

Football 421

Chapter 421 421 Prove It

[USA Team Hotel, 20:20]

Yunus clenched his jaw, his hands curling into fists at his sides. Matteo saw the frustration boiling behind his eyes, but he didn't care. He had said his piece. Reyna, on the side no longer stayed calm as he let out a slow breath and shook his head. "You really think that, huh?" Reyna muttered, his voice quieter now.

Matteo smirked. "I don't think it—I know it. The moment I step on that field tomorrow, everything else disappears. It's just me, the ball, and the back of the net. That's all that matters as everything else disappears."

"You sound just like him," Yunus snapped. "You sound just like Rakim and neither of you cares about the country." Matteo's smile froze.

"Except, you're not," Yunus added, eyes burning into Matteo's. "And that eats you up inside."

For a moment, neither of them moved and it looked like someone would throw a punch at any moment. The hallway was empty, save for the faint hum of the vending machines and the distant murmurs of teammates in their rooms. Matteo's blood ran hot, but he forced himself to stay relaxed.

"See, that's where you're wrong," Matteo finally said, voice dripping with confidence.

"I'm not like Rakim. I don't dance around defenders for the cameras. I don't care about highlight reels. I don't need some scripted documentary to make people believe I'm great. I just score goals. And tomorrow, against France, I'll do it again."

He paused for a second before he continued speaking. "You're right though I don't care about the country, I didn't grow up here and just because my deadbeat dad is from here, doesn't make me obligated to risk it all. If not for my agent and sponsors pushing me to play with y'all all I would be doing my thing in the LaLiga so don't expect anything other than my professionalism on the pitch."

Reyna let out a humourless chuckle. "You think that makes you better than him?"

Matteo leaned in slightly, his voice dropping lower. "No! I think that makes me the only one who really matters."

Yunus exhaled sharply, shaking his head in disappointment. "Whatever, man. Just don't screw this up for us." He turned, walking away before he lost his temper. Reyna gave Matteo one last unreadable glance before following.

Matteo stood there for a moment, watching them disappear down the hallway. He could still hear Yunus muttering curses under his breath. Shrugging his shoulders he made his way towards his room not thinking of this little audience more than he had to.

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[Zdzisław-Krzyszkowiak-Stadion, 16:20, USA U-20 vs. France U-20 – Round of 16]

The stadium was buzzing. The crowd was a mix of Polish neutrals and passionate travelling fans, who came to support their respective teams. The tension rippled through the USA squad as they stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the tunnel.

The echoes of the French players exchanging quick words in their native tongue made Matteo's blood simmer. His fingers twitched. He wanted this more than anything. The chance to beat some of the best players in his age group and prove his worth. The crowd roared as both teams stepped onto the field as both sides neatly walked onto the field.

Under the floodlights, Matteo Smith rolled his shoulders, shaking out the tension in his muscles. His eyes scanned the French lineup as they shook hands. Camavinga. Soumaré. Olise. He had heard of the midfield trio and was looking forward to crushing them since they weren't some no-name players he was about to run circles around.

His gaze flickered to Benoît Badiashile, France's towering centre-back. 'So that's the guy I have to break today.' Matteo smirked. 'Fine.' At the halfway line, Gio Reyna and Yunus Musah stood in silence as the teams lined up for the pre-match formalities. Matteo could feel their eyes on him, but he didn't care. They had their doubts. Let them. All he cared about was his own goals. Both teams quickly went into positions after going through all the formalities none of which aroused much attention from Matteo.

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USA Starting XI: 4-2-3-1

GK: Brady Scott (FC Köln – Germany)

RB: Sergiño Dest (Ajax – Netherlands)

CB: Chris Richards (Bayern Munich – Germany)

CB: Mark McKenzie (Philadelphia Union – USA)

LB: George Bello (Atlanta United – USA)

CDM: Weston McKennie (Schalke 04 – Germany)

CDM: Yunus Musah (Arsenal Youth – England)

RW: Timothy Weah (Lille – France)

CAM: Giovanni Reyna (Borussia Dortmund – Germany)

LW: Christian Pulisic (Chelsea – England)

ST: Matteo Smith (Valencia – Spain)

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France Starting XI: 4-3-3

GK: Alban Lafont (Nantes, on loan from Fiorentina – France/Italy)

RB: Pierre Kalulu (Olympique Lyonnais – France)

CB: Benoît Badiashile (AS Monaco – France)

CB: Loïc Badé (Le Havre – France)

LB: Rayan Aït-Nouri (Angers – France)

CM: Boubakary Soumaré (Lille – France)

CM: Eduardo Camavinga (Rennes – France)

CM: Michael Olise (Reading – England)

RW: Rayan Cherki (Olympique Lyonnais – France)

LW: Amine Gouiri (Olympique Lyonnais – France)

ST: Matthis Abline (Rennes – France)

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[Zdzisław-Krzyszkowiak-Stadion, 16:30, USA U-20 vs. France U-20 – Round of 16]

(Fweet) The referee blew his whistle announcing the Kick-off. France didn't waste time. They immediately settled into a possession-based rhythm, Eduardo Camavinga dictating the tempo with ease. USA tried pressing high, but Boubakary Soumaré absorbed pressure like a brick wall, spraying passes wide to Rayan Cherki and Amine Gouiri.

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They didn't take long to threaten the US goals as Cherki wriggled past George Bello on the right and swung in a cross to Matthis Abline, but Chris Richards rose highest, clearing with a firm header. The rebound fell to Michael Olise at the edge of the box—he didn't hesitate. A curling left-footed strike was headed straight for the top corner until Brady Scott parried it away with a sharp save.

"Wake up, boys!" Scott barked, as he started giving out instructions to his back line. None of them took it to heart and simply started adjusting to their keepers' instructions vowing to do better. Being the reason your country goes behind in an international competition wasn't something they were willing to carry with them.

[7]

The USA struggled to maintain possession in the opening minutes, their midfield caught between pressing and keeping their defensive shape. France, fluid and composed, moved the ball quickly, with Camavinga orchestrating from the centre. Michael Olise found pockets of space between the lines, his quick turns unsettling McKennie and Musah.

Then, in the ninth minute, a breakthrough nearly arrived. Camavinga lifted a clever ball over the top, dissecting the American defence. Amine Gouiri timed his run perfectly, sprinting in behind McKenzie. With a single touch, he brought the ball down inside the box and fired low toward the far post—but Brady Scott reacted quickly, diving to his left and pushing it wide for a corner.

"That's too easy!" McKennie shouted, glaring at his teammates as they jogged back into position.

France took the corner short, Olise exchanging passes with Cherki before curling a dangerous ball toward the back post. Badiashile powered through the crowd, meeting it with a towering header—only

to see Dest lunge in at the last second, deflecting the ball wide. The USA finally had a moment to breathe.

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A shift in momentum came when Musah intercepted a loose pass from Soumaré and immediately played forward to Reyna, who turned sharply away from Camavinga and drove at the French backline. Pulisic made a darting run on the left, dragging Kalulu with him, while Weah sprinted into the space on the right.

Scanning their runs Reyna spotted an opportunity and threaded a pass through the middle to Matteo Smith. He lost his man with a simple but clever movement and calmly controlled the ball. Smith took one touch, then another, trying to create space, but Badiashile shadowed him tightly. Pulisic to his left exclaimed calling for a pass and Matteo turned his way prompting Badiashile to do the same.

It was all a trap as Smith nearly used his teammate as a decoy baiting Badiashile to move and cover that passing lane. Before the defender could react, Matteo had nudged the ball the other way and taken a step to create some separation. Without hesitation, he took aim from the top of the penalty box as he swung his foot letting a cannon of a shot fly.

Chapter 422 422 Coronation

[Olimpijska Poland, Stadion GOSiR, 16:35]

"Yo, isn't your rival isn't playing France right now?" Wirtz asked with a questioning tone as he stepped into the player lounge. They had travelled to Olimpijska Poland for their quarter-final clash with Norway and were in the process of getting ready. Unlike other games that kicked off early, they were the latest in this round as they would kick off at 6 pm.

"What are you talking about?" Rakim inquired as he looked up from his phone clearly confused and a little displeased that he was interrupted just as he was about to send his PEKKA's to destroy an unsuspecting village.

"Matteo Smith isn't he like your biggest rival, I even heard you two came up together sharpening your skills against the other," Florian commented with a slight smile as a mischievous idea came to mind. "Oh, and one of the reports stated he was something like a big brother to you teaching you all his skills and pushing you to become the player you are today."

