

## Football 441

Chapter 441 441 Control

[10/11/2019, Stadion GOSiR, 18:07]

"Wow, Ehlers with the crucial intervention!" Paul exclaimed, nearly shouting into his mic. "Smith was poised to pull the trigger there." The loose ball rolled toward the edge of the box where Angelo Stiller comfortably collected it as he deftly turned, avoiding a tackle from Giovanni.

The defensive midfielder did not initiate an attack but instead returned possession as he started dictating passes along the German ranks. They started forming triangles and squares as passing angles continued to open up for them as they slowly pushed their opponents back. The boys in white tried to disrupt them with frantic pressing but the Germans were technically sound and most importantly tactically strong.

Thus, for the next 5 minutes, they fully controlled the ball as they even passed it back to Luca in between the sticks. It was as if they were asking their opponents if they had run enough and simply waited for them to realise that they wouldn't be easily winning the ball. With Wirtz who played as an attacking midfielder even dropping back even further than the defensive midfielders, slowing down the pace became easy.

Still, there were a few close calls when Weah and Pulisic, on their respective wings, came close to winning the ball. However, that close call was what the European Eagles needed to up the pace at which they moved the ball. They got confident enough with the ball to keep pinning it in a triangle around Weah at some point until the winger voluntarily stopped chasing.

Yet through all that passing and patient buildup, there was an undercurrent of tension rippling through the stadium. You could see the frustration building on the American side. The crowd sensed it, too—

some fans started to clap in unison, urging the boys in white to press harder, while others booed every neat exchange from the German midfield.

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Germany had pushed up past the halfway line and was comfortably moving the ball around when Wirtz suddenly held onto the ball and dribbled forward. Quickly breaking into the ranks of the US defensive lines, he manoeuvred the ball between his feet in a display of quick feet. His diagonal run forward towards the right flank instantly created chaos as he somehow glided past 3 players.

Just before reaching the edge of the box, he knocked that ball back with a backheel pass sending the ball into the feet of Angelo Stiller. The German midfielder didn't even bother taking a touch as he sent a chipped cross into the box. "Angelo attempts a cross but who is his target?" Paul Gartner exclaimed as the ball floated towards the area around the back post with speed.

As the ball rose in a gentle arc through the cool evening air, it seemed to take a lifetime to reach its apex. Eyes darted to the far post, where Rakim and Moukoko both looked ready to pounce. The American defenders—Dest and Richards—were also on high alert, bodies tensed like coiled springs.

Then, at the last second, Weston McKennie soared into view. He thrust himself forward, cutting off the flight of the ball with a solid header that sent it bouncing clear of danger. A wave of relieved applause rolled through the American supporters. They couldn't breathe in relief though as the Germans won possession of the loose ball when Niklas Tauer out-muscled Giovanni for it.

Without a second thought, they went back to controlling the pace of the ball as the players who had led the attack slotted back into their positions. As if nothing happened, Wirtz and Angelo went back to pinning passes around the field as they looked for another breakthrough point. Just as it looked like it

would persist with a spell of German possession, Yunus Musah anticipated a pass from Ehlers that was meant for Rakim.

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With no hesitation, charged forward, bursting past a shoulder tackle from Wirtz before sending a weighted pass to Matte just past the halfway line. The young striker Cooley received as and used his strong body to hold off Bella-Kotchap. "Matteo Smith on the ball let's see what wonders he will work," Jamie exclaimed as he spun to his right and sent a pass to Christian Pulisic who was charging up his left flank.

The winger's first touch was a piece of brilliance as he used his momentum to deftly blitz past Angelo Stiller as a foot race between him and Germany's right-back Simon Asta ensued. Pulisic sped forward, each stride fuelled by the buzz in the crowd. Simon Asta, determined not to be bested, raced shoulder-to-shoulder with him. Both fought with their hands, but it was Pulisic who reached that ball first at the edge of the box, but Aster was there to meet him.

Pulisic managed to shield the ball near the edge of the box, his feet dancing as Asta lunged in with a determined slide. The American star flicked it forward at the last second, skipping over the defender's outstretched boot. For a moment, it looked like he might break free into the penalty area, but a quick recovery from Armel Bella-Kotchap forced Pulisic to pull back, halting the immediate threat. Frustrated murmurs rolled through the stands, mingling with scattered cheers for the German defence's quick reaction.

Without a clear path into the box, Pulisic slid a safe pass back to Musah, who opted to reset the tempo instead of forcing a risky move. The US crowd sounded restless—some were urging a direct assault on goal, while others seemed relieved their side held possession for what seemed like the first time in this match.

Around the 17th minute, the game settled into a tense rhythm of steady passes and cautious marking. Each side seemed wary of committing too many players forward, especially as possession of the ball continued to interchange between both teams. You could see it in the way the American forwards hovered near the halfway line, reluctant to leave too much space behind for Rakim or Jamie Leweling to exploit.

On the German side, Tauer and Stiller calmly tapped the ball around, waiting for an opening that never quite materialized. [20] That spark nearly came when Mark McKenzie intercepted a stray pass intended for Leweling. Seizing his chance, McKenzie drove forward from his centre-back position with unexpected momentum. The stadium buzzed with excitement—or alarm, depending on which side you were on—as the defender burst past a napping Wirtz and threaded a crisp pass toward Reyna just inside Germany's half.

"Oh, that is a fantastic initiative from McKenzie!" Paul Gartner called out, standing halfway in the commentary box. "You rarely see a centre-back burst through lines like that!"

"He's doing the right thing in my opinion, Paul!" Jamie Oliver exclaimed, a trace of pride creeping into his voice. "USA needs all hands-on deck if they want to break this German wall."

Reyna cushioned the pass with an elegant first touch, then immediately scanned for Matteo Smith. But Bella-Kotchap, clearly unwilling to be caught off-guard this time, raced out to close him down. Recognizing the pressure, Reyna shifted gears, pivoted, and looped a pass to Weah, who had drifted near the right sideline to find space.

Weah controlled the ball, but Katterbach arrived a heartbeat later, pressing him tightly. They wrestled for control—shoulders bumping, feet scrambling. Neither wanted to surrender even an inch. Eventually, Weah managed a quick turn that drew a foul, earning a free kick in a decent position out wide. A flicker of hope rippled through the American supporters, while the Germans quickly organized themselves into a tight defensive shape.

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The referee's whistle cut through the noise, and Weah placed the ball carefully, his eyes scanning the penalty area for McKennie or Richards. The tension soared with every step he took backwards, preparing to whip in the cross. But just as he was about to take the kick, the referee signalled for him to wait, gesturing toward some pushing and jostling at the edge of the box giving each a warning.

A brief lull followed as players bickered, the crowd grew louder, and the officials tried to restore order. Through it all, Rakim stood near the halfway line, hands on his hips, visibly impatient. Eventually, the ref allowed Weah to proceed. He stepped up and launched a teasing, curling cross into the German penalty area. Muscles tensed on both sides as McKennie soared into the air, towering over Tauer.

But Ehlers, once again, performed a last-second intervention, heading the ball but he felt like the contact wasn't as clean as he would have hoped. Sure enough, he saw the figure of Yunus at the edge of the box running forward to where the ball would land. "Mine!" A voice exclaimed, causing Yunus to stop in his tracks and in the next second, Ehler, saw a figure wearing USA's number 9 jersey with his back towards the goal jump into the air.

Chapter 442 442 Heating up

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Matteo Smith's leap was spectacular. Twisting his hips mid-air, he attempted a daring overhead kick—one that had the entire stadium rising to its feet in anticipation. The ball met the outside of his right boot with a sharp thud, flying toward goal with surprising power. Even the German defenders paused for a split second, momentarily dazzled by the unexpected acrobatics.

Paul Gartner's voice spiked through the speakers: "An overhead attempt from Matteo Smith! That's brilliant improvisation under pressure!"

All eyes snapped to Luca Unbehaun, who stood rooted on his line as he watched the ball rocket past him and into the right side of the net. Cheers erupted in a tidal wave from the American supporters as the net bulged with Matteo's overhead stunner. For a moment, time seemed frozen—Unbehaun remained motionless between the posts, the ball resting behind him in the net.

Then, chaos took over. The U.S. players rushed toward the corner flag as they chased after Matteo, who was wildly waving his arms in jubilation. He had just arguably scored the best goal of his burgeoning career and was over the moon.

Paul Gartner's voice cracked with excitement. "Goal for the United States! Matteo Smith with an absolute wonder strike! That overhead kick has changed the entire complexion of this quarterfinal."

Jamie Oliver, normally measured, let out a relieved laugh. "Goodness gracious, that's got to be one of the best goals of the tournament so far. Matteo shows courage and technical brilliance in the same breath."

On the German side, looks of disbelief passed between the defenders. Bella-Kotchop smacked his hands together in frustration, while Ehlers stared at the turf, replaying the moment in his mind. Rakim, who had been hovering near the halfway line, clicked his tongue in annoyance as he walked to the sidelines to get a swig of water.

