitcham came on to take control of the midfield in place of Rogic.

Since he already brought on Rakim those were the only changes he could make in hopes it would let his team stabilise the situation. However, things were far from stable as the Heart's fans showed immediate effect switching up the tempo of the game. From sitting back to wait for counter-attacking opportunities, they seemed to remember that they could also attack and started spamming that option.



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[64]

Celtic didn't receive a moment of rest after this as the entirety of the Heart's players started pressing high, no longer allowing them to cross the halfway line without a fight. It was in the 64th minute that Rakim lost the ball on the left wing after receiving a hasty pass from Bitton who was trying to escape the charge of Oliver Bozanic.

He barely had time to control the ball when it was stolen from him by the eager Shaughnessy when he tried to escape the tackle of Craig Wighton. He didn't hesitate in sending a pass to Souttar who immediately initiated a counter wanting to capitalise on this chance. He surged forward, eyes scanning the field as Celtic's defence scrambled to regain their shape.

He spotted Mulraney darting down the left wing, signalling for the ball. Without hesitation, Souttar sent a precise, long pass over the top, splitting Celtic's midfield. Mulraney brought it down with a silky touch, skipping past Lustig, who lunged desperately to close him down. Now in full sprint, Mulraney cut inside toward the box, his pace causing panic among the Celtic defenders.

Simunovic rushed over to meet him, but Mulraney's quick feet allowed him to slip the ball through to MacLean, who was hovering at the edge of the box. MacLean controlled the ball on the turn, shielding it from Ajer, who pressed tight to his back. With a deft flick, MacLean spun and unleashed a curling effort towards the far post. Bain dove full stretch, his fingertips just managing to push the shot around the post for a corner.

"What an attempt from MacLean," Roy exclaimed barely managing to catch his breath. "They are known for their sharp counters and that was a masterpiece in counters." He continued as he watched the replay of the play unfold before his eyes.

"Indeed Roy, they needed a spark to get back into this game and what a way to do it," Callum responded with a smile also fascinated by what he had just witnessed from the Hearts side which had been rather silent the entire game. None of their talk or speculation mattered to the happy Hearts fans who roared in approval, after seeing their team finally go on the attack. Despite the miss, this signalled a change in the team's tactics sending waves of excitement through the stands.

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[67]

Hearts' corner came in fast and high, whipped toward the penalty spot by Bozanic. Souttar, who had stayed up from his earlier foray, leapt above Brown and nodded the ball towards goal. For a split second, it seemed destined to find the back of the net, but Bain reacted quickly, parrying the header away with a sharp save.

The ball spilled to the edge of the box, where Wighton lurked. He took a touch, lining up a shot, but McGregor was there, closing down the space, throwing himself in front of the ball. The deflection sent it spinning away, giving Celtic a much-needed breather from the sudden danger they found themselves under.

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[72]

Celtic were finding it hard to regain control of the game. Hearts' high press had disrupted their rhythm, but Rakim, on the left flank remained a constant threat. Making frequent runs into space and simply connecting with the game whenever possible he made Conor Shaughnessy's life hard. The right back had come on for the purpose of shutting him down and he was making him work for every bit of that not letting him relax for a moment.

A long ball from Bitton after beating the charge of Craig Wighton finding him near the halfway line. With a clever flick of his heel on the descending ball he sent it looping over the figure of Conor who had stepped up ready to apply pressure on him. Turning with the momentum he shrugged him off, bringing the down with a deft touch as he accelerated into open space.

He surged down the wing, Hearts' defenders retreating in anticipation of the danger. As he approached the box, Rakim cut inside, drawing Souttar towards him. With a delicate feint at high speed, he left Souttar off-balance before moving a couple yards beyond him, not hesitating he sent a curling shot towards the goal. The ball soared through the air, curling toward the far post, but Zlamal was quick to react.

The Hearts keeper, with cat-like reflexes, leapt to his right and stretched out his hand. His glove confidently palmed the ball, sending it crashing against the post before it rebounded back into the box. A collective gasp went through the stadium as players in the box scrambled for the loose ball. Edouard charged forward to pounce on the rebound, but Berra was quicker. With a powerful clearance, the Hearts captain launched the ball upfield, giving his team a brief moment of relief.

"That was a real moment of danger for Hearts!" Callum McDonald exclaimed from the commentary box. "Rakim's curling effort had Zlamal beaten if not for the post."

"No that's Fantastic goalkeeping, Callum. He's been in great form today don't let the fact that they are trailing 1:2 fool you, he is my man of the match for the Hearts side." Roy Townsley added before going on a tirade to back up his claim.