Yousoufa Moukoko catching on also commented with a smile. "Yeah, I heard that too, something about you playing to catch up to him and defeat him in a professional match one day."

"Really and here I thought Rakim was the type to look up to nobody but himself," Angelo commented from the side sounding genuinely surprised as he joined the conversation. More and more players started to join the conversation stating what they had heard from the so-called 'articles'.

Rakim who had been enjoying his time off was at first surprised by the sudden interruption but quickly turned to anger. He could quickly tell that Wirtz was trying to get a rise out of him and was about to brush it off but as more of his teammates joined in, he found himself questioning life. He had never considered himself as someone who would get easily baited but his ego was quickly feeling triggered as the stories started to spiral out of control.

"It must be fuck with Rakim day," he muttered to himself silently before finally having enough. "Hey, you mouth-breathing flat earthers, shut the F-up or so help me I will make it my personal side quest to dribble through all of you 3 times in today's match," Rakim exclaimed with furrowed brows squeezing his phone so tight that the protective glass started to crack.

"Let's make one thing clear, I have never Idolised a player whose name isn't Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Kaka or Zlatan. Even then Rakim's favourite player is Rakim," He continued speaking clearly angry as he eyed every one of them causing a few to gulp. "Ahahah, look at your faces, why so tense I thought we were having fun?"

The room fell silent for a moment, everyone absorbing the intensity of Rakim's outburst. Then, laughter began to bubble up among the players, starting with Florian Wirtz, who clapped Rakim on the shoulder with a wide grin.

"Alright, man, we got you good!" Florian chuckled, the tension dissolving as the rest of the team joined in the laughter.

Rakim, seeing the genuine amusement in his teammates suddenly stopped laughing staring at them with a deadpan stare. They didn't notice right away but those that did quickly shut their mouths, but no one passed the message onto Florian. "Man, I could practically see your brain ticking on the verge of exploding," he stated in hearty laughter as he slapped Rakim's shoulder.

By this point, everyone else had stopped laughing clearly having more situational awareness or a better danger sense than Wirtz. Some had even stepped back just in case shit hit the fan. "Hey Youssoufa, did you see his expression when you said Matteo is his Idol?" Wirtz's asked in glee only to notice the latter was gone. "Hey, where did Youssoufa go?"

"Guy's? ...ehem where is everyone?" He asked again his laughter having disappeared as he noticed that everyone had left. Turning to face Rakim he found the latter's green eyes locked onto him with a frown as he gazed at Wirtz's hand still on his shoulder. It was only at this time that the young midfielder realised that his teammates had left him holding the bag.

"So, you found it funny right? I think we should double your workouts since you have so much energy to be pulling pranks." Rakim stated coldly as he took hold of the hand on his shoulder brushing it off as if he was shooing a bug. "We definitely should double or maybe triple our workouts since I'm also feeling restless for some reason,"

"N'no, I won't do it, man!" Wirtz exclaimed as he sprinted off clearly not willing to entertain his friend's sadistic side when it comes to training. Rakim didn't chase him as simply sat back down pulled out a pair of headphones and logged onto the streaming app that was broadcasting this tournament. He was just in time to see Matteo take a shot in the 15th minute.

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[Zdzisław-Krzyszkowiak-Stadion, 16:45, USA U-20 vs. France U-20 – Round of 16]

[15]

Matteo's shot erupted like a cannonball from the top of the box, its trajectory a blur of raw power. Alban Lafont sprang into action, diving to his right with every ounce of determination. Yet, his fingertips merely grazed the ball—it struck the crossbar with a resounding clang that reverberated around the stadium. For a heartbeat, time seemed to stall as the ricocheting ball hurtled back into the penalty area.

In that split-second, no one moved but soon chaos ensued as the bodies of players scrambling to the ball's landing point could be seen. Pulisic who had already been making his run inwards was the closest, but Pierre Kalulu was nipping at his heels not giving a moment of space. He tried to take it on the volley, but the angle was too tricky and the ball skiffed off the top of his boot.

It bounced backwards to the edge of the box where the figures of Soumaré and Weston McKennie could be seen fighting for position. The crowd held its breath as Soumaré managed to nudge McKennie slightly, just enough to get a toe on the ball and clear it towards the midfield. However, his clearance was not as effective as he would have hoped.

The ball landed directly at the feet of Yunus Musah, who was hovering near the centre circle, ready for any opportunity to recycle possession. Musah, spotting Reyna drifting into space between the lines, quickly tapped the ball to him. Reyna turned with it smoothly, assessing his options in a split second.

With the French defence slightly disorganized from their attempt to clear, Reyna spotted Timothy Weah making a dynamic run down the right wing. With a deft flick of his boot, Reyna sent a precise through ball slicing through the French defence. Weah, with his speed, easily outpaced Rayan Aït-Nouri and met the ball just inside the box.

He didn't even take a touch to settle it; instead, he whipped in a sharp, low cross towards the far post. Matteo Smith, who had recovered from his earlier shot, had drifted towards that location and simply slipped past Loïc Badé with a burst of speed. With the goal at his mercy, Smith timed his slide perfectly, connecting with the ball and sending it flying past Lafont into the back of the net.

The American fans erupted in cheers as Smith leapt up, pumping his fists in the air before being mobbed by his teammates as he jogged to the corner flag. He didn't seem to feel the extra weight and simply advanced to the cameraman at the side. Shooing George Bello off his back he knocked on his left chest with his right fist twice before picking up an imaginary crown, crowning himself as KING.

Chapter 423 423 Norway

[Zdzisław-Krzyszkowiak-Stadion, 16:52, USA U-20 vs. France U-20 – Round of 16]

Back at the Stadion GOSiR, Rakim watched intently as Matteo celebrated his goal, his earlier irritation forgotten in the face of his rival's triumph. A wry smile crept across his face as he watched the replay of the Matteos goal flash across his phone.

The scene on the pitch-shifted as the French team, now trailing, gathered around their coach for a quick tactical discussion. The USA's early lead had shaken them, and it was clear they needed to regroup fast if they were to turn the tide.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere in the stadium had become electric, the American supporters buzzing with excitement, while the French fans rallied their voices in support of their team, urging them not to take back the lead. They were a proud football nation and after just winning the world cup in 2018 they were still riding high. Thus, their expectations for the next generation have been high since the start of the tournament and in all fairness, they were met so far.

The match soon continued with a French kick-off as they immediately charged forward looking to equalise as soon as possible. They quickly projected their presence all over the match as they controlled possession of the ball. USA quickly found themselves trapped in their own half as the French contingent looked for ways to score.

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[Back at Olimpijska Poland, Stadion GOSiR, 17:05]

The broadcast showed the French team attempting yet another shot only to fail. Rakim's focus was pulled back by the arrival of his coach, who stepped into the lounge, his expression stern but focused. "Everyone ready?" he asked, scanning the room filled with his players, who quickly nodded or murmured affirmations.

"All right, boys this is the moment of truth we have worked hard to achieve, so let's go out there and push across the finish line." Coach Baum stated as he looked into the eyes of all his players. "The countdown is on, now go out there and do all that you need to get your head in the game."

The players, energized by their coach's words, stood and started to gather their gear. Rakim took a moment to turn off his streaming app and focus entirely on the task ahead. The quarter-final match against Norway would be tough, especially after the days they spent watching tape. Haaland was no joke, was the embodiment of the modern Viking on a football pitch as he always seemed to find ways to score.

Taking a deep breath Rakim slipped his phone into his bag, throwing away all unnecessary thoughts as he put on his training boots. The intensity in the room shifted as the anticipation of the upcoming battle settled on his nerves. The players around him were tightening their shin guards, lacing their boots tighter, each movement methodical almost ritualistic as some said a quick prayer while others simply applied VapoRub on their chest. The chatter had died down; only the sound of preparation filled the air.

[Stadion GOSiR, 17:20]

The German team began their walk towards the pitch for a final pre-match warm-up. The stadium was buzzing, as the stadium started to slowly fill up with spectators. The crowd parsley cheered as they stepped onto the grass, trying to motivate them for the match. The chill of the evening air brushed against their faces, a stark contrast to the warmth of the locker room.

Rakim took a deep breath, letting the atmosphere seep into his veins. The sight of the Norwegian team already on the field, going through their paces, jolted his mind into focus. He watched Haaland for a moment, noting the striker's long hair combed to his left swaying in the wind as his frame went through the drills. Taking another breath to centre himself he jogged don't the pitch joining the other players in a rondo drill.