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Once the whistle blew for the restart, Germany moved the ball around confidently, looking to regain their rhythm after the setback. Tauer and Stiller resumed their central pivot, sending short passes left

and right to pull the U.S. formation out of shape. Leweling drifted closer to the center, occasionally swapping positions with Wirtz to confuse the American defenders.

Paul Gartner's voice rose above the noise. "Let's see how Germany responds. They've been shaken by that stunning goal, but they aren't the type to back down."

Jamie Oliver nodded in agreement. "We've already seen how well they can keep possession. The American side needs to stay sharp and not get complacent just because they're ahead."

Sure enough, the German front line pressed forward in the 30th minute. Rakim, stationed on the left flank, called for the ball with an assertive wave. When Stiller picked him out with a crisp diagonal pass, Rakim drove at pace, stepping around Sergiño Dest with a subtle shift of weight. The crowd tensed, clearly remembering Rakim's earlier runs that nearly broke the deadlock.

This time, Chris Richards quickly slid across, blocking Rakim's immediate route to the box. Rather than force the dribble, Rakim feigned a cut inside before rolling the ball back to Tauer, who recycled possession out wide to Simon Asta on the opposite flank.

Asta seized the opportunity, advancing down the right wing. Pulisic hustled back, pressing from behind, while George Bello closed in from the front. Under that pressure, Asta nudged a short pass to Leweling, who turned swiftly but found Weah snapping at his heels. The U.S. midfield had tightened its lines, refusing to let Germany slice through easily.

"They're crowding the center," Paul remarked, his tone analytical. "Right now, the American defenders are doing a good job of staying compact whenever Germany tries to go forward."

"Agreed," Jamie said. "But Germany are masters of patience. They can play these little triangles all day if they need to."

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The Germans seemed determined to prove that point. They pinged the ball around, pulling the U.S. players from one side of the field to the other, testing for openings. Armel Bella-Kotchap stepped into midfield, adding an extra body to the build-up. He fed a low pass to Wirtz, who attempted a quick turn past McKennie—but Weston read him perfectly, hooking the ball away with a timely interception.

That quick turnover sent a spark through the American supporters. McKennie, wasting no time, launched a searching pass toward Reyna. The nimble playmaker cushioned it on his chest and spotted Matteo Smith peeling away from Ehlers, hoping for a through ball. A cheer went up as it looked like another chance might be on the cards.

But before Reyna could complete his pass, Bella-Kotchap returned to intercept—stretching his long leg out to deflect the ball away. The bounce skittered across the turf, where Tauer took control and reset the German attack once more.

Paul Gartner exhaled audibly. "A real end-to-end battle right now—both teams trading attempts at breaking forward."

"Exactly, Paul," Jamie added. "And with that overhead strike still fresh in everyone's mind, Germany will be desperate to hit back before the U.S. can find another moment of magic."



Indeed, the tension on the pitch remained high, each side fully aware that a single mistake could swing the momentum. With the match settling into a comfortable rhythm, and the Americans found their footing, as they started dominating more spells of possession. The Germans started to struggle when breaking into their final third, leading to stagnation in their attacking rhythm.

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It was in the fortieth minute that this deadlock came to a crescendo after Pulisic was promptly stopped by a hard and swift slide tackle. He had managed to skip past Angelo Stiller and was just about to nimbly dance past the right-back only to be brought to a crashing stop. He protested for a free kick, but Asta didn't bother looking back as he jumped up from the ground and stormed up the flank.

The referee agreed with him as he motioned for him to get up and for the play to continue. He kept the ball under tight control as he hugged the sideline. The stadium noise rose in a wave of anticipation, sensing that the quick turnover could catch the American defense off-guard.

George Bello sprinted across, trying to cut off Asta's path toward the box. But instead of forcing a move, Asta played a neat one-two with Leweling, who dropped deep to receive, then returned it immediately with a precise first-touch pass.

Jamie Oliver's voice crackled over the speakers. "Look at that awareness—Leweling and Asta exchanging a razor-sharp combination here."

Paul Gartner responded, "They're looking to stretch the American back line. Watch for a late run—There goes Wirtz,"

Sure enough, a late run came from Wirtz at the top of the box. Asta spotted it and flicked the ball toward him, forcing Chris Richards to track back hurriedly. Wirtz didn't take a first touch though and let a shot loose from the top of the penalty box.

Wirtz's shot rocketed off his boot in a sudden flash, streaking through the air toward the left corner. CJ dos Santos lunged desperately, his fingertips grazing the ball just enough to alter its course. With a sharp hiss, it whizzed past the post and ricocheted behind the net, sending a ripple of relief through the U.S. supporters.

Paul Gartner's voice rose above the collective gasp. "Wirtz goes for it first time, and it's inches wide! Brilliant effort—CJ might've saved the day there with the slightest touch."

Jamie Oliver's tone held a note of admiration. "Germany's threatening again, and that's a big warning sign for the American defense. Just shows you can't switch off for even a second."

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A wave of boos descended the stands as Rakim stood over the ball at the right corner flag. The winger seemed to remember his match against Juventus as he faced a similar situation. It's weird how my own country's fans are now part of the top 3 worst atmospheres I've played under.' He mused to himself as he dodged a cup of beer thrown his way.

Ignoring this, he raised the number 2 indicating for his teammates in the box to shift towards the outside of the box. The area along the five-yard line quickly became empty with only a few US defenders remaining there just in case. With the German attackers pulling away from the crowded six-yard box, Rakim brushed off the boos and took three measured steps back.

The referee's whistle pierced the air, giving him the green light to deliver the corner. A sudden hush blanketed the stadium, as both sets of supporters braced themselves for the next flash of drama. He curved the cross with a sharp in-swing toward the penalty arc, where Tauer and Bella-Kotchap were waiting just beyond the cluster of defenders. Tauer leaped high, twisting his upper body in mid-air to connect with the ball.

Chapter 443 443 Pigs Blood

[10/11/2019, Stadion GOSiR, 18:44]

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Tauer's forehead met the ball with a resounding thump, guiding it straight into the thick of the box. The American defenders scrambled, arms flailing, as they struggled to clear the danger. For a heartbeat, it seemed like the ball might slip through. But Mark McKenzie, using his towering frame, stretched out a leg and volleyed it away before it could drop at Moukoko's feet.

A collective groan rose from the German supporters, mingling with relieved cheers from the American side. Paul Gartner's voice echoed through the stadium speakers: "Close call for the U.S.! McKenzie saves them from a potential equalizer."

Jamie Oliver added calmly, "Tauer did everything right with that header. Germany's ramping up pressure here, and you sense they're desperate to claw their way back into this match before halftime."

The danger wasn't over though as Yunus Musah at the edge of the box outmuscled Niklas Tauer for the loose ball. He didn't hold onto the ball long as out of the corner of his eye he spotted a white figure sprinting up from the right flank. Not hesitating, he sent a lofted through ball up the right flank before any German player could interfere.

Timothy Weah and Noah Katterbach fought for pace as they raced up the field, but it quickly became obvious that the American had the faster legs. Noah tried to reach an arm out to interfere, but the American winger simply slapped it away as he turned on another gear. He quickly created space between them as he deftly knocked the ball forward, vaulting over a slide tackle from Kevin Ehlers.

Landing in the next moment, he latched onto the ball and latched onto the ball quickly gaining speed. His speed was blinding and by the time he crossed the final third Simon Asta was the only player in his way, but he couldn't fully commit as Matteo was also lurking to his side, waiting for his opportunity. Once they entered the box, he was forced to make a decision in this deadlock, and he chose to commit to a tackle.

Weah, who was fully focused on creating something out of this opportunity, instantly noticed when Asta committed and reacted in a flash. With his right foot, he flicked the ball outward, just out of the defender's reach, then nimbly side-stepped him in the next moment. The crowd gasped in unison as Weah deftly regained control of the ball, but the German Keeper Luca was already pouncing his way.

Luca had timed his moment to exactly when Asta forced his attacker to make a move, anticipating the likely direction he would dodge to based on Asta's positioning. Spreading his arms wide like he had practised many of times, he dove forward as he stretched his legs wide to block off any shooting angle. However, just as his hands were about to smother the ball at Weah's feet the winger's right foot lifted the ball across his body, sending it flying into the open space.

"Matteo Smith on the ball and he is wide open," Paul Gartner exclaimed, his voice tight with anticipation as the American striker took the ball on the volley. A dull thud was heard throughout the Stadion GOSiR as the leather of his boot sent the ball rifling into the open net.

A collective roar erupted from the American supporters, echoing across the stadium. The net rippled, and Matteo spun away, arms wide in celebration, as Weah barrelled into him with a triumphant bear

hug. The rest of the U.S. players charged forward, their faces lit with a mix of glee and disbelief. It was their second goal of the night—coming right before the halftime break—and it felt like a gut punch to Germany's momentum.

Paul Gartner's voice was the first to break through the thunderous cheers. "Another strike for the United States! Timothy Weah with the setup and Matteo Smith finishes with an unstoppable volley!"

Jamie Oliver followed, still catching his breath. "Wow...just wow. Weah's footwork to dance past Asta and Luca was world-class, and Matteo was right there to snap up the chance. They took full advantage of that quick break."