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[75]

The game picked up pace once again, and both teams now trading blow for blow. Hearts pressed relentlessly, determined to claw their way back into the game. The high intensity had the Celtic side who loved to control the game scrambling to adjust to the new pace. Scott Brown and Corner McGregor in particular were having a hard time dealing with the revitalised Hearts' midfield trio of Bozanic, Edwards, and Djoum.

Bozanic, especially, was proving to be a thorn in Celtic's side, his energy and vision were proving to be quite deadly for the Hearts side. He used his ability to deftly initiate attacks whenever possible constantly finding gaps in the Celtic defence. Celtic, on the other hand, still looked dangerous on the break, using every chance to remind their opponents who the strongest team in Scotland is.

Every clearance from Bain or the Celtic defence was quickly funnelled to Rakim and Forrest who would use their speed and creativity to initiate attacks. The fans in the stands were now fully feeling the tension of the match as they watched the man who was the cause of this initiate yet another attack. Wearing the maroon number 7, Bozanic confidently dribbled down the middle of the park with pace.

Chapter 316 Grace & Skill

[75]

Bozanic surged down the middle with pace down the middle of the pitch, his head up as he scanned for options. Brown and McGregor scrambled to close the space, but Bozanic's quick pace allowed him to slip

past their outstretched legs. His actions instantly caused a buzz within the Hearts portion of the fans, roaring in approval as he slid a perfectly weighted through ball to Mulraney on the left wing.

Mulraney, full of confidence after his earlier run, performed a few stepovers before darting past Lustig again. With a burst of acceleration, he reached the byline and whipped in a dangerous low cross. MacLean, running towards the area close to the near post lunged for the ball as he fought off the tight marking of Ajer.

The seasoned defender did just enough to nudge him off balance, not allowing him to get an easy shot off. Both players missed the ball due to this and could only watch as it harmlessly whipped past them and out for a Celtic throw-in. Celtic immediately looked to counter. Bitton launched the ball down the line to Rakim, who chested it down, doing his best to hold off Edwards.

A quick one-two with Nitcham in the middle and he was gone, directly taking off down the wing with speed. Turning on the afterburners he quickly crossed into the final third taking on Conor who already sprang into action. The Hearts right-back squared up as the distance between them narrowed just waiting for his opportunity to pounce.

Seeing this, Rakim feigned a cut inwards with a drop of the shoulder and his left boot lightly nudging the ball. Shaughnessy, seeing this abruptly, went to turn from his angled stance, ready to chance after him when he would accelerate inwards. However, the expected burst of speed inwards never came, as the winger seemed to have changed his mind midway as he flicked the ball down the wing.

Not hesitating he chased after the ball at full speed, not to be beaten Shaughnessy turned on his axis immediately giving chase. By the time Rakim reached the side of the box he had already caught up and was only a step behind. Rakim felt the pressure of Shaughnessy's presence behind him but remained calm, his mind working quickly.

With a sudden deceleration, he rolled his foot over the ball, stopping it dead, forcing Shaughnessy to react quickly, as he came to a sliding stop in front of him. Rakim didn't give him a chance to catch his breath though, as his feet started flashing off the ball in a mix of stepovers as he manoeuvred the ball side to side. Whilst Shaughnessy was swaying back and forth in front of him keeping a close eye on the ball, Rakim didn't even look at the ball.

His entire focus was on the on-goings in the box behind Shaughnessy. He had no intention of sending another blind cross into the box hoping for the best after failing a couple of times. Thus, he decided to try something different this time around. Dropping his left shoulder towards the byline just as he spotted Souttar commit to backing up his marker, he watched as they both stepped to cover that area.

Not committing to going that way though he chopped the ball with his left foot back up the flank, before immediately accelerating towards the edge of the box. McGregor came to meet him just five yards beyond the box calling for a pass and Bitton presented another option as he moved to overlap with him. Seeing this he wanted to flick the ball into the left back's path, but at that moment he felt his wide field of vision granted by the Eagle King's View (Passive) skill suddenly home in on a particular area.

He instantly knew that this feeling came from his Bronze Level Goal Sense, having experienced it plenty of times and thus didn't hesitate to act upon it. Faking a flick towards Bitton, he nudged the ball forward slightly before swinging his foot chipping the ball high into the air, sending it flying with a lot of backspin towards the area around the back post. The ball sailed through the air, spinning with a graceful arc that made it seem to float for an eternity.

Silence hung in the air as every soul in the stadium closely followed the trajectory of the ball trying to guess where it would end up. Edouard who had dragged Berra with him towards the penalty spot was left stupefied when he saw the ball sail high above his head, not giving him a chance. He wanted to complain but instinctively turned his head to see where it would end up just in case, he was wrong.