The Germans spread out across their half of the pitch. The coaches set up small-sided games and passing drills to sharpen their touches and get their blood flowing. Rakim joined a rondo, his touches fluid as always, and his passes felt crisp. He felt good, ready to play as he took his turn in the rondo with Wirtz, "You better not hold me back Florida I got a reputation to uphold."

"Just don't go missing during the game," Rakim replied with a slight grin as he jogged into the middle not missing the chance to nudge Florians shoulder.

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[Stadion GOSiR, 17:50]

As the warm-up concluded, Coach Baum gathered the team for a few last words. "Remember, maintain the intensity, keep the pressure, and use the space effectively. We need to stay sharp out there and choke them with our possession football. Don't give them a chance to settle into this game, let's do this together, as one unit."

Nods and muttered agreements echoed through the group. They broke the huddle with hands together, shouting a unified "Win!" before lining up to walk out to the field. Their starting lineup met up with Norway's in the tunnel with Luca Unbehaun donning the captain's armband and taking the lead.

"Good night, ladies and gentlemen's welcome to this quarter-final clash between Norway and Germany. Both teams have quite the exciting line-ups and have shown glimpses of what they can do, both coaches will be hoping for more of that coming into this match." Paul Gartner's voice resounded throughout the stadium speakers and the live stream as he started doing his job.

"Norway is starting strong with a flat 4-3-3 formation. Kristoffer Klaesson is starting in goals with Leo Østigård and Tobias Børkeeiet holding the central defence in place. On the left back position, they have John Kitolano and Hugo Vetlesen will be playing right back." He paused for a moment as the player's images appeared on screen allowing him to take a sip of his water.

"The midfield trio consists of Jens Petter Hauge, Emil Bohinen, and Hakon Evjen who will be looking to contain that German midfield that has been quite efficient in creating chances in this tournament. Oscar Bobb will be playing on the right wing, with Eman Markovic on the left flank, and the incredible Erling Haaland whose goal tally has reached 11 after scoring 8 against Honduras to push his team across the finishing line."

Finishing with Norwegian he continued listing the German sides treating line up who were taking a 4-2-3-1 formation. Luca Unbehaun from Borussia Dortmund stood in front of their goal and the back line from right to left was made up of RB: Simon Asta, CB: Armel Bella, Kevin Ehlers, and LB: Noah Katterbach.

The midfield consists of a defensive double-pivot of Bayern's Angelo Stiller and Niklas Tauer from Mainz. Ahead of them, Rakim Rex plays on the right, Florian Wirtz in the middle, and Jamie Leweling play on the left flank. Ahead of them leading this ensemble of Germany's attacking talents is Bayern's Malik Tillman who has been in form. The tension in the air became electric as both teams prepared for kick-off. The crowd's anticipation built with each passing second, culminating in a roar as the referee blew his whistle to start the game.

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[Stadion GOSiR, 18:00]

From the outset, Germany took control, dominating possession with quick, precise passes following Malik Tillman's pass back from the spot. For the first 5 minutes, they worked hard to control possession of the ball with simple short and medium passes that left the Norwegians chasing their shadows. Wirtz at the heart of many of these plays, seamlessly controlled their flow as he moved in and out of different positions forcing his teammates to react to his movements.

His on and off-the-ball movement quickly confused the Norwegian midfielders who attempted to break up their rhythm. In the 5th minute, Rakim received the ball on the right wing, at the edge of the final quarter and immediately cut inside to beat his marker with a sharp dribble. Spotting Malik making a run into the box, Rakim swung his foot delivering a chipped through ball over the top of the defensive line.

Malik timed his run perfectly to stay onside as he slipped past Tobias Børkeeiet. He stretched out to meet the ball with a first-time volley, but the shot went just wide of the near post, skimming the side netting. The crowd gasped in disappointment yet applauded in anticipation of what was to come.

Chapter 424 424 Ragnar Lodbrok

[Stadion GOSiR, 18:10, Germany U-20 vs. Norway U-20 – Round of 16]

As the match continued, Germany's tactical superiority became increasingly apparent. They were relentless, pushing forward with a mix of raw speed and technical precision. Rakim, ever the orchestrator on the right flank, switched play when necessary, keeping the Norwegian defence on their toes.

Germany earned a corner after a deflected shot from Wirtz. Rakim jogged over to the corner flag, the ball under his arm, surveying the box before placing it down. He signalled briefly to his teammates, and as he stepped back to take the corner, his eyes locked on the tall figures of Ehlers and Bella in the crowd. With a swift motion, Rakim whipped the ball into the box, curving it towards the near post.

Bella-Kotchap rose above his marker, his timing impeccable, and connected with a powerful header. The ball rocketed towards the goal, but Hugo Vetlesen Norway's right back was there to stop it as he hugged the near post and he chested the ball away from the goal. The ball rebounded sharply off Vetlesen's chest, landing back at the feet of a lurking Wirtz inside the chaos across the five-yard box.

Wirtz immediately swung his foot without hesitation, sending the ball back towards goal. However, it rebounded off Fredrik Bjørkan's leg, killing its momentum. More legs went to kick the ball, but Rafael Veloso was there to smother it before any of them could get to it. As Rafael Veloso clutched the ball to his chest, the pace momentarily slowed, giving both teams a chance to reset.

The Norwegian goalkeeper rolled the ball out quickly to Leo Østigård, who looked up to initiate a counterattack. Spreading the play to the left, Østigård found John Kitolano, who had eagerly pushed up. Kitolano darted forward, weaving past Jamie Leweling with a nimble touch.

On the opposite side, Oscar Bobb and Eman Markovic started to make inroads, exploiting the spaces left by Germany's forward push. Bobb received the ball on the run and slid a precise pass between the German centre-backs, aiming for the racing figure of Erling Haaland. Haaland's presence upfront had been quiet until now, but sensing the opportunity, he surged forward with power and speed exploding past his marker.

Haaland controlled the ball with a deft touch before attempting a split-second shot at the top of the penalty box just as Luca had crossed the penalty spot. Armel had recovered quickly and managed to perform a diving tackle in an attempt to stop the shot, but he was too late. The ball rocketed towards the right side of the goal with power, but Luca performed a star jump and was lucky enough to deflect the ball away.

As Luca Unbehaun heroically pushed Haaland's thunderous shot away from goal, the stadium erupted in a mixture of cheers and sighs. The ball, now loose and spinning wildly towards the sideline, was chased down by Noah Katterbach, who instead of initiating a counter retained possession for his team. Oscar Bobb tried to pressure him but a quick one-two with Kevin Ehlers was all he needed to keep the winger at bay.

Germany took their time settling the game not rushing their next attack as they played their familiar possession game. Rakim and Jamie became the most active on their respective flanks as they teased a few breakthrough runs forcing the Norwegian sides to stay compact. Despite the fact they managed to regain possession quite a few times they found it hard to exploit any room on the flanks.

[20]

In the 20th minute, Norway got their next real chance when Emil Bohinen intercepted a loose pass from Wirtz meant for Niklas. He swiftly turned up the field following his interception, his eyes scanning for options. With a burst of pace, he dribbled past Niklas Tauer who had reacted slowly to the misplaced pass and pushed forward into the German half.

His movements attracted the attention of several German defenders, creating space for his teammates. Hauge, sensing the opportunity, positioned himself just right, calling for the ball. Bohinen spotted him and slid a precise pass through the gap, allowing Hauge to collect it on the move. Hauge advanced towards the penalty area, dribbling with confidence as he prepared to unleash a shot.

Just as Hauge was about to strike, Kevin Ehlers lunged in a desperate attempt to block the shot. The ball ricocheted off Ehlers' outstretched leg, skewing wildly towards the right post. The unexpected deflection caught Luca Unbehaun off guard, not giving him enough time to reach the ball no matter how much he stretched his fingertips.

Luck was on the German side as the ball veered off course clanging against the post and bouncing out for a corner kick. The crowd which had held its breath breathed a sigh of relief or in the Norwegian's case a groan of disappointment. Norway's corner was taken quickly, with Evjen delivering a curling cross into the box.

Leo Østigård rose highest, his header thundering towards goal. However, Unbehaun was again up to the task, showcasing his reflexes with a spectacular save, tipping the ball over the bar. The subsequent corner led to a tense few moments as Germany struggled to clear their lines. Hakon Evjen fired in another dangerous cross, which fluttered dangerously across the face of the goal before being hastily cleared by Simon Asta.