[45+2]

In the German half, the reaction was immediate deflation. Armel Bella-Kotchap slammed a fist into his palm. Luca Unbehaun remained kneeling, momentarily shell-shocked that his dive came up empty. Rakim trudged back toward the halfway line, hands on his hips as he surveyed the scene in frustration. The entire German defence looked unsettled, eyes darting between each other as they tried to figure out how that counter had unspooled so quickly.

Nonetheless, they had little time to sulk. The referee signalled for the restart. Germany kicked off, pushing forward with hasty urgency, determined to make something happen before the whistle for halftime. Niklas Tauer dropped deep to collect the ball, passing briskly to Florian Wirtz, who tried to carve out a path through the midfield. But Weston McKennie swiftly closed him down with a crunching challenge that brought a booming cheer from the American fans.

With the midfield battle raging on, both sets of supporters were on their feet, anticipating one last spark before the break. Jamie Leweling forced a hurried pass up the right flank, hoping to find Simon who had

overlapped but the ball skittered out of bounds. A sharp groan rippled through the German section of the crowd, while the U.S. fans clapped in relief.

Paul Gartner commented, "It looks like Germany is rattled. They're trying to claw something back, but the Americans are riding high on that second goal."

Jamie Oliver kept his tone level. "Exactly, Paul. Another American goal just before halftime is a huge blow to Germany's confidence. Let's see if they can regroup."

[45+4 Added Time]

Before Germany could launch another push, the referee finally raised his whistle to his lips. The halftime whistle rang out, and the tension across the pitch deflated like a punctured balloon. Some of the players dropped their shoulders, while others hurried off the field, anxious to hear their coaches' adjustments.

Paul Gartner summed it up for everyone listening: "It's halftime here at Stadion GOSiR, and the U.S. leads 2–0. Matteo Smith's acrobatic opener set the tone, and his second finish from Weah's brilliant run has really put them in the driver's seat."

Jamie Oliver, voice warm with admiration, added, "Germany have had their moments, but right now, they've got a mountain to climb. Especially with their creative talisman going missing for most of the game after the initial moments of brilliance. That said, this is knockout football—anything can happen in the second half."

"We've got Matteo who needs Rakim, we've got Matteo who needs the dream, he scores with the right and flexes with left. Shall..." The American fans started spontaneously singing this song as they watched

Rakim approach the tunnel. Upon hearing their chants, he subconsciously came to a stop, but before he could even form a thought on how to react, Wirtz slung an arm around his neck and dragged him forward.

"Don't mind them, focus on paying them back with a goal on the pitch," He whispered into his ear as they entered the tunnel together. "Don't worry I'm good, but we've got to step it up if we want to turn this around." He had just said that when a cup containing a red content impacted his chest, splashing what he could only assume as red dye or pig's blood all over the two.

Normally he would have clocked it before it could hit him, and he instantly locked onto the person who did after being hit. However, he had been too focused on Wirtz and thinking of what he could do in the second half to react. He didn't even realise what happened when he felt the figures that made up the German trainer team and players pull him back before he could climb the fence as they ushered him inside.

"Young man, go hit the showers and cool off, I will deal with what happened. What you need to do is focus on going back out there, and leave everything else to the Manschaft. You too, Florian, the team needs you to rise above and do your job, which is to create chances for victory." Coach Hanz Bauer, the old goalie and player development coach, said to Rakim as he cupped his head in both hands, forcing eye contact.

"Thanks, Coach," Rakim half whispered as he was pushed into the changing room. Ignoring all the stunned teammates who hadn't been there to see what had happened and now looked at his kit, face and hair that was now covered in red dye with wide eyes.

"Coach, we will need a new set of kit's, sorry for the trouble," Rakim said to the dumfounded Coach Baum who was just about to beckon them to sit down so he could rally them for a counterattack the likes of the 2014/15 Bayern München vs Porto quarterfinals where the German side decimated the portages giants in a 6:1 at home after losing 3:1.

"Don't worry about it coach, we got this," Wirtz commented with a spirited tone as if his blond hair wasn't hit with specks of red as he followed Rakim into the shower quarters.

Chapter 444 444 Carrie

[10/11/2019, Stadion GOSiR, 18:55]

{Din Ding ding, Dong dingling pick up your phone cause I want to talk,} May barely heard her phone as her gaze remained focused on the tussle and bustle at the tunnel. Following what had happened to Rakim, the German coach who had taken him away had proceeded to give the referees and security guards an earful.

From her seat, she couldn't hear what they were saying but the old man in the German tracksuit must have given the USA staff an earful. Because after pointing in their direction and saying a few words, they who had been on the sidelines watching the happenings were now animatedly arguing with the man. The ringing of her phone unfroze her shock at what was happening as she subconsciously pressed the answer button.

"May, did you see what happened, or is my TV computer bugging?" The concerned voice of Emma resounded in her ear through the phone's speakers.

"Not sure what you saw but it was like a scene straight out of Carrie. Emma, I've never seen Rakim lose his cool like he did, luckily one of his coaches managed to calm him down quickly." May quickly explained, but her gaze remained focused on the happenings at the tunnel, which luckily calmed down.

The official finally grew a backbone, split the two arguing sides, and warned each to stick to their sides. Following that, they quickly gave the security guards some instructions and stern suggestions to prevent such incidents from recurring. Things seemed to have calmed down, but this only allowed the rowdier of the fans to let their unhinged words be known.



May let out a shaky exhale, pressing a hand to her temple in an attempt to steady her nerves. "I can't believe how quickly everything escalated," she muttered into the phone, raising her voice slightly to be heard above the raucous crowd.

On the other end, Emma sounded equally unsettled. "Were they throwing stuff at him? I saw something cup during one of the corners but I'm only seeing screen garbs of something red splatter all over his jersey, but the camera angles were so bad I couldn't see much."

"It might've been dye or something, I don't think it's real blood. Still, I don't understand the need when they are already winning 2:0." May lamented frustration clearly heard in her voice as she glared at some of the US fans celebrating what had happened as if it was some major achievement.

Just as she thought this, a new cluster of security personnel had taken positions along the rails, glaring up at the sections where the worst offenders sat. Some fans kept yelling obscenities, emboldened by the presence of a barrier between them and the field. One teenage boy in a German replica jersey tried to hurl a plastic bottle at a rowdy section of American fans only to have an alert security guard intercept it midair. That small success earned a bit of applause from nearby spectators, but the tension in the stands refused to fade.

"You're safe, right? I mean, you're not that far from them," Emma asked, concern spiking in her voice.

"I'm fine," May assured her, glancing toward the path that led to the concourse. "I've got a decent seat, and there are at least a few empty rows around me. I think everyone's crowding the lower stands for a better view. It's just so uncomfortable, seeing how quickly they turn nasty."

Emma's voice softened. "Don't worry, he's tough, just don't go doing anything stupid to defend his honour. His ego is not that fragile though it's pretty close since they messed up his hair. Knowing him, he is thinking of ways to make them choke on their disrespect just for messing with his hair."

Hearing her words, May burst out laughing, "Haha, he probably is. Sometimes I think he believes his power lies in his hair like Samson in the bible, despite already being good when he had short hair."

"I think it's more about the memories since he got dreadlocks. That was the first request he made to our parents, so I guess it has sentimental value to him more than anything." Emma commented with a light sigh, causing an awkward silence to linger as neither of the girls knew what to say.

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[10/11/2019, Stadion GOSiR, 19:10]

"Welcome back to a second half that is promising to be just as action-packed as the first. Germany is trailing Team USA with a score of 2:0 and will be looking to make things happen early on." Paul Gartner's professional voice resounded, causing those who hadn't seen what happened at the end of the first half to believe this was just an average start to the second half in this quarter-final match-up.

He had been given stern instructions by the streaming services investors to lean into the positive of the game before the match. His boss made sure to call him again after the incident and they simply decided to act like it didn't happen or they hadn't seen it. However, Jamie, his co commentator didn't seem to have gotten the message as he continued stirring the pot.

"It sure was a lively end to the first half, players need to realise what they mean to their fans and act more accordingly. Though it will be exciting to see how the Germans respond to the clear message their opponents sent them in the second half." He said with a neutral tone, doing his best to hold back the mocking grin.

"Ehem, there come the players. It will be fun to see what an exciting display they put on for us." Paul interrupted before his co-host could say something stupid as both teams jogged out of the tunnel. However, he had just averted one disaster when two more popped up in the forms of Wirtz and Rakim.

Both their heads were covered with what looked like red dye. Wirtz was still ok as it looked like it was prayed on in a light shade after what one could only assume happened after washing. However, in Rakim's case, half his hair was a deep shade of red and he didn't seem to have made an effort to wash it out.

Paul could already see bullet comments in the stream from the clueless ones who had gone on a toilet break asking why they decided to dye their hair over halftime. Some of the more precise ones were even asking if those two were new players. Trying his best to ignore their question, he watched as another pig teammate decided now was the best opportunity to zoom in on Rakim.

"I guess it's fuck with Paul day," he silently cursed under his breath as they watched Giovanni Reyna jog up to him and hold a handout in what seemed to be an apology.