Zlamal, the Hearts goalkeeper, shifted nervously, not sure whether to risk coming off his line or stay put. He was still indecisive when he heard Hickey shout "Keepers," trying to get him to go for the ball but it

was already too late at this point. Turning his head in Hickey's direction his heart almost stopped as he watched the figure of Forrest racing towards the descending ball.

Shifting his body ready to lunge in that direction he watched with bated breath as Forrest let the ball descend on his grounded feet bouncing it up around chest height. The ball flicked up slightly to his right allowing him to dodge Hickey's who had caught up and tried to steal the ball. Swinging his foot to shoot trying to take it on the volley he stopped last minute choosing to flick it across his body.

That proved to be the right choice as the figure of Hickey, Berra and Zlamal lunged/dive in that direction trying to block the ball. Springing forward he swung his weaker left foot letting instinct take over. As the ball connected with Forrest's foot, it riffled towards the back of the net as the winger had put in nothing but pure power. Zlamal, who had committed to the earlier dive tried to extend his arm and leg in a last-ditch attempt to make a save, but it was too late.

"GOAL! Forrest has doubled Celtic's lead!" Callum McDonald shouted, the excitement palpable in his voice. "What a stunning strike that was!"

Roy Townsley chimed in, "That's the kind of instinctive play that wins you matches. Forrest didn't hesitate, and Zlamal had no chance!"

"From the lead up to the delivery to the execution, it was simply a master class of brilliance from both wingers," Callum commented in excitement as the replay of Rakim's dance on the wing was once again shown on the Screen. "Shaughnessy couldn't even get close to him without risking opening up a path into his box for a winger of Rakim's calibre to exploit." He continued as he started analysing what the Hearts right-back could have done better or if things could have gone worse.

"We've come to expect things like this from the young phenom, but Forrest also decided to reach deep into his bag of skills," Roy stated sounding equally mesmerised by the display of grace skill from the

Celtic 49. "The composure alone deserves bonus alone. He practically forced them to give way so he could get his goal." In the 78th minute the score now reads Hearts 1 and Celtic 3.

Chapter 317 System Maintenance

\*FWEEEEEEE\*

The referee's whistle cut through the noise of Hampden Park, signalling the end of the Scottish Cup final. The cheers of the Celtic fans erupted, rising to a deafening crescendo as their team secured the coveted trophy. In contrast, Hearts players crumpled to the ground in despair, faces etched with the pain of failing at the last step. That was the game though, there always had to be a winner no matter how good both sides played or deserved to come out victorious.

They had thrown everything they had into the last 15 minutes, pushing for a late comeback that never materialized. All that running as if their life depended on it and flying into tackles just trying to bring some life into the game was all for nothing in the end. No number of tears or desire to right their wrongs from earlier in the match could change the feeling of defeat that now enveloped them.

The bitter taste of defeat was all they were now left with as all the glory went to their opponents who had completed their mission. Involuntary tears welled up even in the toughest of them as they watched the happy faces of their opponents embrace each other in celebrations. Some pounded the turf in frustration, others hung their heads, hands on knees, trying to process the heartache. The sight of their opponents celebrating, arms draped around one another in elation, only deepened the sting.

Some of the softer-hearted of them even had full-blown tears trickling down their faces as they tried their best to remain composed. Their eyes burned as they watched Celtic players leap into embraces, their faces radiant with victory. None of them wanted to be that image—the one caught in a vulnerable, broken moment, splashed across tomorrow's back pages for all to see immortalised in print. Yet, despite their efforts to remain stoic, grief and exhaustion won over.



Seeing his teammate's defeated expressions Berra pushed down his own feelings and started making his rounds. Offering silent embraces to some and words of encouragement to the younger ones who were experiencing their first cup game, he perfectly did his job as captain. "It's tough, I know, but you'll come back here soon kid," he told the 17-year-old Aaron Hickey who had played his heart out throughout the 90 minutes he was on the field.

Aaron nodded slowly, his lips pressed into a thin line. He didn't say anything, but Berra could see the pain behind his eyes, the way his chest heaved as he struggled to keep his emotions in check. Berra gave him a light squeeze before standing up and moving on to the next of his teammates who needed a comforting word.

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[MC POV]

On the other side of the field, a completely different scene unfolded as the boys in green ran around in pure joy, letting the adrenaline and the thrill of victory fuel their wild celebrations. Celtic had done it they had won the Scottish Cup after 96 minutes of hard work and a final score of 2:3. In the last period of the game they had really felt the determination fuelled wrath of their opponents.