Regaining their composure, Germany started to reassert their dominance in possession. Rakim, now more involved, drifted centrally, looking to create opportunities. He linked up with Florian Wirtz, who had dropped deeper to collect the ball. Together, they orchestrated a series of sharp, quick passes, probing the Norwegian defence for weaknesses.

In the 27th minute, Rakim found a sliver of space and exploited it with a clever through ball to Malik Tillman. Tillman, with only the keeper to beat, timed his run perfectly but his low shot was thwarted by a brilliant one-handed save by Kristoffer Klaesson. The ball rebounded back to Tillman, who tried to curl it into the far corner, but this time it was blocked by Tobias Børkeeiet, ensuring the score remained level.

The match continued at a high tempo, with both teams exchanging spells of possession and chances. Germany's tactical discipline and Norway's counterattacking created a visual delight for the onlookers. However, this deadlock couldn't persist for too long as the cookie crumbled in Norway's way in the 35th minute.

Norway's very own Viking received the ball on the halfway line and decided to just charge through the middle. Angelo Stiller tried to tackle him on his left but was quickly shoulder-checked to the ground and Niklas Tauer attempted a slide tackle. Erling merely lifted the ball over Tauer's attempt and vaulted over him as he continued forward quickly gaining speed.

He resembled Ragnar Lodbrok charging through an army as he charged towards the box. Germany's two wingbacks didn't dare to converge into the middle as Norway's winger also barrelled down the wing

plus, they trusted their two centre-backs to stop the attack. The two central defenders, Bella-Kotchap and Ehlers, positioned themselves to cut off any potential angles for a shot as he neared.

As he reached the top of the box Haaland made a slight feint to the left, drawing Bella-Kotchap slightly off balance. Seizing the moment, he nudged the ball to his right breaking past Bella-Kotchap in the next moment. He tried to get in his way by stretching out his arm, but Erling simply muscled through as he nudged the ball past Ehlers.

He also tried to hold him, but Haaland was already in full motion and charged past them. Luca who had ghosted forward barely even had the chance to react when the ball whizzed past him impacting the back of the net. Not even allowed a second to process what had happened the Norwegian fans jumped up in jubilation as Haaland continued his charge towards the corner flag in celebration.

Haaland slid on his knees near the corner flag, fists clenched, roaring toward the stands as his teammates rushed to surround him. The Norwegian fans erupted in wild celebration, the stadium slightly shaking with their cheers. Watching this scene the German players looked stunned. Bella-Kotchap slammed his fist against the turf in frustration, while Ehlers shook his head, exhaling sharply. Luca Unbehaun, still on his knees from his attempted save, pounded the grass before rising, shouting to his teammates to regroup.

Chapter 425 425 Obitto

[Stadion GOSiR, 18:30, Germany U-20 vs. Norway U-20 – Round of 16]

[30]

As the match resumed following Norway's goal, the German side, stung by the sudden strike, quickly regrouped and intensified their efforts. Coach Baum signalled from the sideline, urging his team to maintain their structure and focus. He made tactical adjustments, directing his defensive pivot to tighten up the middle, and also directed the wingers to be more daring and make things happen.

Back in play, Germany controlled possession from the kick-off, methodically moving the ball across the pitch. Rejuvenated by Coach Baum's instructions, they began to exhibit greater control and creativity. Niklas Tauer and Angelo Stiller orchestrated the play from deep, distributing the ball with precision and looking for any opportunity to penetrate the sturdy Norwegian defence.

Germany's tactical shift was evident as they looked to exploit Norway's slightly higher defensive line. The central midfield duo of Niklas Tauer and Angelo Stiller was at the heart of this approach, frequently switching the play to stretch the Norwegian defence and create spaces for penetrating passes.

In the 37th minute, Florian Wirtz, now finding more space in the middle, received the ball from Stiller and quickly turned to face the goal. Spotting Jamie Leweling making a sharp run behind the Norwegian right back, Wirtz delivered a precision through ball. Leweling latched onto it and darted towards the goal, but his final shot was well saved by Kristoffer Klaesson, who had quickly narrowed the angle.

Undeterred, Germany maintained pressure. Rakim continuously drifted in from the right, teasing the defenders with cuts inwards. In one of these moments, Rakim collected the ball near the halfway line and drove forward at speed. He evaded a tackle from Emil Bohinen who failed to get in his way as he was shaken off with two quick stepovers.

Accelerating towards the edge of the box, he didn't even bother looking for a passing option as he unleashed a powerful left-footed shot. The ball whistled through the air, but it was slightly off target, brushing past the far post. The German fans groaned in disappointment, yet they applauded Rakim's audacity and skill.

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The near miss didn't shake the Norwegian team too much; they simply returned to their game plan of high balls. They continued to play a lot down both flanks, whipping in crosses for Haland to run into. Since, on average, they were all a head or two taller than their opponents, they made sure to turn this into a physical game.

In the 42nd minute, Angelo Stiller made a daring tackle on Hakon in the middle of the field, but the latter quickly accelerated past the tackle. Not holding onto the ball, he sent pricing through ball towards his right flank for Oscar Bobb, who had just slipped past his marker. This move signalled the rest of Norway's attacking contingent to spring into action, as they all, sprinted down designated attacking lanes.

Noah Katterbach Germany's left-back had his gaze on Jens Petter Hauge who was waiting for him to commit before speeding into that gap that would be opened. Thus, as he charged down the line unchallenged, it wasn't until he cut inside rather than crossing that Noah abandoned his mark on Jens to press the ball. But as soon as he moved, Oscar Bobb found Jens with a pass.

He took it down the wing past the box and delivered a low cross. Luca Unbehaun read the play perfectly, coming off his line as he anticipated the ball and threw himself down to smother it. Haaland was a heartbeat away from finishing, but he wasn't mad and simply gave his teammates a thumbs-up with a wide grin before sprinting back to his defensive position.

Germany launched another attack, while Norway's forward line dropped back to help with a high-pressure midfield defence. The defence line moved up, creating a trapping circle around the midfield. Angelo and Niklas exchanged passes before risking a ball over to the left wing for Jamie Leweling.

He was remarkable in his first touch, dribbling past Hugo Vetlesen. Unfortunately, just as he got past Hugo the ball ran a little too far ahead, and Leo Østigård quickly closed the gap. As Jamie tried to regain control, Leo swept the ball to Kristoffer Klaesson, their goalkeeper. Kristoffer stopped the ball and passed it to Tobias Børkeeiet, who passed it to John Kitolano on the wing.

He was forced to keep the ball moving as Rakim closed the gap in an instant, but Norway didn't mind as they calmly kept control of the ball. They organized another attack, taking their time with the pace. Despite Germany's high press. Controlling the tempo for a while as the Norwegians worked meticulously to maintain possession.

As the half drew to a close, Norway struggled to control the tempo, they faced an onslaught of German attacks. In the end, Leo Østigård was forced to boot the ball long when he found himself cornered by Rakim and Malik. The ball sailed high, arcing towards the midfield where it was met by the head of Angelo Stiller, redirecting it back into the Norwegian half.

Wirtz calmly chested it down as he held back both Emil Bohinen and Hakon Evjen regaining possession of the ball for his team. With a deft touch, he spun around, evading Bohinen's lunging tackle, and flicked the ball to Rakim, who had drifted centrally in anticipation. The winger skipped past him only to heel-pass it back towards the wing for Simon Asta who had moved up the wing.

Norway's left back John Kitolano who had been gearing up to follow Rakim centrally was forced to double back. He was too late though as Asta accelerated down the wing reaching the edge of the box in a matter of moments forcing Tobias Børkeeiet to step up to block his way inwards. Asta didn't even bother taking him on as he came to a sudden stop and slotted the ball back to Wirtz who had drifted behind him upon losing his bodyguards.

The Leverkusen hopeful didn't take a touch to control it and simply passed it forward diagonally to Angelo Stiller who had drifted forward. Using the space left behind by the collapsing Norwegian defence he reached the front of the box before Jens and Hakon stepped up to defend him. Angelo's first touch was a through ball slotted in between the open legs of Jens who fell over trying to close them.

Rakim was in behind him making a diagonal run into the box surprising Tobias who scrambled to step forward looking to intercept his second touch. He was too late though as the German winger didn't



bother receiving it and nearly let it slip through his legs mid-run. The ball rolled through to Jamie Leweling who had pierced the box after slipping past his marker on the flank.