After all, they had already gone through the customary handshake so this was the only explanation he could think of. However, it was not meant to be as Rakim merely smacked his hand away and jogged to his position. An avalanche of boos descended following his actions, but he merely started doing stretches on the spot as he waited for the proceeding to begin.

"What utter lack of sportsmanship from Rakim here at Stadion GOSiR, this sort of behaviour has no room in our beloved sport. Losing is no excuse for such actions," Like the bored Jerry, he is Jamie continued finding trouble out of boredom as he went on a tirade only stopping when his mic was turned off by the producers.

Chapter 445 445 Mute

[46]

For a few moments, only Paul Gartner's voice filled the broadcast. Jamie Oliver's mic remained muted, leaving him visibly frustrated in the commentary box. But on the pitch, the teams positioned themselves as if nothing else mattered. The second-half kick-off loomed, and all eyes fell on the referee at midfield.

A shrill tweet of the whistle sliced through the stadium noise, and the ball rolled into play once more. Germany, trailing 2–0, began with a clear sense of urgency. Bella-Kotchap wasted no time firing a pass to Wirtz, who found Tauer hovering just behind the centre circle. Right away, Tauer zipped a diagonal ball toward the left flank for Rakim to chase.

You could sense the tension ripple through the stands the instant Rakim touched the ball. Echoes of boos bounced off the stadium walls—some fans were still angry, others simply determined to rattle him. Rakim, however, kept his gaze forward, stretching his left leg out as he deftly brought the ball down. He immediately accelerated along the line, forcing Dest to give chase as they quickly reached the side of the box.

Rakim came to a sudden stop and suddenly cut backwards, creating space between him and Dest. With a swift feint as if he would go back down the line, he shifted the ball to his right foot. Nudging it forward, he sent a crisp but curved cross into the box into the penalty area.

Paul Gartner, now carrying the broadcast solo, spoke in a brisk tone. "...That's a dangerous cross!" Paul Gartner's voice rang out with renewed energy, filling the broadcast. As Rakim's curved delivery soared

into the penalty area, a surge of anticipation rippled through the stadium. The German forward line converged, Moukoko and Leweling both darting in from different angles, eyes locked onto the incoming ball.

Mark McKenzie was the first to react, launching himself into the air, but he miscalculated its angle as it sailed above his head. It dropped into the area behind him near the far post, where Jamie Leweling, guarded by George Bello lurked. Both jumped forward feet first with different objectives, in—a blur of kicking legs and grasping arms.

Leweling reached it first with an outstretched boot, angling the ball toward the near post. George Bello's desperate attempt to block it only redirected some of the force; the shot still zipped through the six-yard box. Paul Gartner's voice surged in excitement, "Leweling with a toe-poke toward goal—this could be it!"

The ball whizzed low and fast toward CJ dos Santos' left side. The American keeper reacted in a flash, dropping to his knees and extending both hands wide. The contact wasn't particularly clean, but it was enough. The ball rebounded off his gloves, ricocheting up into the air. In the stands, hearts jumped into throats, the moment suspended in time.

Moukoko tried to capitalize on the bouncing rebound, lunging in to meet it with a header. But Mark McKenzie, recovering from his earlier misjudgement, rose like a barrier, flicking the ball with his head into CJ's open arms.

"Safe hands thereby CJ dos Santos!" Paul Gartner announced, his voice echoing through the speakers. "He is being tested right at the start of the first half."

Rising to his feet, CJ took a moment to scan the field before launching a low-driven kick toward Weston McKennie. The midfield battle resumed instantly. McKennie chested it down, but Wirtz was on him in a

flash, jostling for control. After a brief tussle, the ball squirted free, rolling toward Timothy Weah on the right sideline.

Weah flicked it forward with the outside of his boot, hoping to spark a counter. However, Bella-Kotchap read the attempt early, stepping up to intercept. Calmly scanning the field, he decided to send a sharp pass out wide to Simon Asta instead of sending the ball forward.

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Asta took Bella-Kotchap's pass gracefully, controlling it with a firm first touch. Instead of darting immediately forward, he glanced up, searching for an open channel. Pulisic quickly advanced, trying to close him down. With a quick one-two feint, Asta slipped away from the American winger's press and threaded a short pass toward Angelo Stiller.

Stiller took over, pivoting to face the heart of the pitch. A surge of movement from the German attack hinted at a developing play. Jamie Leweling hovered near the right sideline, Moukoko drifted centrally, while Rakim cut in from the left, each looking for the space to receive the ball. Stiller spotted Moukoko's decoy run, then slipped a neat vertical pass to Wirtz just beyond the centre circle.

Wirtz, mindful of McKennie quickly spun away from the midfielder. He gained a yard of space and lifted his head, seeking his next pass. He nearly picked out Moukoko, but a well-timed step from Chris Richards forced Wirtz to pause and reconsider. Forced to think on the fly, he sent a chipped pass over to Niklas, skipping over Weston McKennie's head.

The defensive midfielder didn't hesitate in sending a lofted diagonal towards the right corner flag, picking out Asta who had overlapped with Jamie. The right-back deftly touched it down at the side of the box with George Bello rushing back to stop him. He feinted a cut forward only to send a no-look back to Jamie Leweling who swung in a first-time cross into the box.

Leweling's cross sailed high and fast, arcing toward the penalty spot. For a moment, the entire box seemed to freeze in anticipation—both sets of players tensed, ready to pounce. Chris Richards hustled back into position, tracking the cross, while McKenzie sized up a potential clearance near the edge of the six-yard box.

Moukoko, eyes fiercely locked on the ball, dashed in between the two centre-backs. Catching the defenders off guard, he rose higher than expected, meeting the cross with a powerful snap of his forehead. The ball rocketed downwards toward CJ dos Santos' right side, sending the American keeper scrambling.

"Header from Moukoko—this is dangerous!" Paul Gartner's voice blared in the booth, the sole commentary on air.

In a flash of reflex, CJ dropped low. His outstretched arm made contact, palming the ball away at full stretch. The rebound spun loose, skittering across the crowded six-yard box. Pulisic, racing back to help, tried to hook it clear but slipped under pressure from Asta, and the ball bobbled free again.

A gasp went up around the stadium—this had all the makings of a scramble that ends in the back of the net. Tauer charged in from the top of the box, launching a desperate side-footed attempt on the loose ball. Just as he swung his leg, Mark McKenzie flew in, blocking with a last-ditch tackle that sent the ball spinning out toward the left corner.

The American fans were just about to breathe a sigh of relief when a green figure latched onto the loose ball. Rakim's feet flashed over the ball with a quick step over mixed with an L drag to dodge Dest's desperate slide tackle. His move caused him to slip, but he used his left hand to brace his fall as he hooked the ball on his foot, turning with the momentum.

Back on his feet, he slotted the ball through the open legs of Yunus who had just tracked back. The American defender tried to hold onto his shoulder, but Rakim simply pivoted his balance as his right foot wrapped around the ball. He sent a curved shot towards the top right corner of the goal as he stumbled to the ground.

The shot twisted through the air, its trajectory arcing toward the top-right corner. CJ dos Santos launched himself, fully outstretched in an attempt to parry it away. A collective intake of breath from the crowd painted the moment with suspense. Rakim sprawled on the turf, watched as a split second later the ball kissed the underside of the crossbar, ricocheting downward.

CJ's fingertips grazed it, but the momentum was enough. The net rippled. The stadium atmosphere exploded—an eruption of cheers and gasps, roars and groans—as the scoreboard changed: Germany 1, USA 2. The German fans who had been silent so far could now be seen jovially waving their scarves and flags.

Rakim exploded from the ground with power as he darted passed the stunned US players and fished the ball out of the net. With his now half red dreads swaying in the wind, he stormed to the right corner flag in front of the opposing fans and just stood there. The rest of his team quickly joined him as they enveloped him in a team hug as they celebrated.

Meanwhile, Jamie Oliver's mic sputtered back to life, though it seemed to cut in and out. A snippet of his voice broke through: "...I've been trying to—... remarkable strike from—... oh come on, this is not professional!"

Paul Gartner resumed his role, filling the air. "He's done it! Rakim has breathed life back into this German side, and the score is 2–1. The American lead might just be in danger if Germany continues to press like this."

Chapter 446 446 Chang In Formation



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Jamie Oliver's voice finally stabilized, crackling back onto the airwaves with palpable irritation. "You have to be kidding me—there we go, finally! Ah, ladies and gentlemen, apologies for... technical difficulties. But if you're just joining us, Germany has found a lifeline thanks to Rakim's brilliant strike. It's now 2–1 in favour of the USA."

Down on the pitch, the atmosphere simmered with renewed energy. Germany's players, buoyed by the goal, rushed to reorganize for the restart as Rakim placed the ball in the centre circle. Like starving wolves who had a taste of prime ribs, they were now hungry to devour the bull that stood in their way.

With a sharp blow of the whistle, the match roared back to life. Matteo poked the ball back to Giovanni who pivoted sharply as soon as the ball touched his boots, spinning gracefully around Youssoufa Moukoko who charged forward. He spotted Yunus Musah quickly dropping into a pocket of space, smoothly threading a short pass through Wirtz's attempted block. Musah turned deftly, taking advantage of his low centre of gravity to fend off Niklas Tauer's muscular challenge.