They no longer had control of the match as they faced a much more desperate Hearts side, who were relentless in trying to score. It was in the 85th minute after a spectacular breakthrough dribble from Hickey on the wing, whereby he dribbled past 3 Celtic players before delivering a dangerous pass into the feet of MacLean. The striker didn't disappoint, as he held off Ajer and then proceeded to slot the ball past an alert Bain.

We barely had time to recover from that blow before Hearts came charging again, trying to press their luck for a late equalizer. They got their chance too in the final minutes when Edwards was taken down in

the penalty box by McGregor before he could let loose a shot. 'I still can't believe Bain saved that shot,' I found myself thinking as at that moment it felt like they were snatching our victory in the last moment.

However, like the beast he is Bain did what he did best diving to the top right corner to deflect Harring's shot and secure our victory. {I wouldn't be surprised if he receives the Man of the Match award for the game he's had today. With 8 shots on target saved, a 50% penalty save rate and an overall 80% save rate, stats like that are hard to come by even for the best keepers in the world.} Eva stated sounding genuinely impressed by Bain's performance, which if you know her is a hard thing to achieve.

'Yeah, he was great today, unbelievable honestly,' I responded with a light smile as I took a seat on the grass letting the moment sink in. After spending the first few moments running around in celebration the high of that feeling is finally beginning to wane.

I am a champion, a Scottish cup winner but a champion nonetheless, and it's not like one of those times when Mum crowned me the king of the universe after winning a pick-up game on my birthday. This time it's something I can put on my CV, (haha) I've finally made my mark in the world of football after starting my journey.

{You were great too, played some of the best football I've seen you play in a while,} she told me her words sounding warm with a hint of pride in my head. Almost as if on cue the familiar sounds of notifications rang off in my head and from the sounds of it, they were a lot.

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[Ding: Post-Match Review]

>Goals scored: (1) = 10Sp

>Assists: (1) = 10Sp

>Cards: 0 = 0Sp

>Final Match score: 2:3 Win: 30Sp

>Match Rating: 9.0

[Ding Mission: Help your team win the Scottish Cup Completed]

Rewards:

1. +1000 Singularity Points

2. Shop Update

[Ding: It is detected that the host has won his first major professional trophy meeting the requirements to open the trophy cabinet function of the system. The host will gain a slight boost when playing in that same tournament in the future.

(Note: Congratulations, now get back to work to fill your cabinet,)]

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'Wow that's a lot, is it Christmas already, because I can't remember the last time the system has shown me so much love,' I thought to myself not at all expecting to receive that extra notification which was monumental for the system. Because it meant that it was going to update its functions, something it hadn't done since I got it, and it chose football as my career.

{Hmm, it's only to be expected, since it finally completed one of its primary goal's which is getting you to become a certified professional. Winning any trophy on the professional level would have triggered the same update as it would mean you finally proved yourself as a player.} Eva stated clearing up some of the confusion as to why I was only getting this update now instead of earlier.

'You're right as always, let's check out the trophy cabinet,' I responded but was quickly disappointed with a buffering loading screen as the systems seemed to be undergoing maintenance. 'Did I forget to update my insurance or something?' I questioned but didn't get to wait for an answer as I was doused in a wet liquid snapping me out of my thoughts.

Cold water splashed down on my head, soaking my jersey and sending a shock through my system. I blinked, momentarily disoriented, before realizing what had just happened. I wiped my eyes clear to see a grinning Forrest jumping in front of me grinning from ear to ear joy plastered all over his face. "haha looking at you I almost thought we lost, you need to enjoy this they don't come around every day y'know."

## Chapter 318 FOOTBALL!

"They started out shaky, falling behind, but they quickly showed us why they are Scottish champions. A dominant offensive performance all around today," Callum McDonald's voice carried over the stadium as the celebrations below continued to unfold.

"Absolutely, Callum," Roy Townsley chimed in. "Hearts gave it everything, but in the end, Celtic was resilient enough to battle out a win. The super sub of the day is for sure Rakim Rex who came in after an unfortunate injury from Johnston. He was a game changer for sure with a goal and an assist to his name."

"And what a goal it was," Callum added, his voice brimming with excitement. "I bet Van Persie would be proud, his assist was no less impressive finding Forrest from such a tricky angle,"

The two continued to chat about the notable moments in the match, finding great joy in it. They had been genuinely entertained in today's match and couldn't fault the outcome of the match. The match was filled with the right amount of tension, a pinch of drama, and most importantly a lot of goals.