Quickly the situation became dangerous as Jaimie found himself one-on-one with the outrushing Kristoffer Klaesson. His first touch immaculately trapped the ball as he strode forward facing the keeper head-on. Jamie feinted to his right, but Klaesson didn't bite as he closed the distance putting the pressure on the winger as he closed down the shooting angles.

It looked like he would have to force a shot as the keeper geared up to pounce forward only to halt his movement and jump to his left. He realised it too late though as Jamie had already squared the ball across the face of the five-yard line. Like the ghost of the Uchiha who had a knack of appearing out of nowhere the one player Norway didn't want to get on the end of that ball appeared above it.

Chapter 426 426 Aura

In the stands of Stadion GOSiR, some sections were clustered in black, red, and gold colours exclaiming to the world who they were here to support. The diehard Germans had travelled to support their youth team in this tournament and so far, they had been satisfied with their performance. Among them were longtime friends Markus, Lena, and Jan, who clung to the railing in the front row, anxiously watching the match.

As the match progressed, the atmosphere among the German supporters fluctuated with every pass and tackle. Their voices rose and fell in a rhythmic chant, trying to inject some spirit into their young team. However, the 30th minute brought a silence that fell like a curtain.

Haaland Norway's forward steamrolled right through the front door of their team convincingly butchering them before taking a seat at the table. At least that's how it felt to the trio as they watched him slice through their team's defence with a solo effort that was both stunning and heartbreaking. His shot found the back of the net, and the scoreline flashed a disheartening 0:1.

Markus shook his head, his face painted in the national colours, now looking smeared from the sweat and the early summer humidity. "Not again," he muttered, recalling the previous year's World Cup, where the senior team had finished last in their group—an unthinkable outcome for a nation proud of its football heritage.

Lena, despite being disappointed still decided to stand up and shout trying to hype up the boys to fight back. "Come on, Jungs! Fight back! We know you can do it!" Her cheers seemed to echo into a void as the Norwegian fans erupted in jubilation.

"ERLING HAALAND, 12," the Norwegian sections loudly exclaimed drowning out even the commentator's voice that could be vaguely heard through the stadium speakers. The smiles now held a smug tint as they watched their team step on the necks of the Germans.

"The 19-year-old phenom from Norway is a player to watch mark my words. I can see why Dortmund who are known for their eye for talent needed to sign this goal machine. He makes it look effortless without even trying as he beat the Germans both physically and with his kill set." Paul Gartner's voice continued to drone over through the speakers in the stadium much to the delight of the Norway fans and displeasure of the Germans.

As a matter of fact, some of the more hot-blooded fans debated storming the commentating booth and giving him a piece of their mind. They would be disappointed even if they tried as Gartner wasn't actually present in the stadium and was conducting his broadcast in a temporary studio in Poland. Thus, he felt no scruples saying whatever he felt needed to be said without fearing for his safety.

Gartner's words felt like salt rubbed into their open wounds. Markus, Lena, and Jan could only exchange looks of frustration, their earlier energy dampened by the turn of events. Jan was the first to speak up after the game had resumed and the noise from the crowd had quieted down. "It's not over yet," Jan asserted, trying to rally both his friends and the nearby fans. "We've seen this team pull back from worse. Let's not give up on them now." His voice was filled with a mix of hope and desperation, but it resonated with the small contingent of German fans who were just as eager for a turnaround.

As the game progressed, the Germans gradually regained their composure on the pitch, much to the relief of Markus, Lena, and Jan. The trio clapped and cheered as Florian Wirtz began orchestrating plays, with Rakim Rex increasingly finding space on the right wing. The energy in their section started to build up again, hopeful chants echoing around their corner of the stadium.

Their chants grew louder when Jamie Leweling broke through on the left, their collective breath held as his shot forced a brilliant save from the Norwegian keeper. Markus jumped up, waving his flag furiously, trying to spur more energy from the crowd. "Das ist es! Keep pushing, boys!" he yelled, his voice cracking with the intensity of his support.

Lena joined in, her cheers turning into rhythmic clapping, encouraging those around them to join. The section soon turned into a sea of clapping hands, the sounds merging into a unified beat that reverberated across their part of the stands. "Wir glauben an euch!" (We believe in you!) they chanted, their voices growing stronger with each passing minute.

Jan, usually the more reserved of the trio, couldn't help but get swept up in the rising tide of optimism. He stood up, shouting encouragements and waving his scarf high above his head. Every time Rakim touched the ball, a buzz of anticipation swept through the crowd, as he had delivered heroic feats in past matches. Their hopes were now pinned on the young winger to make something happen.

As the first half neared its close, the tension was palpable. The German team spurred on by their fan's support intensified their attacks. Rakim, seizing a moment of brilliance, danced past two defenders and unleashed a shot that skiffed off the far post. The crowd groaned in unison; disappointment etched on their faces but quickly turned it into applause for the effort.

This had been his 3 shot from similar range and with each attempt he got ever so closer like a gunner trying to calibrate the exact coordinate to bury the enemy in a hail of footballs. "Huh, he is just so hot

when he moves with the ball, it's almost like dancing, it's like he was born with it glued to his feet," A nearby teenage girl exclaimed in amazement with a group of her girlfriends joining in.

They didn't care whether he scored or missed but came for the simple fact the boy looked cute in his little uniform. "You're right Marie no wonder they call him the dream," another girl commented with an infatuated expression as Rakim's frowning expression appeared on the jumbotron.

Instantly the loud exclamations of girls rained down on the stadium, but no one bothered to guess why as it had happened quite a lot during the tournament. Apparently, some Tik Talkers decided to list the Hottest players in this mini-World Cup and Rakim made it on the list. What no one expected though that he became so popular that a bunch of rich 16-year-olds decided an impromptu trip to Poland was in order.

Safe to say Rakim and a select few players managed to single-handedly boost Poland's tourism. "It's all that post fault if it didn't get in the way my boyfriend would have scored,"

"B##c4 who is your boyfriend Because I know you're not talking about my hubby Rakim,"

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The playful bickering among the girls was cut short as the match tension escalated. Norway's left back, John Kitolano, had been positioning himself to track Rakim centrally but was forced to adjust swiftly as Simon Asta, catching a fresh wind, surged down the wing. Rakim's dynamic presence on the field had stretched the Norwegian defence thin, and Asta took full advantage, reaching the edge of the box in a matter of moments, forcing Tobias Børkeeiet to step forward to block him.

Asta didn't engage in a duel but instead came to a sudden halt and deftly slotted the ball back to Florian Wirtz, who had smartly drifted behind his markers upon losing his bodyguards. The Leverkusen hopeful, without taking a touch to settle it, immediately passed it diagonally forward to Angelo Stiller, who had surged forward into the vacated space left by the collapsing Norwegian formation.

Stiller's first touch was masterful, threading a through ball between the legs of Jens, who toppled over in a futile attempt to close them. The German fans in the stands erupted, sensing a moment of opportunity as Rakim, perfectly timing his timing appeared in front of the retreating defensive line. Tobias scrambled to step up and intercept, but Rakim let the ball roll, through his legs barely allowing it to brush past his boots before it found Jamie Leweling, who had deftly slipped past his marker on the flank.

As Jamie faced off against the advancing Norwegian keeper, Kristoffer Klaesson, the entire stadium held its breath. He feinted right, drawing Klaesson off his line, but instead of shooting, he coolly squared the ball across the five-yard line. The collective anticipation of the German fans turned into an explosive cheer as Rakim who had continued his run appeared over the ball.

Chapter 427 427: Chater 427 Goal

Making eye contact with Kristoffer Klaesson pouncing over in desperation to stop the ball Rakim ruthlessly brought his foot down. Similar to an Ozil bounce pass he sent the ball skipping over the keeper's outstretched body as it sailed into the open net. Leo Østigård in a last-ditch effort jumped feet first into the goal trying to kick it out, but he was too late as the ball softly hit the back of the net.

As he crashed to the ground a crescendo of cheers erupted at the Stadion GOSiR, as the German fans erupted from their seat letting loose their pent-up emotions. The Norwegian fans could only watch in stunned silence as Rakim followed by his teammates sprinted towards the corner flag in celebration. Performing his signature Griddy celebration as he neared the corner flag he brought a hand to his face.

