

Football 36

Chapter 36 NIKE Camp

Opening the three presents in the first box was a red Bayern kit with the eighteen-year-old muller on the back. I remember she asked me who my favourite player was, and I just told her muller since Neymar since he is a part of my favourite line-up for Bayern. The kit had a signature on the big twenty-five on the back which honestly surprised me.

"How did you get a signed copy," I asked them genuinely curious about how they had managed that. I mean he is a young talent right now, but he still plays for one of the biggest clubs in Europe. The response they gave me was just a chuckle as they continued to urge me to open the next present.

The next present was an iPhone one and a pair of white beats headphones that were not supposed to be released for another seven days. I'm assuming that they used some type of connection to get me a pair early. I'm finally going to have something to listen to when doing my workouts, you don't know how hard it is to stay motivated when doing a five-kilometre run.

The last present seemed to be a shoe box, after removing the wrapping paper I saw the Iconic Jordan logo on a white box. Inside the box, there was a pair of Air Jordan XV Retro SE that just came out this month. The shoe's primary colour was white with a gold lining which gave the whole shoe a sense of prestige.

"Thanks, I love the presents," I told my new parents with a bright smile on my face. This is the first ever birthday present I've ever received in both lives which made it quite special for me. Ben simply laughed and started eating a slice of my birthday cake, guess his sugar addiction is acting up again. It's not really a problem since he eats them in moderation, but I've never seen him turn down a piece of cake or a snack. It's probably a good thing that he works out in the morning, apparently, he has a gym in his company as well, but I've never seen it.

"Your welcome son, your uncle wanted to be her but his in DC for a case," Lisa told me as she slid the cake tray away from Ben so he wouldn't finish the whole thing by himself. Seems like she has also noticed his attraction to the sweet things in life. I wasn't too sad about Uncle William being absent since we had spoken on the phone last night and he wished me a happy birthday.

"All good hope his case goes well" I answered her with a smile as I went over to Emma so she could help me set up my phone. She readily agreed as she dismantled the phone box like a pro. Looking at the speed of her fingers that were gliding over the touch screen was dizzying so I stopped paying attention.

"Here it's done I've added all our phone numbers to it," she said as she handed me my phone after only having it for like half an hour at most. Dang, she must know magic because there is no way that was done with human speed.

"Thanks, sis," I said to her with a smile knowing she loved it when I called her my sister. It is probably something about being an only child so having a sibling must be like having a friend for life. I'm not complaining either since I also love the idea of having a sister, I can share my worries with and plot scheme with.

We spent the rest of the day as a family playing games and going on a walk around the lake at sunset to enjoy the scenery. We had a burnfire at night where we grilled bratwurst and marshmallows in the backyard. Ben spent the night telling us war stories of him and his friends in college and high school. He only stopped when Lisa sent us to bed at around one in the morning as both me and Emma were falling asleep in our chairs.

"This is by the best birthday I've ever had," I told Lisa as she tucked both Emma and me onto my bed. Before she had even left the room my eyes had closed shut ready to enter dreamland to greet my old friend sleep.

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[21/07/2008]

[Location: University of Florida]

[Nike Soccer Camp]

Mike James has been in a terrible mood for the past weeks since he found out that he was given the task to scout a camp full of kids below the age of ten. He has been working as a scout for various clubs in the German Bunde's Liga for almost ten years having reached his mid-thirties now. Most recently he's been employed by the German giant BVB with whom he has been working with for the past three years, helping them collect data and attract young talents. This club is one of the few European giants that is known for turning young talents into reliable wonder kids who can compete with the best player in the world.

The camp is mainly a training camp but in reality, it's for the Nike company to attract future players here in the US (Unconditioned State). The company loves to sign players to represent the brand but what they have lacked for the past years is a face for their domestic market. They have athletes in the MLB, NHL, NBA, and NFL they only lack a superstar that can carry the US banner in the country. They have recently invested a lot into the young phenom Ronaldo from Portugal but if they get a superstar who plays for the national team, they can strangle the domestic market.