Despite their chat being interesting most viewer's eyes were focused on the players that would be shown every now and then on the screen. The Celtic players after calming down from their initial moments of celebrations had started showing their sportsmanship. They were all players after all, and it wouldn't hurt to say a kind word after coming out victorious.

Rakim In particular could be seen talking with the Hearts Czechian goalkeeper. For Rakim it was more about talking to the best keeper he's gotten to play against since making his debut. As for Zlamal, he found himself enjoying the chat he was having with the 15-year-old who had made his life hard in the two games they played against each other.

"You know how scary you are kid," Zlamal stated in perfect English with a heavy Czech accent, but Rakim was still able to understand him perfectly.

"The water is just different in Florida old man, don't know what they put in it, but they create monsters over there," Rakim responded in a joking tone causing the older keeper to chuckle lightly despite not fully understanding his insinuation.

"Don't slow down, continue working hard and stay hungry for victory that's the best advice I can give you. Otherwise, I'll be ashamed to tell my grandkids I faced you in a cup final." The older keeper stated in a serious tone causing Rakim's joking expression to instantly straighten up.

He knew that the keeper's words made sense, and he wasn't one to ignore the advice of his elders without seriously considering them. Thus, he simply nodded at his words before proceeding to take off his kit indicating a shirt swap. The keeper didn't hesitate to do the same as he also handed his top over with the prominent number one on it.

The fans who happened to catch this scene erupted in applause after seeing the heartwarming moment between them. Both quickly posed for a picture before joining their respective team's camps.

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Walking around the pitch with Zlamal's top slung over my shoulder I tried to find people I knew. At the end of the match the pitch was quickly flooded with press, VIP's, staff and much more creating quite the crowd. After posing for many pictures with my teammates and doing my best to avoid some of the impromptu interviews.

'I feel a little lost as to what I should do at this moment' Rakim watched as most of his teammates were with their family relishing in their victory. Not that he minded since he already knew that his family couldn't make it to the match in person, as Emma and the girls had quite a hectic weekend ahead of them. They have to visit college campuses and do interviews for some of the Ivy schools just to secure their entry.

'Sigh how long do you think it will take for them to set up the awards podium,' He asked Eva as he caught a glance of a few of the staff working hard to set things up and by the look of it, it'll take quite a while. Not knowing what to do he absentmindedly pulled out his phone which he had kept in a bag at his team's bench.

{Does it really matter just go give an interview or go to interact with the crowd,} She retorted, and he did just that as before he knew it his legs carried him towards the edge of the edge of the pitch without prompt.

Not even questioning it he started scrolling through his looking to check out some of his fan's reactions on Twitter and Instagram. As expected, his fans titled The Rex Nation were going crazy with reactions blowing up his Twitter feed. Not only that he even found a few Superman, I believe I can fly memes with Videos of his flying header being showcased.

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@TrueREXFan22: Our boy unlocked the ability to fly, yall believe me now when I say he is different?

@BatmansJoker: Never mind flying, y'all see Shaughnessy's legs hit the two step before @Rex22 decided to set it up on a plate for @Forrest?

@GreenInsurance: Does anyone have Shaughnessy number I would like to offer him our first-rate car insurance. We usually only insure rally drivers but seeing his leg reaction speed we see potential in him.

@TrollingIsAnArt: @GreenInsurance, I'll give you a 4/10. "Go home right some shit and don't come back until something dope done hit you."

@RakimsWife: Congrats Hubby, I'm so proud of you!!!!

@Rakim'sWife2: Always knew you could do it, never doubted you for a second that's why I bought you two victory cakes.

@Rakims-BabyMama: Congrats on bringing it home babe, enjoy the moment and hurry up your milk run it has been 5 years now.

@No1SugarMomy: Well, done cute, call me up I have a big surprise for you to congratulate you.

@RakimsMother: You think sleepy Baiden will let me borrow the FOOTBALL! I promise I'll use it for the good of humanity?

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Rakim almost tripped reading that part of his Twitter feed not knowing how he had managed to pick up such crazy female fans. Especially since he refrained from posting pictures or videos for the sole purpose of sexual appeal. Matter of fact his YouTube only has him vlogging at matches he watches or him actually playing. The occasional reaction video also appears but he's never posted anything that would result in him getting brain-dead Twilight fans.

Not that he hated the movie just the fact its main appeal is good-looking people showing off their abs and flexing. Lost in thought about how he managed to become a thot magnate Rakim did not notice the figure in front of him. Before he could even realise what was happening, he bumped into a slender figure who immediately lost her balance.