It covered most of his face as he tried to make it seem like it curved towards his right eye as his other hand performed a one-handed hand seal. He held that pose for a few moments before being enveloped by his teammates as they celebrated the goal. The score changed once again in the 45th minute reading Germany 1:1 Norway.

Following the goal Norway barely got a chance to restart the match before the official blew his whistle to end the first half. He had given a minute of added time but with Germany's later equaliser and celebration, there wasn't much to be played. Haaland had one long-range attempt from around 40 yards, but it couldn't trouble Luca in between the sticks.

The players trudged off the pitch with mixed emotions swirling through Stadion GOSiR. The Germans, buoyed by their late equalizer, walked with a renewed swagger, their steps lighter, their faces alight with the thrill of the comeback. They knew that Coach Baum wouldn't be too hard on them since they had managed to level the score, and the momentum of the game had likely shifted their way. In stark contrast, the Norwegian squad looked rather frustrated at having their lead snatched away, their initial confidence shaken as they still contemplated how they conceded in the first place.

In the locker room, the German coach Baum, didn't waste time in setting up the whiteboard as he motioned for his players to pay attention as they gathered their strength. "That's the spirit I want to

see!" he exclaimed, clapping his hands for emphasis. "You were patient and didn't panic after falling behind and we were rewarded for it, congrats."

"Whoo," some players exclaimed followed by a few of them clapping their hands in agreement. Some of them had wanted to speed up the tempo after falling behind but curbed their eagerness in favour of team tactics.

It also helped that the attacking players strictly followed the tactics making it hard for those in the ranks behind them to charge forward. Although they didn't plan on conceding holding more than 65% of the possession was and that allowed them to control the match. For a time, Norway went five whole minutes without once touching the ball.

Now that might not sound like a lot but in a game where some teams can score 3 goals in 2 minutes, it might as well be a century. Players who excel with the ball on their feet will quickly lose their touch if they can't impact the game. So, when they do finally get the ball and try to take advantage of a chance, they are more likely to make mistakes.

"I couldn't have structured that goal better if I tried, well done connecting together and breaking them down. I wasn't to see more of that in the second half but let's not underestimate our opponents we were punished for that already. Kevin, I want you to stick to Erling closer than glue and my two defensive midfielders I want you breaking up passing lanes forward," He stated as he proceeded to go around the room giving instructions to his players.

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[Stadion GOSiR, [19:00], Germany U-20 vs. Norway U-20 – Round of 16]

The second half kicked off with the stadium still buzzing from the excitement of the first. Commentator Paul Gartner's voice rang out, crisp and clear over the stadium speakers. "And we're back for what promises to be an enthralling second half here at Stadion GOSiR. The young Germans have shown resilience to come back from a goal down, and now, it's all to play for!"

On the pitch, Germany maintained their composure and control, their earlier struggles seeming like a distant memory. The Attacking midfield trio of Jamie, Wirtz, and Rakim, looked even more eager as they actively linked up with their teammates. They would expand the field and contract their movement on the pitch keeping their opponents busy.

Their effort bore fruit in the [48th] minute when they created their first real chance. Rakim received the ball just outside the box after a quick turnover in midfield just as he cut to the middle of the field. With a deft flick, he sent the ball spinning into Jamie's path on the left.

The winger exploded with agility, as he darted past Hugo Vetlesen and cut inside, drawing two defenders toward him. This movement created a pocket of space for Florian Wirtz, who had smartly positioned himself just at the edge of the penalty area. Wirtz received Jamie's pass and feinted to shoot, causing the defenders to halt momentarily.

Instead of taking the shot, he tapped the ball to his right, where Malik Tillman was lurking. With the Norwegian defence now slightly off-balance, he spotted an angle and didn't hesitate. He curled a precise shot towards the far post, but Kristoffer Klaesson stretched to his limits, fingertips brushing the ball enough to nudge it onto the post. The ball rebounded back into play, and amidst a scramble, it was cleared by Leo Østigård, who sent it flying towards the midfield.

The German crowd groaned in frustration but quickly resumed their enthusiastic support, sensing that their team was on the verge of breaking through. Coach Baum, from the sideline, gestured vigorously, encouraging his players to keep up the pressure.



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As the game progressed, Germany's dominance in possession continued. Niklas Tauer and Angelo Stiller controlled the midfield with discipline, frequently disrupting Norway's attempts to build attacks. Their movement acted as a gate between the midfielders and Haaland breaking that crucial link to the German's goal.

Their effective distribution and ability to maintain possession allowed Germany's attacking players more freedom to express themselves creatively. In the [56th] minute, another opportunity arose. Noah Katterbach intercepted a poorly judged pass from Emil Bohinen near the halfway line and quickly passed it forward to Malik Tillman.

Malik laid it off to Wirtz, who spotted Rakim making another run down the right flank. Lifting the ball, he sent a chipped-through ball into his path just as the winger ran past his marker. John Kitolano stuck closely to his side but quickly slowed down as he realised the winger would overshoot the lofted ball.

Turning ready to tap the ball down the unthinkable happened as Rakim's left foot shot backwards like a scorpion's tail. He deftly flicked the ball up sending it floating over the figure of John who tried to rise up in a futile attempt to intercept the pass. The ball almost lazily landed in front of Rakim as he deftly touched it down just as he entered the box from the side.

A wide smile appeared on his face as he looked to accelerate into the box only to suddenly halt and drag the ball backwards. In the next moment, the figure of John appeared sliding past him tearing up the turf as he exited the field. He didn't accelerate into the box but delivered an arcing cross into the box after spotting Malik Tillman repositioning near the penalty spot.

Malik had just enough space to fire a low drive towards the goal. Klaesson, who was already positioned at the near post in anticipation of a shot from Rakim, could only watch as the ball hit the back of the net. The German fans erupted, their cheers almost deafening, as Malik and his teammates rushed towards the jubilant crowd, celebrating their lead for the first time in the match.

The German fans erupted, their cheers almost deafening, as Malik and his teammates rushed towards the jubilant crowd, celebrating their lead for the first time in the match. Coach Baum nodded approvingly, after seeing his strategy to maintain control and apply constant pressure finally paying dividends.

Chapter 428 428 Strike Back

The euphoria in the stands was palpable as the German supporters waved their flags more fervently, the atmosphere charged with excitement. The score now read Germany 2:1 Norway, and they could practically see themselves stepping into the Quarterfinals of this under-20 World Cup. The match soon resumed in the 52nd minute with Norway immediately launching an attack looking to score as soon as possible.

Their strategy was clear: use the physical presence of Erling Haaland to disrupt the German defence. From the restart, Emil Bohinen found space in the midfield and sent a lofted ball towards Haaland, who was closely marked by Armel Bella-Kotchap. Despite the tight coverage, Haaland managed to get a flick on the ball, directing it towards the onrushing Jens Petter Hauge on the left wing.

Hauge collected the pass in stride and burst down the flank, his cleats churning up the grass as he raced towards the goal line. With a quick glance up, he whipped a dangerous cross towards the far post, where Oscar Bobb was arriving at pace. Bobb leapt high, his timing impeccable, but his header sailed narrowly over the crossbar, prompting a collective sigh from the Norwegian supporters and a scattered cheer of relief from the German crowd.

The Germans quickly regrouped and initiated a counterattack. Angelo Stiller retrieved the goal kick from Luca Unbehaun and distributed it to Niklas Tauer, who turned smartly under pressure, evading a Norwegian challenge. Tauer played a quick sequence of passes with Florian Wirtz, who was dropping

deeper to help orchestrate the play. With a swift movement, Wirtz turned upfield and spotted Jamie Leweling making a diagonal run across the field to the right flank.

Wirtz threaded an exquisite ball through the Norwegian defence, catching the high line off-balance as Leweling latched onto it just outside the penalty area. Without breaking stride, Leweling took a touch and then unleashed a fierce drive towards the near post. Kristoffer Klaesson, the Norwegian goalkeeper, reacted swiftly, diving to his left to parry the shot away. The ball ricocheted off his gloves and rolled dangerously across the face of the goal before it was hastily cleared by Leo Østigård.

As the game progressed past the hour mark, the intensity on the pitch escalated. Norway, increasingly desperate to find an equalizer, began pushing more players forward, which in turn created spaces at the back that the German team was eager to exploit. Rakim Rex, who had been a constant threat throughout the match, started finding even more room to manoeuvre.