The reason he got this assignment is due to his failure to get a promotion into a management role. Mike loved his job when he was young as he was able to travel and discover talents for the sport he loves. However, he is looking to settle down now since he is reaching his thirties and his wife wants him to be home more. So, he has been applying for a role as a first-team coach or a youth division director. He didn't expect that the club he has travelled thousands of miles for has started to value young talents

more than the backroom staff that has helped get them there. The club is now more interested in making money by selling players so coaches and other staff have naturally been ignored. After all, in the game of football managers, coaches and other staff are a dime a dozen.

Mike was sent on a mission to the US to scout for talents but if he was being honest, he is just going through the motions since his contract ends this year. If he was to actually find a talent, he wouldn't recommend it to the club that has not valued all his contribution over the years. He has already been offered a position as a youth academy director by one of their rivals, so he did not have to worry about not having work.

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[Mike Pov]

"Yo old man James I didn't expect to see you here" a mischievous voice spoke up from behind Mike as he was heading towards the stadium where the camp is held. Turning his head, He was met by a young man with a youthful face and a blond mop of hair on his head. The young man looked to be in his mid-twenties freshly out of school.

"I'm not here by choice Kai let's just hope those brats are worth the trouble" I answered him as I continued to head to the stadium. Nike really went all out for this by booking the Gators football stadium for a whole week to train these kids. Taking a seat in the stands I noticed I wasn't the only scout there. The only difference between all the other scouts and me is that most of them are young and just starting their careers.

Looking around I could see scouts from the French, English, and Spanish leagues some of them were from first-tier teams too. It is a pity that they were not valued enough by their club and were sent just to gain basic information. The US talent pool is actually quite vast when it comes to raw athleticism it is just

that there are way too many major sports in the country. I do have to praise how the country manages to train athletes from an early age till they enter the professional stage.

"(Sigh) this country is still far behind Europe when it comes to football" I mumbled under my breath as I started looking at the basic information of all the players present not bothering to look up at the energetic kids on the grass.

"Although the level of soccer here is quite low, other sports thrive here" I heard kai say as he took a seat next to me. This is going to be annoying if this chatterbox is going to be sitting next to me all day.

"Anyways since you are a local is there anyone interesting at this camp?" I asked him wanting to get some useful information since he was going to talk anyways. It seems I was right as he visibly beamed and started introducing players that he has been looking at over the past year.

"We have a good batch of talents in this age group ill mention the noteworthy ones starting with the oldest at the age of ten this year we have Pulisic and Mckennie both of them are the oldest in the camp and have the most potential," kai explained enthusiastically happy to see some rising talents from his country. He's not lying when he says that they both have a lot of potential, I know for sure that Pulisic has already negotiated a deal with the higher-ups at Dortmund to join the youth divisions.

"Yeah, they are both great talents, I'm guessing your Juventus is here for Mckinnie," I asked him with a slight smile on my face. He simply nodded at my question and went on to continue on to the next players.

"At the age of eight we have Dest, Weah, and Ferreira who are also tremendous talents who have yet to grow into their respective roles" He introduced the next batch of players who are arguably very well known in the football community even though they are so young. The three of them have caught the

attention of various scouts in the circle, I am fairly sure one of the major football academies will pick them up in the years to come.

"In the six-year age group, there isn't anyone noteworthy yet but there is a completely unknown name on the list who just turned six two days ago" Kai continued before I could comment on his previous statement. He must really be here just to watch Pulisic and Mckennie, I don't blame him though getting one of them to sign would be a major boost in his career.

"Oh, you mean this Rakim Rex, I was actually surprised to see a name I've never heard of," I answered him wanting to hear his thoughts on the boy since he might have some information.

"I thought he was special since I've never heard of him, and he made the camp, but it turns out he got in through connections of his father," Kai said with a hint of disdain in his voice as he stared at a small boy in the distance who seemed to be around 4'2 which is quite good for his age. The odd thing about the boy though is that he was wearing Adidas gear from his under armour and boots they too had the bold three stripes.

"Haha what an interesting kid, looks like it's about to start," I said to Kai as I noted down Rakim's name and the number twenty-two that was on his bib. My gut feeling was telling me that I might be surprised by the kid or maybe I'm just trying to get rid of the board.