Reacting instinctively his left hand snaked forward clamping firmly around that figure's slender waist halting her fall as his legs moved to steady his stance. Only after doing all this did, he get a chance to look at the girl whom he had almost sent flying to the ground. The girl he'd caught looked up at him, wide-eyed, as time seemed to slow in her brown eyes that twinkled like Dimond's hidden behind her round glasses.

She wore a black baseball cap to protect herself from the heat, but that wasn't able to hide her long black hair. It cascaded down her head perfectly framing her face matching her auburn eyes which twinkled more now that she had a little flush going on. She brushed it aside, clearly flustered, at the intense gaze those green eyes were now giving her. Embarrassed she muttered a shy, "thanks," barely audible but Rakim still heard it. Despite the hustle and bustle all around him, he somehow could still pick up her soft tone which oddly reminded him of his Zeus when he was still a puppy.

Chapter 319 First Piece of Silverware

Rakim blinked, snapping out of the trance he'd unknowingly fallen into while staring at the girl. He quickly let go of her waist, after seeing that she had regained her footing trying to act casual as he offered an apologetic smile. "No problem," he said, scratching the back of his head awkwardly. "Sorry about that, didn't see you there."

Not quite understanding why he was feeling shy which wasn't like him whose ego is the size of Texas especially when he is on a football field. Her being a sight, in general, shouldn't make him feel this way

since he had practically grown up around a lot of good-looking people. Still looking at the black cargo trousers that encased her long legs and hugged her curves in all the right places caused his gaze to linger for a second longer than necessary.

The fact she was wearing a loose Celtic top tied up around her midsection to create a make-shift girls' crop top. It was only now that he realised that he was holding her bare waist and not when he caught her fall just moments ago. Looking back up to her face he watched as she adjusted her glasses, offering a small smile in return, though she still seemed flustered. "It's okay, really. I guess I wasn't paying attention either."

They both stood there for a moment, an awkward silence hanging between them as the noise of the post-match celebrations roared around them. Rakim glanced at the massive crowd, unsure of what to say next. His mind raced for a conversation starter, but his mind seemed to just blank. {I can try getting the system to shock your brain, maybe that will help,} Eva suggested promptly snapping me out of my stupor.

"Are you... with the press?" he finally asked, noticing the small notepad she was clutching tightly.

The girl nodded quickly. "Yeah, sort of. I'm interning with The Glasgow Voice, but I'm actually just here with my family." She laughed nervously. "It's just something to help with Uni applications, can I get your autograph tho? My little sister is a big fan."

"Just your sister?" he asked with a raise of his eyebrow not believing that a girl around his age range would be one of his fans. That goes especially if they are already football fans and wearing one of his team's jerseys.

The girl blushed slightly, looking away as she adjusted her glasses. "Okay, maybe both of us," she admitted with a shy smile. "But mostly her. I don't usually fangirl over players. I just like the sport, and

you know... the atmosphere." She gestured around the stadium, still buzzing with post-match excitement.

Rakim chuckled, feeling his confidence return. "that's good cause I attract some of the craziest fan girls," he replied looking genuinely exasperated as he inadvertently thought about all these womenfolk who claim to be his wife and whatnot.

"Hahaha trust me I know my little Ellie has gotten into quite a few feuds with some of them in your comment sections," she replied with a light chuckle that sounded angelic looking much more relaxed now that the awkwardness faded.

"My condolences to her hope she managed to stay sane, anyway's what do you want me to sign for her?" Rakim replied also sounding much more relaxed not even remembering the fact he was still not wearing a top since swapping with the old Hearts Keeper. Lucky for the girl across from him she had been too flustered by the situation to realise this otherwise she wouldn't be as composed as she is now.

However just because she didn't notice this did not mean that the eagle-eyed BBC reporters at the scene didn't. As a matter of fact, the two of them appeared quite a few times on the live broadcast as the camera operator seemed to have found his muse. However, it is more precise to say that he could already see himself getting a promotion for capturing a juicy piece of gossip for the network.

"You can sign the kit it's yours," She replied with an excited smile directly pointing to the spot above her chest as she pulled out a sharp pen.

For a moment Rakim did not know what to do after seeing how excited the girl in front of him was, that she did not even realise what she was asking him to do. How to react to a situation like this had not been covered by the ACE academy media training nor the Celtic side. He couldn't back down though, after seeing her excited expression that seemed to be pleading him to proceed.

Thus, a peculiar scene was captured in 4KHD at Hampden Park, where a tall light-skinned boy with free-hanging dreadlocks was standing in front of a beautiful brunet. The fact he was wearing only his game shorts fully showcasing his muscular yet lean physique that glistened with the sweat from the match he had just played. However, it wasn't his abs that caught the attention of those who were watching but the fact he was writing something just above the brunette's right chest.