With Germany pressing aggressively, Musah kept his composure and swung the ball wide toward Sergiño Dest, who surged forward eagerly from his fullback position. Dest, seeing Rakim closing him down, sharply flicked the ball with the outside of his boot, releasing Timothy Weah down the right wing. Weah surged ahead, eyes scanning for options inside the box, but Noah Katterbach closed the gap quickly, matching his pace stride for stride.

Jamie Oliver's voice sharpened with excitement, capturing the building intensity. "Weah and Katterbach racing down the touchline—it's a footrace!"

Timothy braked abruptly, creating enough separation from Katterbach to cut inside. He fired a quick cross toward Matteo Smith, who had slipped cleverly between Ehlers and Bella-Kotchap. Matteo leapt, his eyes fiercely locked onto the descending ball, but just as he swung his head forward, Kevin Ehlers rose to challenge him. Both players collided mid-air, Ehlers managing to flick the ball clear.

The clearance dropped kindly at Niklas Tauer's feet, who instantly turned and initiated a rapid German counterattack. He drove a precise, diagonal pass wide to Jamie Leweling, already streaking down the right flank. George Bello sprinted back frantically, desperate to cover the space.

Leweling, fuelled by fresh adrenaline, feinted toward the line before cutting inward, cleverly drawing Bello off balance. Spotting Florian Wirtz breaking through the central channel, Jamie fired a low pass across the turf. Wirtz collected the ball with ease, gracefully pivoting around Weston McKennie, who lunged in a fraction too late.

Wirtz accelerated toward the USA penalty area, creating chaos among the defenders. Richards rushed out to close the angle, forcing Wirtz to send a neat through ball toward Rakim, who had drifted inward from the left wing. Rakim feinted a quick shot, dragging Dest away before calmly squaring the ball to Moukoko on the edge of the area.

Moukoko controlled the ball swiftly and immediately unleashed a powerful strike toward the far post. CJ dos Santos reacted instinctively, diving sharply to his left, stretching his gloves just enough to deflect the fierce shot wide.

A collective gasp filled the stadium, then applause echoed from both sets of supporters, recognizing the brilliance of the save. "Stunning stop by CJ dos Santos! He's just preserved the lead for the Americans," Jamie Oliver shouted over the airwaves, his voice vibrant once again.

Germany set up for the resulting corner, bodies jockeying for position inside the box. Rakim approached the corner flag, lifting a hand to signal to his teammates. He whipped an in-swinging delivery, high and dangerous into the crowded penalty area. Bella-Kotchap rose highest, beating McKenzie to the ball, and powering a header downward.

For a split second, it appeared certain to nestle into the bottom corner, but Yunus Musah, guarding the post, reacted superbly, clearing it off the line with a desperate swing of his boot. The ball ricocheted to Weston McKennie, who immediately launched a searching ball toward Matteo Smith at midfield.

Smith controlled it smoothly, his body shielding the ball from Kevin Ehlers' aggressive press. Pivoting on his heel, Matteo fed the ball back to Giovanni Reyna, who quickly found Pulisic lurking near the halfway line. Pulisic immediately turned, spotting a gap between Simon Asta and Bella-Kotchap. He threaded a perfect through-ball forward, inviting Matteo Smith to chase it down.

Smith, bursting with determination, raced ahead of Bella-Kotchap, bearing down on goal. With Luca Unbehaun quickly narrowing the angle, Matteo unleashed a fierce shot toward the top-left corner. Luca extended fully, fingertips brushing the ball just enough to steer it narrowly around the post, denying Matteo's fierce strike.

Jamie Oliver nearly leapt out of his seat, his voice crackling with enthusiasm. "End-to-end action now! Matteo Smith nearly restores the two-goal advantage for the USA!"

Paul Gartner's voice also rose above the exclaiming fans, "The game sure became lively, both teams are no longer content with just testing each other and have started taking a more direct route."

The game soon settled into a rhyme of back-and-forth attacks with most being broken up by both side's defensive midfielders. Until the 60th when Coch Baum decided to take off Niklas Tauer for Kevin Schade to bolster the midfield as their formation changed from a 4-2-3-1 to a more direct 4-4-2 diamond formation as Rakim moved up to the second striker but played more like a free-roaming Attacking midfielder.

This change had an immediate effect as the Germans started overloading their opponents in positional battles. The Diamond-shaped midfielders would collapse into one side causing a situation where an American player was surrounded by green German kits. With Rakim dropping deep this situation became more glaring creating a higher turnover rate for the Eagles.

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Their hard work bore fruit in the 65th a lazy pass from Mark McKenzie meant for Yunus Musah left the midfielder scrambling to bring it under his control. Florian Wirtz was quickest to pounce, sliding in sharply to poke the ball loose from Musah's scrambling feet. The midfielder immediately sprang to his feet, instinctively turning his body to shield the ball from Weston McKennie's urgent pressure.

Glancing up, Wirtz threaded a crisp, incisive pass through the congested midfield, finding Rakim lurking menacingly at the top of the box. Rakim felt Chris Richards breathing down his neck but calmly used the defender's aggression against him. With a smooth swivel of his hips, he rolled away from Richards, earning himself a precious half-yard.

The crowd rose to their feet, anticipating another dazzling strike, but Rakim instead feigned the shot, gently sliding a disguised pass to Youssoufa Moukoko, who burst into space to his right. "Moukoko—this is dangerous!" Jamie Oliver roared, his voice surging with expectation.

Moukoko wasted no time, angling a blistering strike towards the near post. CJ dos Santos lunged low, punching the ball away forcefully, but this time the rebound fell straight into the path of the onrushing Kevin Schade. The substitute midfielder, sensing glory, connected instantly, hammering a fierce volley into the crowded penalty area.

The net bulged emphatically—but the cheers were short-lived as the linesman's flag shot skyward. "Offside! The assistant referee's flag denies Germany an equalizer," Paul Gartner shouted, matching the emotional rollercoaster playing out on the pitch.

The Americans in the stands almost felt their life flash before them as they almost lost their hard-fought lead at the drop of a dime. What angered them even more was the fact that Rakim once again played a crucial role to them almost concerning another goal. If not for the fact that the newly brought-on Kevin Shade was too eager it would have been game over.

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The Americans responded immediately, regrouping quickly and launching their own attack. Musah, determined to redeem himself, collected CJ's quick distribution and carried the ball forward with remarkable composure. Dodging Schade's energetic press, he played a smart pass forward to Giovanni Reyna, who gracefully turned away from Angelo Stiller's sliding challenge.

Reyna surged forward, effortlessly gliding past the halfway line before slicing a beautifully weighted ball through to Timothy Weah on the right flank. Weah exploded into space once more, pulling Noah Katterbach wide. He glanced up, spotting Matteo Smith cutting aggressively into the penalty area.

Weah bent a precise cross toward Matteo, who anticipated brilliantly, beating Bella-Kotchap to the near post. Matteo rose swiftly, connecting with a powerful header—

Chapter 447 447 Silver Platter

[10/11/2019, Stadion GOSiR, 19:13]

Weah bent a precise cross toward Matteo, who anticipated brilliantly, beating Bella-Kotchap to the near post. Matteo rose swiftly, connecting with a powerful header—but Luca Unbehaun was positioned perfectly, comfortably catching the ball with steady hands.

"Safe hands from Unbehaun! Smith denied again," Oliver called out, appreciating the German goalkeeper's calm presence.

[73]

Unbehaun quickly rose to his feet, assessing his options calmly before opting to roll the ball short to Armel Bella-Kotchap. The centre-back advanced, head raised confidently, surveying the shifting lines ahead. Spotting Wirtz drift into an open pocket, Bella-Kotchap delivered a pinpoint pass along the ground. Florian Wirtz smoothly turned on the ball, sidestepping Weston McKennie's aggressive challenge with ease.

Wirtz exchanged a rapid one-two with Angelo Stiller, freeing himself from the crowded midfield zone. Glancing up swiftly, he released a perfect, lofted diagonal ball toward Jamie Leweling galloping down the right flank. Leweling controlled it effortlessly, immediately attacking George Bello who closed the space with urgency. Leweling dropped his shoulder and swiftly cut inward before unleashing a stinging shot toward the top-left corner.

CJ dos Santos leapt acrobatically, fingertips stretching fully, managing to push the effort just past the frame of the goal. "What a brilliant save again by CJ dos Santos!" Jamie Oliver exclaimed, breathless from the nonstop action. "Leweling nearly levelled the scoreline."

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Germany's corner found no takers, as Mark McKenzie towered over the crowded box, heading clear convincingly. Yunus Musah pounced on the loose ball, initiating a rapid American counterattack. Spotting Giovanni Reyna charging forward, Musah fed the ball swiftly through Germany's hastily regrouping midfield.