In the 65th minute, a clever piece of skill by Rakim saw him evade two defenders near the halfway line and drive towards the heart of Norway's defence. He slid a perfect pass to Malik Tillman, who had smartly peeled off his marker. However, Malik seemed to lose balance or maybe felt the nerves causing his first touch to go array. Before he could recover Tobias Børkeeiet put his body in between him and the ball bodying him back words as he took control of the ball.

Not hesitating he sent a crisp pass up the left flank finding the feet of Eman Markovic who had been tracking back. Since Rakim had charged up it created a pocket of space, and the Norwegian winger wasn't going to waste his chance to make use of the opportunity. Turning with the momentum of the ball he dribbled forward like a man running away from child support payments quickly crossing the halfway line.

Simon Asta stepped up from the front and Angelo Stiller appeared from the centre as he tried to box in the opposing winger. It seemed to work as he was forced to slow down the closer, they got performing stepovers to keep them at bay. Just as Asta decided to lung in and take his chance Eman's feet seemed sluggish before rapidly flashing over the ball.

Pushing the ball along the ground with the top of his foot, primarily the outside of his boot he sent the ball gliding along the ground as it slipped through Asta's open legs. He wasn't able to chase after the ball as he found himself swapped up by Asta's charge but he wasn't worried. The nearby German layer subconsciously stopped expecting a whistle to be blown but was surprised to see the ref motion for an advantage to be played.

They couldn't question why as they quickly broke out in panic when a red blur sped down the wing racing after the ball. They were shell-shocked at the sight they were late to react only moving upon the prompt of Luca in between the sticks shouting for them to get back. John Kitolano Norway's left back had overlapped with Eman channelling his inner track star as he barely managed to stop the ball at the byline before it could go out for a goal kick.

He came to a skidding halt just outside the field before nimbly turning back his feet flashing as he nudged the stationary ball through the legs of Niklas Tauer who had hustled to track him down. Rounding him with two large steps, dodging Tauer's attempt to put his body in the way he took control of the ball as he entered the box. With a deft touch, John Kitolano guided the ball along the byline heading towards the near post.

As Kitolano closed in on the near post, Luca Unbehaun readied himself for the impending cross or shot. Expecting a cutback, Luca positioned himself slightly off his line to better react to any redirections inside the box. But Kitolano had other plans. With a cheeky flick of his boot, he sent a low hard driven cross directly towards the penalty spot, cleverly bypassing the German goalkeeper's reach.

At the penalty spot, Erling Haaland, who had cleverly drifted away from Bella-Kotchap, who had stepped forward trying to close John down, positioned himself perfectly to meet Kitolano's cross. His movement was a textbook display of a striker's instinct, peeling off at the last second to create just enough space to operate. As the ball approached, Haaland's eyes narrowed, focusing intently on the incoming cross.

With precise timing, Haaland unleashed a powerful side volley, directing the ball downwards towards the far corner of the goal. The stadium held its breath as the ball rocketed towards the goal, but his control was shaky, and the ball impacted the post sending it back out. The German fans breathed a sigh of relief, but the danger wasn't over as the figure of Oscar Bobb appeared at the edge of the box.

He calmly took control of the ball with a deft touch breaking the momentum of the ball as he nudged it past Kevin Ehlers trying to get in his way. Keeping his composure, he fired off a missile of a shot to the top right corner catching Luca who had just shimmied across his line at Haaland's earlier attempt. He could only watch in dismay as the ball sailed beyond his reach, striking the inside of the post and nestling securely into the back of the net.

The Norwegian fans erupted into jubilant cheers as Oscar Bobb ran towards the corner flag, sliding on his knees with arms outstretched as if trying to embrace the world. His teammates followed suit rushing over to engulf him in a group embrace. The scoreline was now level at 2-2 in the 68th minute, and the momentum had dramatically shifted. The German supporters, momentarily silenced, looked on with tense expressions as the reality set in.

Chapter 429 429 Attacking Duel

The German players, feeling the shift in momentum, knew they had to respond quickly to regain control. Coach Baum, sensing the need for a tactical adjustment, gestured animatedly from the sidelines, directing his players to tighten up their formation and focus on maintaining possession to stabilize the game. The German team responded with renewed vigour, methodically circulating the ball among themselves.

In the 72nd minute, Florian Wirtz took charge in the midfield, weaving through Norwegian defenders gracefully as he displayed his technical prowess. He linked up with Rakim on the right, who had drifted inwards as the midfield trio narrowed their positioning keeping a compact formation. Together, they orchestrated a few clever back-and-forth plays keeping their defenders running as they slowly edged towards the box.

As Rakim and Wirtz controlled the play near the edge of the box, they patiently waited for the right moment to break through the resilient Norwegian defence. Suddenly, Rakim spotted Jamie Leweling

making a sharp cut towards the penalty area. With a deft flick, Rakim passed the ball into Jamie's path, but before he could unleash a shot, a Norwegian defender intervened, clearing the ball to the sideline.

Seeing that their opponents had gotten used to his team's attacks, Coach Baum on the sidelines rubbed his bald head as he glanced at his bench. Realising it was time for some tactical substitutions in the 76th minute he signalled to the bench, and soon, Yannik Engelhardt and Kevin Schade were preparing to enter the fray. He didn't have to wait long as a stray pass soon exited the field for a throw-in ending Angelo Stiller and Jamie Leweling's contribution to this round of 16 clash.

The German supporters applauded their contributions as they jogged off the field high-fiving their replacements and wishing them luck. Engelhardt slotted into the central midfield role to provide fresh legs and help maintain possession, while Kevin Schade took up a position on the left wing, bringing a new dynamic to the German attack. Their formation naturally shifted to a 4-3-3 as the two wingers naturally moved up the field looking to put more pressure on the Norwegians.

Wirtz now played the CAM role, with Niklas Tauer and Engelhardt backing him up. The latter played as a box-to-box midfielder. Tauer continued as a deep-lying playmaker, intercepting passes and retaining control once his attacking teammates got stuck. With the new structure in place, Germany began to exert more control in the midfield.

With fresh legs on the field, the Germans looked sharper and more aggressive in their forward movements. The inclusion of Kevin added a new threat on the left, his pace and dribbling ability challenging the Norwegian defenders who had started to show signs of fatigue. In the 81st minute, Kevin made his first real impact on the match.

Receiving the ball near the halfway line, he drove at the heart of the Norwegian defence, weaving through a couple of challenges before releasing a cross into the box. The ball sailed over the heads of the defenders and found Rakim, who had smartly positioned himself at the far post. He managed to pluck the ball down with a deft touch, but before he could turn to fire Hugo Vetlesen came flying in cleanly sweeping the ball away.

Emil Bohinen rose to the air beating Yannik in aerial duel as he nodded the ball to his right where Hakon Evjen was lurking. Hakon, with space opening in front of him, controlled the header with a deft touch before sprinting towards the German half. As the Norwegian midfield gathered steam, Evjen weaved through the midfield, glancing left and right, searching for passing options.

Spotting Eman Markovic making a diagonal run from the left flank, Evjen threaded a precise pass between two German defenders, finding Markovic in stride. Markovic received the ball just outside the penalty area and, with few options for a pass, he decided to take on his marker directly. Using a quick feint to his left, he cut back to his right, creating just enough space to unleash a shot. The attempt, however, was thwarted by a well-timed slide from Armel Bella-Kotchop, who had read the move and intervened at the crucial moment, sending the ball behind for a Norwegian corner.

The corner kick, taken by Jens Petter Hauge, swung in with pace towards the near post where Leo Østigård rose above the rest, aiming to redirect it towards goal. His header was powerful but slightly off target, skimming the top of the crossbar and going out for a goal kick.

As the match entered the final minutes, both teams showed signs of fatigue but also an unyielding desire to find the winning goal. The intensity on the field was mirrored by the growing tension in the stands, with fans from both sides chanting and cheering with every move on the pitch.

In the 87th minute, Germany launched another promising attack. Florian Wirtz, using the freedom he gained after the tactical shift, picked up the ball in midfield and dribbled forward with purpose. He played a one-two with Kevin Schade on the left flank and skipped past nearby defenders into the final third of the pitch.

Receiving the return pass, Wirtz found himself with a sliver of space just outside the penalty area. He paused momentarily, assessing his options, before curling a beautiful cross towards the far post. The ball

arced over the outstretched hands of the Norwegian goalkeeper, Kristoffer Klaesson, and seemed destined for the head of Malik Tillman, who had made a late run into the box.