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"Bro, we won and all, but you need to chill," Forrest whispered into my ears we lined up at the side of the stage that the staff had set up for the awards ceremony. "It's too late now but you should probably turn your phone off for the next 3 days and definitely do not leave the house,"

"I don't get the problem she asked me for a signature, and I delivered, what was I supposed to do say no to one of my dear fans?" I retorted not yet willing to accept that I was in the wrong or any trouble I may have caused. Despite not touching anything I shouldn't from the way it must have looked is enough to make a cow fly.

"I miss being young dumb and innocent," He simply retorted as he started moving forward as the announcer started the proceedings. Hearts had already received their medals, going through the torture of having to walk past the trophy they had come all so close to winning but failed in the end.

SFA President Mike Mulraney is a bald fellow dressed in a pristine navy suit with the SFA pin at the left side of his lapel. His assistant stood behind him ready to hand him the medals, and next to him stood another bald man but this one was around 6ft with a well-groomed beard. He also wore a well-tailored suit with a purple lapel and a William Hill pin as he was the representative of the tournament sponsor.

I gave Forrest a nudge, as I followed after him, "I wasn't doing anything," I stated defensively trying to act casual. Forrest grinned turning in my direction probably making those watching from afar think he was just happy about the win. "Sure, mate. Just try not to autograph anyone else's heart, yeah?" I rolled my eyes at him, tugging at my reserve kit that one of the team's staff had handed me ready to focus on what's important.

The crowd erupted as we were called to step forward, and the energy of the moment swept me up. The stands were alive with Celtic fans chanting, waving green and white flags in unison. This was a completely different feeling of euphoria than what you would feel after scoring in front of a crowd of 40,000. This feeling of unity, of being part of something bigger than myself is something you only get to truly realise when you help your team win a trophy.

Everyone went through the ceremony of shaking the sponsors and presidents hands before receiving their medals. Unlike in most football competitions around the world, the medal wasn't hung around our necks but instead presented in a small navy-coloured box made out of leather. Smiling at this I quickly shook both bald man's hands barely able to register the friendly words from them.

"Congrats young man, it was a pleasure watching you play today," The William Hill rep stated with a happy smile before pulling me into a quick man hug following our handshake. "Thank you, sir, happy you enjoyed the match," I replied before moving on to the next guy who was even happier than the last reminding me a little of the Chief coach Andy Reid.

"Thank you for playing in our league son, it's been a pleasure having you here." He started sounding genuinely happy, "Congrats and all the best in your future endeavours, you will always be welcomed here son," He finished before tightening his handshake slightly and then handing my medal with the same bright smile.

"Thank you," was the only thing I managed to say before having to move on. Doing a light Griddy with my medal in hand I joined the rest of my teammates who were eagerly waiting behind the trophy. Since I was one of the last players I didn't have to wait long before Scott Brown and manager Neil got their well-deserved accolades.

As the ceremony reached its climax, the tension in the air felt electric. The golden Scottish Cup gleamed under the stadium lights, a symbol of glory as the league's biggest single tournament trophy. The crowd roared, a wave of sound that washed over the players as they gathered around the trophy. Rakim found his place among his teammates, already excited to get a hold of the silver trophy that seemed to be calling his name.

Scott walked towards the trophy placed on the small podium, where President Mike handed the trophy to the captain who firmly grasped it in his hands. Turning around to face his team who were already eagerly waiting he called over coach Lennon letting him hold one side of the cup. Both men walked up to the semi-circle the players had created, "Ohhhhhhhhh, Campione, Campione, Campione, Oh Ohh Ohh ohhh ohhh Ohhhh, CHAMPIONE!!!!"

The chant echoed through Hampden Park originating from the players who proceeded to jump up and down upon lifting their trophy. Green and white confetti fell from the sky as the thunderous rhythm continued to pulse in tune with the heartbeat of every Celtic fan present. As the players joined in, their voices mingled with the crowd's roar, creating a symphony of jubilation. Rakim felt the energy surge through him, a rush of adrenaline that made every moment of sweat and sacrifice worth it.

What happened next was utter chaos as the players lined up for a quick team photo before breaking off into smaller groups to continue the celebrations. Somehow, they got their hands on massive bottles of Champaign and started spaying them all over the place quickly soaking. Rakim joined the rest of his teammates in their frantic celebrations feeling like he was on cloud nine for the next few minutes basking in the glory of winning the first silverware of his professional career.

