

Football 471

Chapter 471 471 Saving Face

Paul Gartner's voice boomed from the commentary booth, capturing the electric moment: "Germany strikes first! Lenn Jastremski with a poacher's finish after Jamie Leweling's delightful chip. Brilliant counterattack from start to finish."

The English players exchanged quick, heated words of encouragement as Henderson thumped the ground in frustration, knowing that he could have done better. Jude Bellingham barked instructions to rally his teammates, but the Germans didn't care as they all swarmed the man of the moment, Lenn Jastremski. The fans broke out into chants and songs, with many blowing their plastic trumpets in support.

[Łódź, Poland – Stadion Widzewa Łódź | Time: 17:25 | U-20 World Cup Final | England 0 - 1 Germany]

As the celebrations finally subsided, the match resumed. England quickly restarted, urgency now etched onto their youthful faces. Mason Mount tapped the ball to Jude Bellingham, who immediately shifted play wide to Reece James. The right-back surged forward, intent on redemption after being outmanoeuvred earlier.

James exchanged a quick one-two with Bukayo Saka, bypassing Rakim Rex's hesitant defensive press. Saka's nimble feet danced past Niklas Tauer, cutting inward toward the penalty area. He teased a delicate pass to Greenwood, whose clever feint created just enough space to unleash a fierce strike toward goal.

Luca Unbehaun stretched fully, fingertips brushing the ball, tipping it over the crossbar. The English supporters surged to their feet in hope, voices rising like thunder. Eddie Hall's voice cut sharply through the tension: "Another critical save by Unbehaun! Germany's keeper is single-handedly keeping them ahead!"

Mount stepped up to the corner, lifting his arm briefly before whipping in a swerving cross. Teden Mengi powered through the crowd of defenders, rising forcefully. His header flashed narrowly wide of the right post. Relief rippled visibly through the German defenders as Unbehaun quickly organised them again.

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Germany took their time with the goal kick, subtly slowing the tempo, as completely different from the opening scene at the beginning of the match. They restarted their familiar possession game, deftly moving the ball around their opponents. Despite the clear difference in talent on paper, the clinical nature of the Germans became apparent.

It became pretty hard for them to mount a worthwhile attack as the Germans immediately constricted space with their zonal marking. This often times left them fighting for the slightest inch the moment they won the ball. The temperature on the pitch continued to increase, and judging by the players' body language showed they were starting to feel the toll.

Passes increased in sharpness as the intensity of the fans' chants continued to sound around the stadium. Tackles also became stronger with no player on the pitch daring to pull half-measures. England pushed higher up, their midfield trio tightening the noose. Declan Rice, previously sitting deeper, now shadowed Wirtz every time he drifted between the lines.

Their efforts bore fruit in the 35th minute after a moment of sloppiness from Germany. Angelo Stiller received a pass under pressure but hesitated too long under the pressure of 2 opposing defenders. He decided to bail out with a quick pass out wide, but it was too close to Mount. The Chelsea midfielder wasn't going to let the chance slip by and pounced, intercepting with an outstretched boot.

He took one touch to settle the ball under his control, and before anyone had the chance to reach, his next touch released it. His pass was low and hard, hugging the turf as it slipped into the channel behind Bella-Kotchap. Mason Greenwood was already on his track star, his studs digging into the turf as he left his man in the dust.

He sprinted in behind the German backline, eyes locked on the ball, timing immaculate. Kevin Ehlers scrambled to cut him off, but Greenwood's first touch was clean, and his second touch sent him racing into the box. Asta backtracked hard, trying to cover; however, Greenwood chopped the ball onto his left foot, shifting his weight just enough to open up an angle.

Without hesitation, he swung his foot, hitting the ball with venom, catapulting the ball towards the goal. The strike was pure—his left foot slicing cleanly through leather, sending the ball thundering toward the bottom right corner with terrifying precision. Luca Unbehaun, already in motion, flung himself full-stretch across the goal.

His frame cut through the air like a missile, arms outstretched, eyes locked on the ball. With his arms stretched out to the max, his fingers stretched out as far as possible as the ball neared. His fingertips made contact, but it wasn't enough. The ball ricocheted off Unbehaun's glove, its pace only slightly dulled as it spun across the face of the post—and in.

(GOAL!) The England supporters erupted into a wall of sound, flags waving violently, fists pumping the air. Greenwood sprinted toward the corner flag, sliding on his knees, arms wide open in Joy as his teammates quickly swarmed him. Behind him, Mount arrived first, leaping onto his back, followed by Bellingham and Saka, who screamed with unrestrained joy.