Reyna elegantly controlled the pass, feinting past Stiller and opening up a sliver of space. He then slipped a delicate ball wide toward Christian Pulisic, who surged toward Simon Asta with a menacing pace. Asta backpedaled cautiously, eyes locked firmly onto Pulisic's tricky footwork. The winger suddenly burst to the outside, delivering a low, driven cross toward Matteo Smith lurking at the near post.

Matteo attempted a deft flick, redirecting the ball toward the far corner. It skidded across the slick grass, narrowly missing the far upright, drawing groans and gasps from the stands.

"So close from Smith!" Gartner's voice reverberated in appreciation. "This game is balanced on a knife edge!"

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As play resumed, Unbehaun wasted no time distributing the ball quickly to Noah Katterbach out wide on the left. Katterbach swiftly fed Rakim, who had dropped surprisingly deep into his own half to gather possession. Rakim paused briefly, his eyes instantly evaluating the terrain ahead of him before a teasing

grin appeared on his face. The world stood still for a moment as he felt like the whole world turned its gaze towards him.

Different passing lanes opened up for him, but his goal senses seemingly drew a route through the field for him beckoning him to dare to take the chance. He nudged the ball slightly as he started leaning forward as nearby defenders converged on him, and with a burst of pace, he surged forward, darting past Timothy Weah's half-hearted attempt to track him back.

Rakim flipped a switch and picked up momentum, accelerating gracefully past Yunus Musah's seemingly well-timed sliding challenge near midfield. Giovanni Reyna closed in, but Rakim smoothly shifted his body, dipping a shoulder and spinning past the American midfielder, leaving Reyna grasping at empty air. The German fans roared to life, sensing something special.

Paul Gartner's voice quickened, excitement saturating every syllable. "Rakim now—still going—he's carving through the American midfield!"

Weston McKennie charged forward, desperate to halt Rakim's momentum. Rakim slowed slightly, enticing the tackle, and then he feinted right before suddenly pulling off a lightning-quick Elastico, flicking the ball first outward then immediately inward, slipping through McKennie's stretched legs. McKennie's tackle caught Rakim's shin guard sending him sprawling to the turf—but astonishingly, Rakim retained control. Twisting acrobatically on the ground, he kept the ball glued to his feet, manoeuvring the ball in a half circle as he dodged Yunus and Mark McKenzie's attempt to clear the ball.

Springing back to his feet with remarkable agility, Rakim instantly shifted gears once more. Sergiño Dest surged in desperately, only to be left stumbling as Rakim pulled off a silky Ronaldinho-Esque flip-flap, gliding effortlessly past him. The stadium collectively gasped, witnessing artistry unfolding in real time.



Chris Richards charged forward, trying to shut down the space, but Rakim calmly executed a pirouette, spinning around Richards' aggressive lunge and leaving him bewildered. Suddenly, the penalty area opened up, the American backline in disarray, drawn toward Rakim like moths to a flame.

"Rakim still dancing forward—this is extraordinary! He's glided past half the American team!" Paul exclaimed his voice crackling with awe, as he watched the scene unfold in real-time.

CJ dos Santos edged forward nervously, preparing himself for the seemingly inevitable shot, but at the last possible second, Rakim coolly rolled his boot over the ball, freezing the keeper completely. With defenders scrambling desperately toward him, Rakim calmly threaded a delicate no-look pass across the box to Youssoufa Moukoko, standing completely unmarked.

Moukoko steadied himself briefly, then calmly swept the ball into the unguarded net. The stadium erupted, shaking with thunderous cheers, disbelief and jubilation intertwined. "GOAL!" Paul Gartner roared into the microphone. "Simply sensational from Rakim, who laid it on a silver platter for Moukoko—Germany is level at 2–2! An absolute masterclass from the young star."

Rakim followed Moukoko as they sprinted to the corner flag not caring the slightest about the stunned opposing fans behind it. Moukoko slid sharply to the right his hands pointing to where he had just been reviling Rakim who had taken his top off and now held it up to the stands. The Green kit swayed lightly in the wind as the gleaming name of Rex and 22 started at the fans. A crescendo of applause followed from the German fans who instead of wildly cheering chose to celebrate what they had just witnessed.

Jamie Oliver was practically on his feet, his voice quivering with astonishment. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have become a believer in this young man's talent. What we have just witnessed was pure footballing genius from the 16-year-old Rakim Rex! Unstoppable—breathtaking even! And Germany is now level. Can the Americans respond to such brilliance?"

As the celebrations subsided, the American players regrouped at midfield, frustration etched on their faces. Rakim received his mandatory yellow despite the referee being reluctant, but he had a job to do. A short while later in the 80th minute Matteo restarted play, knocking the ball back quickly to Weston McKennie, who immediately sent it sideways to Yunus Musah. Musah carefully advanced, aware of the relentless German press led by Kevin Schade and Florian Wirtz, who closed down space rapidly. Musah angled a precise pass forward, finding Pulisic who had drifted centrally in search of the ball.

Pulisic twisted elegantly, effortlessly evading Angelo Stiller's lunging challenge, and threaded a sharp ball to Sergiño Dest charging up the right wing. Dest controlled the ball neatly on the move, with Rakim racing back to defend. Dest cut inward sharply, his pace forcing Rakim onto the back foot.

Dest laid a quick, precise ball to Timothy Weah, who cleverly turned Katterbach inside-out before firing a hard, low cross into the box. Matteo Smith lunged forward aggressively, trying to stab the ball home from close range, but Bella-Kotchab bravely threw himself into the line of fire, deflecting the shot inches wide.

"Vital block by Bella-Kotchab!" Paul Gartner shouted; his voice sharp with urgency. "Matteo Smith was inches away from regaining the lead for the Americans."

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The resulting American corner saw Christian Pulisic stepping up, signalling with a raised arm before delivering a high, looping cross deep into the German box. Richards and McKenzie both surged upward, but Luca Unbehaun confidently rose above the cluster of bodies, snatching the ball securely from the sky.

"Strong take by Unbehaun," Jamie Oliver called clearly, his voice measured once more as he gave a more professional neutral commentary. "Germany looking to quickly launch another attack."

Indeed, Unbehaun immediately rolled the ball out to Simon Asta, who strode forward cautiously at first, analysing his options. Spotting Kevin Schade drifting into a pocket near the halfway line, Asta clipped a precise pass forward. Schade controlled it neatly, swiftly evading Musah's aggressive approach with a nimble side-step.

Schade accelerated into the heart of midfield, slicing between Musah and McKennie before threading a perfectly weighted ball toward Florian Wirtz, who quickly flicked it to Rakim, lingering dangerously between lines. Rakim wanted to initiate another attack but found himself quickly thrown to the ground by a rough tackle from Mark McKenzie forcing the referee to blow his whistle.

Things are getting heated as the end of the match nears," Paul Gartner stated as Rakim sat up from the ground with his arms questioningly raised at Mark seemingly asking why. He hadn't even gone for the ball and was lucky the referee only gave him a yellow card but either Rakim's or the official actions caused the American fans to loudly boo him as whistling sounds resounded throughout Stadion GOSiR.

Chapter 448 448 Scorpion

[10/11/2019, Stadion GOSiR, 19:38]

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Rakim slowly got to his feet, brushing dirt off his shorts as he exchanged a tense glare with McKenzie, who had already retreated to organize his defence. The Referee did however still book him with a yellow card for that rough tackle from behind warning him to watch himself. The German fans booed the aggressive challenge, frustration mingling with excitement as their side set up quickly for the free kick.

Moments later Florian and Rakim stood over the ball, looking like two anime characters with the red dye in their hair. Both were discussing what to do with the set piece as they scanned the penalty area, where their teammates jostled aggressively, looking to exploit any defensive lapse. Following the ref's signal they both rapidly closed in on the ball from different angles and Rakim leaped over the ball baiting a few in the wall to jump.

A second later Wirtz swung in a curling delivery toward the back post. The ball floated gracefully toward the far edge of the six-yard box, where Bella-Kotchop surged forward aggressively, fighting through the mass of bodies. He rose high above McKenzie, powering a fierce header downward—but CJ dos Santos reacted brilliantly again, diving to his right and palming the ball out of harm's way with another stunning reflex save.

"Another phenomenal stop by CJ dos Santos! He's been absolutely immense today," Jamie Oliver exclaimed, voice crackling with excitement.

The rebound fell directly into the path of Youssoufa Moukoko, who swung his boot hastily. His strike deflected off Chris Richards' outstretched leg, spiralling awkwardly back toward midfield, where Yunus Musah was quickest to claim possession. Musah immediately pivoted, shaking off Wirtz who attempted to claim the rebound but was a second too late.

Musah steadied himself, instead of rushing forward impulsively, he shifted the ball sideways to Weston McKennie. The American Defensive midfielder swiftly settled play, gesturing to his teammates to reorganize their shape. McKennie paused momentarily, patiently allowing his side to reposition before distributing a careful pass back toward Sergiño Dest at right-back.

Dest cautiously pushed forward a few yards, before passing to Giovanni who dropped deeper to collect the ball away from Germany's pressing midfield diamond following Rakim's active press.