A few minutes later, the entire Celtic squad, started moving around the stadium to thank the fans who'd spent their hard-earned money to cheer them on. Rakim fully enjoyed the moment, interacting with the fans to the fullest especially the ones wearing Titan fit Hoods. Most of them were drunk with joy and all the alcohol they had been chugging throughout the game. Young Dembele and Forrest even jumped into the stands to join them in singing their team's songs fully enjoying the moment.

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"Thank you, hope you liked the match" Rakim replied with a happy smile making eye contact with the beautiful Brunet who was wearing a blue-coloured professional one-piece dress. She stood at a height of 5'8, so she had to tilt her head upwards slightly to make eye contact with him.

"Yes, it was a stunning game, kept us on the edge of our seats till the last moment," She replied in a friendly manner as she maintained her professional smile keeping the conversation going. Before both of them realised they had a full-blown conversation about the match, as the young ace reporter easily kept the conversation going.

"(Ahem), How do you feel about winning your first professional trophy?" Mike queried finally getting his piece in the conversation almost startling Rakim who had forgotten he was there. "Of course, I'm over the moon, you dream of these moment's and when they actually happen it's better than you ever imagined. Surreal is what I'm currently feeling,"

"I can Imagine, you were amazing out there one goal and an assist, is it safe to say you are satisfied with your performance," Carla questioned getting back into the conversation. "Yeah, you had your moments of brilliance out there quite impressive out there," Mike added, trying to steer the conversation back under his control.

Rakim chuckled softly, running a hand through his damp hair as he nodded. "Thanks, yeah, it was a tough match. Hearts really made us work for it. But I think it was a team effort more than anything. We all dug deep and gave everything we had out there." His tone was humble, but the pride in his voice was unmistakable.

"You've had quite the journey this season, Rakim. A lot of people doubted whether you could bounce back from that shooting and return to top form. Do you feel like you've proven them wrong tonight?" Carla questioned with curiosity wanting to get the winger's take on this since he hadn't publicly spoken about the issue even after his return. He mostly dodged any direct answers regarding the issue using his charming personality to deflect.

"I think," he began slowly, choosing his words carefully, "It was definitely a horrifying experience, not just for me but also for my family and friends. If I'm being honest, it was never about proving anything to anyone but more about living up to the image of the player, I know I am." He looked at Clara, holding her gaze for a moment before continuing, "Winning that trophy just proves that my support team didn't waste their time believing and investing in me. That goes especially for my Mum who has been, my coach, nutritionist, and now agent"

"Your Mum's a woman of many talents," She responded with a light chuckle.

"That she is, must have something to do with the myth of Woman being able to multitask," Rakim replied almost instantaneously saying the first thing that came to his mind. "Oh, trust me it's not a myth it's very much real"

Rakim grinned, sensing the playful tone of Carla's response. "I won't argue with that," he said, laughing lightly. He shifted his weight, still buzzing from the adrenaline of the victory, his eyes occasionally darting back to the celebrations continuing behind them. His teammates were still drenched in champagne and confetti, revelling in the glory of their triumph.



Mike, not wanting to lose the flow of the interview, stepped back in. "So, Rakim, with this Scottish Cup under your belt and TitanFit making waves with you as the Face, What's next? Can we expect to see you playing in Manchester next season if the rumours are to be believed?"

Rakim paused for a moment, instantly sobering up from the happy mood he was feeling as the question was causing his spidey senses to tingle. Although I didn't touch any of the alcohol, joy can equally do the job of making you let your guard down. Whatever the case Rakim instantly felt that if he answered wrong, he would have all types of headlines he'd like to avoid pooping up tomorrow morning.

"That's a good question emm... Mike," He started his demeanour shifting to a more composed one as he for the first time made eye contact with the man. The man's looks were pretty average, but he possesses a rugged kind of charm Coupled with his outgoing charisma it is no wonder he is a successful anchor for sky sport in Scotland.

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Chapter 320 Brazil

As the ceremony reached its climax, the tension in the air felt electric. The golden Scottish Cup gleamed under the stadium lights, a symbol of glory as the league's biggest single tournament trophy. The crowd roared, a wave of sound that washed over the players as they gathered around the trophy. Rakim found his place among his teammates, already excited to get a hold of the silver trophy that seemed to be calling his name.

Scott walked towards the trophy placed on the small podium, where President Mike handed the trophy to the captain who firmly grasped it in his hands. Turning around to face his team who were already eagerly waiting he called over coach Lennon letting him hold one side of the cup. Both men walked up to the semi-circle the players had created, "Ohhhhhhhhhh, Champione, Champione, Champione, Oh Ohh Ohh ohhh ohhh Ohhhh, CHAMPIONE!!!!"

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