[Score: England 1 - 1 Germany | Time: 39:40]

"He buries it! Mason Greenwood with a rocket of a finish!" Paul Gartner boomed from the booth.
"England equalises! One-all! A stunning response, and we're back level at Serce Łódź!"

Eddie Hall jumped in without missing a beat. "That you striker will do great things, I tell you. His chance to goal conversion is the fourth highest in the tournament, only barely falling behind Matteo Smith and Rakim Rex."

"Indeed, we have gotten to see some of the best strikers the new generation has to offer. If not for the ridiculous numbers, Haaland managed to put up those 3 names might have been the peak." Paul intoned with a light smile as the referee motioned for the players to return to their halves.

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The restart came quickly. Lenn sent it short to Niklas Tauer, who returned it to Bella-Kotchap. The centre-back wasn't fazed by the approaching English players who charged at him like hungry wolves. He remained cool and collected, calmly spreading it wide to Simon, who had to deftly turn backwards to avoid Sancho's charge.

His spin was effective, allowing him to turn past Sancho as he hugged the byline. manoeuvring past the English winger, he sent a crisp pass to the back-tracking Jamie Leweling. The winger calmly took control of the ball using his broad shoulders and strong arms to hold England's left back Ben Chilwell off.

Mason and Declan in midfield tried to shut him down, but Jamie wasn't intimidated in the slightest. Pushing off his marker, he swung his foot, sending a chipped pass to Stiller. He jumped lightly to chest the ball down, completely shrugging off Jude's shoulder tackle. Without hesitation, he sent a weighted pass back to Noah Katterbach on the left flank.

Noah Katterbach brought Stiller's pass under control with a gentle instep touch, already scanning. James and Saka had pinched infield to choke the lane, so the left-back clipped a quick diagonal to the middle of the pitch toward Florian Wirtz between England's midfield and defence. The stadium seemed to inhale a breath of air as the attacking midfielder side stepped and an English player with a quick roulette.

Wirtz pirouetted an elegant but swift blur of green boots and white lines, sending Declan Rice the wrong way. In the same movement, he jab-rolled forward, stringing England's shape like an accordion. Mount, who had moved to recover his position, lunged in, but Wirtz coolly threaded the ball through his legs, bursting into the vacant behind him.

Conor Bradley stepped up to stop his charge, but Wirtz, who was already in motion, had a faster reaction speed than the defender. He deftly managed to manoeuvre the ball just in time to nudge it to the right, skipping past England's number 5. Teden Mengi, the other defender, debated whether to charge forward or stick to marking Lenn.

The hesitation was all Wirtz needed to make up his mind as he adjusted his footing and took aim. A second later, his foot met the ball with power, causing the leather to dent slightly before erratically rocketing toward the goal. Wirtz's strike burst from his boot like a tracer round, knuckling through the cool evening air toward the top-right corner.

Dean Henderson sprang, body fully unfurled, fingers scraping the sky. The keeper's slightest touch was enough: the ball cannoned off his glove smacked the underside of the bar with a metallic thud, and ricocheted straight down onto the goal-line. Immediately, a scramble for scraps ensued as the ball bounced on the line and out into the box.

For a moment, everyone hesitated — half-expecting a goal-line technology signal or a referee whistle. But nothing came. So, when the ball dropped down, it spun awkwardly, between legs and boots like a live grenade. Lenn Jastremski was the first to react and swung his foot, but only the side of his boot managed to clip the side of the ball.

Ben Chilwell fought off Jamie and twisted his body, trying to hook his foot around the bouncing ball. But the ball didn't go far as both he and Rakim simultaneously struck the ball. The ball took an awkward bounce to the far post, where Niklas Tauer, like a deer in headlights, found himself unmarked.

One could easily tell that he wasn't expecting the ball to go his way as he stumbled like Bambi on ice, trying to raise a foot to stop the ball. He somehow managed to knock it down with his shin guard, bringing it under his control as it bounced in front of him. Adjusting his body to the bouncing ball, he swung his foot, looking to smash the ball into the net. However, his strike was smothered brilliantly by Dean Henderson in the next moment, who took it to the face but held onto it for dear life.