However, just as Tillman prepared to meet the ball, Tobias Børkeeiet made a crucial intervention, stretching to his limit to head the ball away from danger. The clearance fell to Yannik Engelhardt, who had followed up on the play and was positioned just outside the box. Without hesitation, Engelhardt unleashed a powerful strike, but his effort was blocked by a wall of Norwegian defenders who threw themselves in front of the shot.

The rebound from Engelhardt's blocked shot spiralled back into the midfield ending up at the feet of Rakim. Without hesitation, he nudged the ball forward by about a meter as he kept his gaze on the looming ox that seemed to explode outwards. The goal seemed to whisper at him to try it and he didn't hesitate in activating his Bronze Heavy artillery skills.

With no nearby defenders, he took a large step forward his left foot landed next to the ball as his right followed suit. Arms extended for balance; the top of his foot stuck the ball with a loud thud but there was no follow-through as his boot stopped the moment he struck the ball. The ball exploded forward from 30 yards out quickly taking flight as it started to flutter in the air weaving left to right.

Klaesson, the Norwegian goalkeeper, tracked the unpredictable trajectory of the knuckleball as it danced through the air, weaving an erratic path towards the goal. With every flutter, the crowd's anticipation built, culminating in a collective gasp as the ball dipped sharply towards the crossbar. Klaesson leapt, arms outstretched, but he misjudged its flight path and could only watch as it struck the underside of the crossbar and nestled into the back of the net.

The stadium erupted in a deafening roar as the German fans leapt from their seats, their cheers filling Stadion GOSiR with an overwhelming wave of excitement. The German players, fuelled by the electrifying atmosphere, rushed towards Rakim who had jogged to the corner flag almost immediately after his shot. Standing with both arms stretched wide he looked into the camera as he was quickly engulfed in a celebratory pile.

Rakim's audacious strike from distance had given Germany a late 3-2 lead surprised everyone least of all coach Baum who had a stunned expression in front of the home team's bench. He had been shouting for the winger to pass the ball the moment he realised what he was about to try only to be stupefied by the result of his shot. His eyes remained wide as he continued to stare at the Norwegian goal as his right hand stroked his bald head.

Only when he was swept into a hug by his assistant Coach Sorg did he come to his senses causing excitement to explode. The realization of what had just transpired began to sink in as he hugged the nearby coaches jumping up and down in joy. He had been gearing up for extra time, so this late winner was a welcomed surprise in his books.

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With the scoreline now favouring Germany 3-2, the remaining minutes of the match became a frenzied effort by Norway to equalize. The Norwegian coach signalled his team to press with all they had left, resulting in a dramatic final push that saw both teams stretched to their limits.

On the pitch, the intensity magnified. Norway, refusing to concede defeat, threw everything forward. In the 90th minute, Coach Baum responded by making his final substitution, by bringing on defensive midfielder Dennis Jastrzembski to replace an exhausted Florian Wirtz. Weber's fresh legs and defensive mindset were intended to solidify the midfield and help hold onto their slender lead.

As Dennis jogged onto the field, the crowd's applause washed over him as the fans thanked Wirtz for his performance and wished him luck. The game soon resumed with a German throw-in which was highly contested by the opposing players who didn't give them a moment of rest. Norway, desperate for a breakthrough, ramped up their attacks. Jens Petter Hauge, persistent in his efforts, found a bit of space on the right and sent a sharp cross into the box.

Erling rose between the German defenders but his header, under pressure, veered wide of the goal, his frustration palpable as he punched the air in disappointment. The Germans, now primarily focused on

defence, managed the game by maintaining possession and disrupting the Norwegian rhythm with tactical fouls. As the match entered added time, four minutes were shown by the fourth official, giving Norway a glimmer of hope and the German fans a reason to boo the referee.

The stadium soon became a shouting match as the noise in the Stadion GOSiR, which was 3/4 capacity became defining. The trio of Markus, Lena, and Jan, could barely think as with every pass, tackle, and clearance were met with passion filled with reactions from a crowd that was at the edge of their seats. In the 93rd minute, Norway won a corner After Oscar Bobb failed to whip a cross past the out-stretched leg of Noah Katterbach.

The tension was palpable as Leo Østigård, along with other tall figures, moved forward. Even their keeper Kristoffer Klaesson sprinted up the field ready to join the hustle and bustle in the box. Hakon Evjen delivered the corner with precision, curling into the crowded penalty area. As bodies jostled for position, the ball flicked off a head in the melee and arched towards the far post.

Kristoffer Klaesson, the goalkeeper turned temporary striker, leapt alongside Armel Bella-Kotchap, both towering figures stretching to make contact. In a heart-stopping moment, Klaesson dropped to the ground and painfully clutched his head just as Armel knocked the ball out of the box. The referee did not hesitate to blow his whistle as he pointed to the spot to the horror of the German contingent.

Paul Gartner's voice rose over the stadium speakers, capturing the sudden shift in the atmosphere. "Oh, dramatic scenes here at Stadion GOSiR! The referee has pointed to the spot, and Norway could have a chance to level this in the dying moments of the match! It appears there was some contact on Klaesson in the box. This game has had it all!"

The German fans expressed their disbelief and frustration, booing and waving their arms in protest, while the Norwegian section burst into hopeful cheers. Coach Baum looked on, stern and anxious, as he discussed the situation with his assistants, his team now facing a critical test.

As the players argued and the referee tried to plead their case, the official was having none of it insisting that Armel had elbowed the Norwegian keeper as he raised a yellow card to the pleading defender. The defender had a few choice words for the referee, but he was promptly dragged away by Rakim and Simon who tried to calm him down. "Calm down bro we still have everything to play for even if they do score."

Paul Gartner seeing this scene didn't bother commenting on it as he focussed on the actual play. "Looking at the replay it was Klaesson who had rested his elbow on Armel's shoulder trying to beat him to the aerial ball only to be easily steamrolled away. In my books, this penalty might be the steal of the tournament."

"Would you look at that it seems both Haaland and Captain Jens both want to take the set piece," Gartner commented as the situation on the field unfolded. Both players could be seen glaring at each other as their hands wrestled for the ball, but in the end, it was Captain Jens who won the argument.

Throughout the tournament, all he had heard about was bout the next savour of Norwegian football Erling. At first, he didn't have anything against them since the kid was good and made them stronger as a team, but things changed when all everyone would talk about after a win was him. They had beaten Honduras 8:0 and he had assisted the kid 5 times only to be forgotten as another footnote.

When they were beaten all the news article could talk about was that they were holding him back. For Jens who had spent most of his football career with the national team since the age of 6 this sudden change grated him the wrong way. He suddenly felt like all his efforts were being denounced as nothing more than a role player, someone's sidekick.

As Jens Petter Hauge placed the ball on the spot, the tension in Stadion GOSiR reached its peak. The German fans were on their feet, whistling and jeering to create a daunting atmosphere for the penalty taker. Luca Unbehaun, the German goalkeeper, took his position on the line, his gaze fixed intently on Hauge, ready to play his part in this nail-biting climax.

Paul Gartner's, voice rang out over the speakers and stream. "Here we are, folks, at the edge of our seats. Jens Petter Hauge, who's had a spectacular tournament so far, is about to take the most crucial kick of his young career. Can he send this to extra time?"

Hauge took a few steps back, his eyes never leaving the ball. The whistle blew, and he approached with a determined run-up. As he struck the ball firmly, aiming for the bottom right corner, Unbehaun sprang into action, diving with full stretch to his left. The stadium held its breath as the ball and goalkeeper converged in a moment of fate.

Unbehaun's outstretched hand connected with the ball, sending a strong deflection wide of the post. The crowd erupted in a cacophony of cheers and groans, depending on their allegiance. The German fans' cheers drowned out the disappointed sighs of the Norwegian supporters as Unbehaun punched the air in jubilation, having just made the save of the match, possibly the save that would see Germany through to the quarterfinals.

His excitement was short-lived though as the referee blew his whistle and motioned for a retake as the linesman at the side had his flag raised. "A chance for redemption for Jens, Luca was not on his line when the kick occurred." Paul's voice resounded over the stunned viewers who struggled to control the roller coaster of emotions.

The referee's decision sent a ripple of disbelief through Stadion GOSiR, as the German fans protested loudly, their jeers echoing through the stands. Visibly frustrated, Luca Unbehaun prepared himself once again, struggling with having his heroic moment overturned out of the blue. He set himself on the line, stomping the turf twice to make sure the ref saw he was on the line.