Reyna turned smoothly, shielding the ball as Angelo Stiller closed him down aggressively. Rather than risking a turnover, he fed a careful back-pass to Chris Richards. Richards calmly switched play, sweeping the ball horizontally to Mark McKenzie, who stepped forward confidently, attempting to initiate another measured build-up from the back.

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McKenzie this time played a more cautious short pass forward into midfield, finding Weston McKennie who swiftly glanced around, aware of Florian Wirtz lurking nearby. McKennie cleverly turned his back to shield the ball, calmly laying it back once more to Musah, allowing the Americans to regain control of the midfield tempo.

Just as it looked like they would pass the ball about a couple more times Musah suddenly raised his head and unleashed a diagonal long ball down the right flank. The ball sliced through the gap between Kevin Ehlers and Germany's left-back Noah Katterbach as Weah dashed past him along the outside line. Both defenders scrambled to chase after him and cover the space as the American front 3 roared to life quickly piercing into the box.

Weah surged forward, his pace electric, forcing Noah Katterbach into a desperate sprint to keep up. The stadium erupted into noise, sensing danger as the American winger closed in toward the box. Kevin Ehlers raced to provide support, his eyes flicking nervously between Weah and Matteo Smith, who was cleverly shifting positions inside the penalty area. Luckily, he saw Bella-Kotchap behind the striker and knew he could commit to stopping Weah from breaking into the box.

Weah quickly glanced up, spotting Smith peeling away from Bella-Kotchap's tight marking at the near post. Without hesitation, he drilled a fierce low cross into the crowded box, angling it just beyond the German defenders' reach. Matteo lunged aggressively forward, stretching every sinew—but Bella-Kotchap reacted superbly, thrusting a leg out at the very last moment to redirect the ball behind for an American corner.

"Vital interception by Bella-Kotchap! Smith was inches away from putting this game to bed," Jamie Oliver roared with excitement. "Germany still holding firm, but Team USA is asking the right questions."

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Christian Pulisic stood behind the corner, signalling to his teammates crowded inside the box. As he delivered an in-swinging corner toward the penalty spot, both Richards and McKenzie surged forward powerfully, muscling their way past German markers. The ball dropped dangerously toward the back post, where Chris Richards rose highest, aiming a firm header downward.

But Luca Unbehaun was positioned well and all he had to do was stretch out his hands to firmly bring the ball under his grasp. Calmly rising to his feet, Unbehaun immediately slowed the tempo, giving his teammates a moment to breathe and reorganize. Germany's keeper rolled the ball carefully to Simon at the right side of the box who proceeded to play a quick one-two with him to sneak past Pulisic.

Simon Asta pushed forward cautiously, eyes scanning for openings, fully aware of Pulisic tracking him closely from behind. With no immediate pass forward, he patiently rolled the ball back inside toward Angelo Stiller, who calmly received it near the edge of Germany's defensive third. Stiller raised his head, assessing options as Weston McKennie closed him down with urgency.

Instead of forcing a risky pass, Stiller coolly switched the ball horizontally across the defence, finding Kevin Ehlers, who had settled into space. The American forward line quickly pressed higher, with Matteo Smith energetically cutting off the passing lane back to Bella-Kotchap.

Ehlers saw Yunus Musah moving forward rapidly to press him and calmly laid the ball wide to Noah Katterbach, who had taken a higher position near the left touchline. Katterbach assessed his options and opted to pass neatly forward, finding Rakim, who had cleverly drifted back into a pocket of space at the

halfway line. Not holding onto the ball, he sent a first-time Ronaldo chop pass to Wirts who was moving up to his right as he rounded his marker.

Wirtz Deftly took control of the ball nudging it past Weston with a flick of his foot as he sent a sharp pass forward to Youssoufa Moukoko. Standing at the edge of the opposing box he took control of the ball whilst using his body to keep Mark McKenzie at bay. Seeing Rakim approaching he faked a pass his way prompting mark to momentarily loosened his marking as he swiftly turned to his left.

He sent a weighted pass out wide to Jamie Leweling who had moved up the field. The winger fought off Pulisic who had tracked back with a fifty/fifty shoulder check that left the American winger stumbling as he charged to the edge of the box. Faking a cut inward, he skipped by George Bello on the outside creating a yard of space at the side of the box.

Leweling immediately whipped a dangerous low cross across the Six Yard line, but Moukoko was already too far ahead to jump for it. The same went for Mark McKenzie who was marking him It seemed like the cross would go to waste as Chris Richards and Rakim were already approaching the line, and the ball was curving back out. It was then that Rakim lunged forward like a diver jumping into a pool as he swung his right heel back and up like a scorpion towards the goal connecting with the ball before he fell over.

Chapter 449 449 Desire

[10/11/2019, Stadion GOSiR, 19:45]

The stadium fell into a brief, astonished silence as the ball looped beautifully toward the far corner, spinning softly in mid-air. CJ dos Santos, initially caught flat-footed, desperately scrambled to reposition himself, leaping across his goal line with an outstretched glove. For a heart-stopping moment, everyone in the stadium watched in breathless anticipation as the ball gently kissed the outside of the far post, narrowly missing the target before rolling agonizingly out for a goal kick.

An audible gasp echoed throughout the stadium, followed by a surge of applause—half from relief, half in admiration for Rakim's audacious effort. "Oh, my goodness!" Jamie Oliver's voice rang out, breaking the brief silence. "Rakim nearly pulled off a goal-of-the-tournament contender! A scorpion kick, inches from glory."

Paul Gartner chimed in, clearly stunned, "That was absolutely outrageous from the young man. A moment of pure genius—you don't teach that."

CJ dos Santos took a deep breath, visibly shaken by how close he'd come to conceding. The keeper set the ball carefully on the edge of the six-yard box, taking a few seconds to let his teammates recover and reorganize themselves. McKenzie gestured emphatically, reminding his defensive partners to maintain concentration as the clock ticked toward the 90th minute.

The American fans, sensing both relief and mounting anxiety, began urging their team forward with rhythmic claps and chants, attempting to inject some late energy into their players'-tired legs.

Dos Santos finally launched a powerful goal kick deep into midfield, aiming for Weston McKennie, whose aerial prowess had been reliable throughout the match. McKennie rose strongly, outjumping Angelo Stiller, to deftly nod the ball down into Giovanni Reyna's path. Reyna quickly controlled it on the bounce, expertly shielding possession from Florian Wirtz, who pressed closely.

[90+1]

The fourth official stepped up on the sidelines, raising his illuminated board: three minutes of added time. On the pitch, Giovanni Reyna turned carefully, intelligently holding possession as Florian Wirtz closely shadowed him. Rather than force the issue, Reyna swung the ball calmly back to Musah, who had drifted into a pocket of space in midfield.



Musah settled the ball smoothly, eyes scanning the field for potential gaps, but the Germans had already fallen back into their disciplined diamond shape. Rakim Even dropped into the midfield line, creating a five-midfielder defence, breaking up any USA attacks before they could mount. With no clear forward option, Musah passed sideways to Weston McKennie, who promptly swept the ball out wide to Sergiño Dest.

Dest took two measured steps forward, hesitating slightly as he saw Kevin Shade already closing him down aggressively. Not willing to risk losing the ball he sent a risky pass down the flank searching Timothy Weah who latched onto the ball with sheer grit as he held off Noah Katterbach. Weah, back to goal, skilfully used his body to shield possession, patiently waiting for support as Katterbach applied intense pressure, not allowing him any easy escape route.

Spotting Dest rapidly moving up in support behind him, Weah carefully rolled the ball backwards to the advancing right-back, who took a confident touch before lifting his gaze toward the German penalty area. He swung his foot delivering a wicked curling cross toward Matteo Smith, who had made a darting run toward the near post. The striker rose powerfully, stretching every muscle to flick a glancing header toward goal—but Luca came out fist first punching the ball out of his box.

That would prove to be the last attack of the allotted time as neither of the two teams managed to mount a meaningful attack. When the referee blew the final whistle, the fans breathed sighs of disappointment with none daring to leave their seats. As for the players, some did their best to catch their breath while others directly sat on the ground as fatigue caught up to them.

"Boys come over here quick," Coach Baum exclaimed from the sidelines urging his players to quickly gather in front of him as the medical staff and trainers went around checking on the players.

"How are you feeling? You took a couple of hard hits this half." Dr Hans Schultz the team's doctor asked the moment Rakim took a seat at an area around their team's technical area. "Let me check that shoulder?"

"It's all good Doc I've played with tougher and rougher defences," Rakim responded with a laboured intake of breath but still let him do his job. A couple of manoeuvring of his arm a little bit of poking and needing that caused him to go through a mixture of relieved and painful sensations. "How is it looking, still young and strong right?"

"Haha, it's mildly inflamed. Just try to brace your falls better, I'll have Müller apply athletic tape and use some freeze spray," The middle-aged doctor said in a light-hearted tone as he got up to check the next person. A few moments later trainer Sebastian Müller appeared to do as the good doctor had said.

"Listen up lads" Cocha Baum exclaimed clapping his hands to gather everyone's attention. "I know you are tired and everything in your body is telling you to rest but I'm asking you to give me 30 minutes. 30 minutes of grit to make everything we have worked for worth it, I'm already proud of how we have carried ourselves in this tournament, no matter the outcome."