Chapter 472 472 Call To Battle

[Łódź, Poland – Stadion Widzewa Łódź | Time: 42:50 | U-20 World Cup Final | England 1 - 1 Germany]

The corner flag quivered as the wind picked up slightly, swirling above the electric atmosphere. Germany had just come inches from reclaiming the lead, and the crowd could feel it—the throb of pressure rising once again. As Dean Henderson sat up on the turf, still hugging the ball, a crimson trail of blood trickled from his nose.

"Oh, Dean is bleeding," Paul exclaimed in surprise as the referee blew his whistle, bringing the proceedings to a halt. Moments later, England's medical staff could be seen sprinting onto the field with their med bags.

Dean Henderson sat upright, blood seeping from his nostrils, staining his top lip a vivid red against the bright white of his kit. The keeper's gloves were still wrapped around the ball, and for a second, it looked as though he'd try to wave off the staff. But one of the medics dropped to their knees beside him, already unzipping a pouch and pulling on fresh gloves.

The referee, clearly cautious after the intensity of the last fifteen minutes, urged calmness from everyone. Players milled about, catching their breath, with some wishing they could just head for the halftime break instead of having to wait. Luckily, they were respectful enough not to voice their intrusive thoughts as they patiently waited.

"Credit to Henderson," Eddie Hall murmured over the sound of tactical shouts. "Takes a boot to the face and still smothers that rebound. That's the kind of keeper you'd go to war with."

Paul Gartner replied, "You are right, if he doesn't stop that Wirtz shot, this whole stadium's singing a whole different song right now."

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After a minute of quick attention—nasal plugs, a splash of water, and a nod from the physio, Henderson was back on his feet. The fans behind the goal responded with applause, with even the German supporters joining in to show their sportsmanship. It took a whole five minutes before Dean was declared ready to continue with the referee deciding a drop ball would resume the game.

The referee raised a hand, dropped the ball at Henderson's feet—and play was back on. Despite time already having run over the allotted time for the first half, the fourth official held up a board signalling for an extra 5 minutes due to Dean Henderson receiving treatment.

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Dean, still with gauze visible under his nose and blood stains streaked faintly across his jersey, took a calming breath before rolling the ball short to Teden Mengi. England looked unlikely to mount a full

attack in what little time remained, but that didn't mean they'd sit back. Germany, on the other hand, showed no signs of relaxing.

Mengi received the ball with his back to Jastremski, who gave him a half-hearted press, which reminded him of his presence rather than a threat. He tapped it square to Conor Bradley, who kept it tight and simple—no risks, just control. But Germany's shape was still alive, compact, waiting to pounce on the slightest misstep.

Bradley slid it across to Declan Rice, who turned his body to shield from Wirtz, the German playmaker shadowing him with unnerving poise. Rice checked over his shoulder once, then again, before turning into space and shifting the tempo with a slick pass to Jude Bellingham.

The Borussia Dortmund star took the ball on the half-turn, his touch smooth as velvet, and immediately looked up. Sancho darted inside, pulling Asta with him, creating a brief opening on the left. Bellingham seized it. A no-look pass, rolling diagonally into the channel for Chilwell to gallop onto.

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He latched onto the pass mid-stride just before Simon Asta could get to it, as a foot race erupted between them. The English full-back's momentum gave him the upper hand as he quickly gained a yard of space. They quickly reached the side of the box, and just as Asta committed to a slide tackle, Chilwell whipped in a low cross.

It came in low and dangerous, flying across the six-yard box as a mass of bodies charged in. "Luca Unbehaun," One of the commentators exclaimed loudly as the German keeper came diving out firmly clutching the ball in his grasp.

"Unbelievable save from the German number 1," Eddie Hall commented with excitement as the keeper remained down for quite a while, eating up time. That would prove to be the last significant action of the first half, as two minutes of Germany passing the ball around ended things.

"Well, there you have it, folks, after a fierce back-and-forth battle between these two giants of the footballing world, things are still at a deadlock at the end of the first half." Paul Gartner's voice resounded through the broadcast as the players slowly trudged off towards the sidelines. "England 1:1 Germany"

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[AWAY LOCKER ROOM | GERMANY]

The clatter of boots on the tiled floor echoed as the German players filed into the away dressing room. A few dropped onto the benches, heads bowed, sweat trickling down temples and necks, shirts clinging to torsos like wet bandages. The air inside was a stew of adrenaline and musk, thick with the unspoken knowledge that this final was far from over.

Coach Peter Baum entered last, a clipboard in hand and his jaw clenched. He didn't raise his voice. He didn't need to. His presence alone commanded the room. Assistant coaches hovered near the whiteboard, but everyone's eyes were on Baum.