He took a short pause looking into a couple of players' focussed gazes. "On our journey, we have become family and that's something to be proud of but in this game, one of ours is being hunted. He has come through for us when we needed him to, now all I ask from you is to do the same for him and silence this stadium down."

"Yes, Coach!" the players exclaimed their fighting spirit evident as they listened to him speak about how he wanted them to play during extra time. "All right boys for the first half of extra time I want you to play our defensive counter-attacking play. Our attacks will be initiated through Armel and Angelo giving the rest of the midfielder a freer role."

"Look to create quick transitional football and looks to reach the opposing box in under 10 seconds when launching counterattacks. We are all tired so let the ball do the running, that means pass it when possible that goes especially for you two," he said in an amused tone causing quite a few to chuckle as he pointed at Rakim and Wirtz.

"Lars you will be going on for Kevin Ehlers you've done well today. Joshua, you will be going on for Noah, I've only got one job for you to contain Weah on that flank I'd rather he shoots than send another cross into our box," He instructed with a serious gaze picking up the whiteboard from assistant coach Marcus Sorg.

Coach Baum spent the next 5 minutes going over tactics and what they should watch out for as the trainers went about checking on the players. Moukoko got a leg massage because he felt tight, and the doctors wanted to avoid him getting a cramp.

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On the other side of the field, American coach Tab Ramos stood in a tight huddle, his players gathered around him, exhausted but attentive. Ramos spoke in a firm yet reassuring tone, gesturing passionately as he outlined the adjustments needed for extra time.

"Listen closely, guys," he said, scanning each player's face to ensure he had their full attention. "We've come this far by playing our football and executing what we have practised in training. We are not a major football nation, yet they have all come this far to cheer you on so take some pride and give it all you have."

He paused briefly, giving his players a moment to breathe. "Germany is tired too—don't let them fool you. That is why for the first half it's all about maintaining our composure. Gio and Yunus, you've been great at holding possession—keep doing that. Matteo," he turned to his striker, eyes fierce with belief, "stay sharp. You're getting closer every time. Just a bit more movement off the ball and the chance will come."

"Yes, Coach!" The American players echoed; their voices infused with renewed determination.

Back at the commentary booth, Jamie Oliver and Paul Gartner offered their analysis to viewers waiting anxiously for the restart. "What an extraordinary 90 minutes of football we've witnessed here, Paul," Jamie remarked enthusiastically. "Two evenly matched teams, both resilient, both talented—this one truly deserves extra time."

Paul Gartner agreed, voice calm yet full of anticipation. "Absolutely, Jamie. And we have to highlight individual brilliance today as well. Rakim Rex with some spectacular moments, Matteo Smith scoring arguably the goal of the tournament with that breathtaking overhead kick, but let's not forget CJ dos Santos' heroics in goal for the Americans—simply outstanding."

Chapter 450 450 Awkward Situation During Extra Time

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The stadium gradually regained its voice, swelling into a wave of anticipation as the players once more took their positions on the pitch. Matteo Smith stood firmly over the ball at the centre circle, shifting his weight restlessly from foot to foot, his eyes locked forward. After confirming readiness, the referee glanced around carefully and blew his whistle sharply—extra time was underway.

"Here we go then," Jamie Oliver announced, his voice a blend of excitement and tension. "Thirty minutes to decide who moves on, and who goes home."

Smith immediately tapped the ball backwards to Giovanni Reyna, who calmly settled possession before laying it back further to Weston McKennie. Germany, cautious, maintained their compact diamond midfield shape, looking to pick up from where I left off. Rakim drifted just behind Moukoko, ready to pounce at any opening and create opportunities for his side.

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McKennie played it square to Musah, who briefly glanced up, assessing options. Kevin Schade approached carefully, wary of committing too aggressively and opening space behind. Musah, content with the tempo, patiently moved the ball out wide to Dest, who had just overlapped with Weah.

Dest immediately faced Joshua Vagnoman, freshly subbed on and decided to latch onto him as he pressured him outward. The German defender closed the space immediately, offering Dest no clear angle forward. Recognising this, Dest prudently returned the ball to McKenzie, restarting the patient cycle once again.

"This is sensible from the United States," Paul Gartner remarked thoughtfully. "Keeping their structure tight, cautious with possession—exactly as coach Ramos instructed."

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After a series of controlled passes along their backline, McKenzie spotted an opening and slid a pass forward to Reyna, who turned neatly under pressure from Angelo Stiller. Reyna shielded the ball expertly before cleverly flicking it behind him, allowing Pulisic to receive it at pace. The American winger immediately accelerated, racing toward Simon Asta with menace.

Asta quickly stepped back, keeping his stance balanced as Pulisic feinted inside, then sharply broke outside toward the touchline. His sudden burst created just enough separation to curl a dangerous cross into the box. Matteo Smith read it superbly, lunging toward the near post—but Lars Lukas Mai, freshly subbed in for Kevin Ehlers, arrived in time, heading the ball firmly clear from danger.

"Superb defending by Mai," Oliver declared appreciatively. "Already proving why coach Baum trusts him in these critical moments."

The ball fell to Rakim deep in Germany's half, who immediately attempted to initiate a quick counter. He glided forward gracefully, sidestepping Musah's energetic challenge, before threading a sharp pass into midfield, finding Florian Wirtz on the move.

Wirtz swiftly turned, eyes scanning forward as Rakim continued his run ahead. Weston McKennie quickly recognized the danger, sliding across to shadow Wirtz tightly. Instead of forcing the pass, Wirtz wisely slowed the pace, turning and distributing calmly sideways to Kevin Schade.

Schade rolled it back toward Angelo Stiller, allowing his team to reset their attacking shape and patiently wait for the Americans to lose their defensive discipline. "Both teams clearly cautious," Gartner commented knowingly. "Neither wants to be the first to make a mistake now."

"After making it this far, it's hard making that choice to risk it all on an all-or-nothing attack," Oliver commented, doing his part of the commentary of keeping the fans engaged. "Oh, Stiller decides to take the chance,"

His exclamation was spot on as, moments later, the figure of Jamie Leweling could be seen darting down the right flank as he stretched his foot out to latch onto the ball. In the next step, he brought the ball under his control just as he crossed the final third. He feinted left just as George Bello stepped up to block his path but chose to break through on the right the moment his marker took the bait.

Exploding past Bello, he nudged the ball forward, making full use of the space in-behind. Leweling sprinted hard toward the byline, lifting his gaze briefly to assess his options in the box. Rakim was already arriving at the penalty spot, dragging Chris Richards with him, while Moukoko hovered

dangerously near the six-yard area. Leweling didn't hesitate—he whipped a sharp, driven cross toward the near post.

McKenzie lunged in desperately, extending his leg fully, managing to divert the ball slightly off-course. The deflection looped into the air, spinning dangerously toward the back post. CJ dos Santos reacted instantly, shifting his feet quickly and leaping high to punch it clear just ahead of Moukoko's poised leap.

"Great anticipation from CJ dos Santos again," Oliver remarked excitedly. "He's shown remarkable composure under immense pressure today."

The punch landed safely at Mark McKenzie's feet, allowing the United States to settle possession once more. He kept the ball close, holding off Florian's determined pressing before turning and calmly distributing it back to Weston McKennie. The experienced midfielder immediately gestured for his teammates to take positions, patiently regaining their composure.

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The game took a steady turn for the next couple of minutes as both teams fought for possession and continued to test each other. In the 12th minute of extra time, Rakim controlled the pass back from Moukoko right outside the centre circle. Before any opponents could close him down, he pulled the ball back with his left foot and then kicked it toward Angelo Stiller, Germany's holding midfielder.

Tauer was also quick while controlling the ball. He stopped it with a single touch and immediately passed it towards Wirtz a few paces ahead. The latter also controlled it well before squaring it to Rakim, who had just made a run into an unmarked pocket of the space within the American half.

He quickly shrugged off the two American midfielders marking him despite how desperately they tried to hold onto his jersey retaining control of the ball.

He raised his leg, seemingly as if he was just about to pass the ball, but the next moment, he turned around with the ball glued to his boot to execute a Marseille turn. His sudden turn allowed him to break past another two defenders, leaving them in an awkward position to interfere. Without losing a second, he lifted his foot, nudging the ball forward, intending to continue his run towards the American box.

However, it was at that moment that he felt a firm tug on his jersey. He tried to shrug off the opponent's grip while continuing his run. But the opponent stubbornly held onto his shirt and didn't let him take another step with the ball. In the end, he stopped struggling and raised his hands in annoyance as he looked back at who was hanging onto him.

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Just as the whistle blew, he came face to face with Yunus, who was still holding onto his jersey as if his life depended on it. An awkward silence lingered between them, but it was quickly broken up by a few players joining, wanting to continue the match. Luckily for Yunus, he merely got away with a warning, but now they had to face a direct freekick from just outside of the box.

"This will probably be the last action of the first half of extra time, and the man of the moment is Rakim Rex," Paul Gartner commented just as Rakim closed in on the ball at an angle, "It's the moment of truth and he shoots."