"Silence," he said, firmly raising his hands to capture everyone's attention. The murmuring died instantly.

He turned toward the magnetic board and snapped a magnet into the middle of the pitch. "Look. That equaliser? It happens. Greenwood made a world-class run, and Chilwell's overlap caught us sleeping. But we are Germany, not victims."

He pivoted to face another group of players, his dark eyes scanning every player. "You are Germany. You adapt. You overcome. And more than anything—Win."

He pointed at Bella-Kotchap and Ehlers. "You two—stay tighter when Bellingham drops deep. He's manipulating space to pull Florian out of position. Don't bite on decoy movements—communicate and trust your midfield screen." He paused for a second, making sure they were paying attention. "Greenwood is not a standout forward that we need to make special adjustments for, so just implement Zonal marking when we have the ball and man-to-man on their counters. And be physical, he is not to get a yard of space without paying the fee."

He turned to Stiller and Tauer. "You've done well containing their width, but now I want proactivity. Win us our space so we can operate, and when Sancho or Saka drift inward, press them before they turn."

His tone sharpened. "Jamie—when you drive at Chilwell, don't hesitate. He's aggressive and overcommits. Get him on a yellow. Use your pace but stay composed in the final ball. One clean cutback and this match flips again." Leweling nodded silently, face still flushed from the first-half effort.

Baum's eyes fell on Rakim next. "Rakim." He paused, turning to make eye contact with the winger. "You've kept Reece James on skates for the first 30 minutes, but now I need you to utilise your chances more, don't go missing on me."

Rakim nodded, beads of sweat clinging to his lashes as he used one of his towels to wipe his face. "Good, I want the wingers cutting in more and mix it up with crosses, into the box, don't be predictable." Coach Baum shifted slightly, eyes scanning the whole room now.

"And Florian," he continued, eyes landing on the creative midfielder who had an ice towel draped across the back of his neck. "Their midfield is pressing you early with Mount and Rice doubling when you drift central. So, change your rhythm. Drop deeper, let Rakim and Jamie stretch the width, then explode into the pocket. If you see Bellingham coming for the trap, drag him with you and let Angelo release it from behind."

Florian gave a small nod, flicking a glance at the board where the assistant coach had begun rearranging magnets into a transitional shape. A subtle tweak created a staggered 4-2-3-1, which prompted the attacking quartet to move as a unit. This left a slight gap behind them that was meant to lure the opposing attacking midfielders to step into those areas for the defensive midfielders to spring the trap.

(clap clap clap) "Listen up," He exclaimed, garnering everyone's attention. "We all know what we need to do, so all I ask from you is to go out there and execute. And score some damn goals so we can end this in 90 minutes."

Chapter 473 473 No Hair = Lost Powers

[SECOND HALF – KICKOFF | Stadion Widzewa Łódź | Time: 45:00 | England 1 – 1 Germany]

The whistle pierced through the electric hum of the stadium, and the second half was underway. The floodlights cast silver beams across the pitch, and both teams emerged from the tunnel with new energy, sharpened by the words exchanged in their locker rooms. Germany looked more compact in their structure now—Wirtz starting a little deeper, and both wingers higher, stretching the field to open up more attacking angles.

England was still in their 4-3-3 formation, but it was narrower with both Saka and Sancho starting at the sides of the centre circle instead of out wide. (Peeeeep,) Mason Greenwood kicked things off following the referee's whistle with a short but sweet pass back to Jude in midfield.

"Welcome to the viewers who are just tuning in to this under-20 World Cup final, between Germany and England, the score is level at 1:1, and the second half promises to be action-packed as these two teams chase a gold medal." Paul Gartner's voice resounded throughout the livestream broadcast as the 3 Lions moved the ball around their ranks.

Jude Bellingham and Declan Rice had their work cut out for them as the German attacking quartet shot forward, resembling hungry wolves in their chase. Ben Chilwell received a sloppy pass from Declan, who panicked under a combined charge from Wirtz and Jamie, forcing the English left back to hastily step up and control the ball.

"What a hospital ball from Declan, but Chilwell remains composed and spins out of trouble with a nimble roulette." Eddie Hall exclaimed just as the left-back came to stop from his spin, a yard away from Jamie Leweling. Not holding onto the ball, he calmly played it out to Mount, who had just stepped into a pocket of space just ahead of the halfway line.

Mount barely had the ball under his control when he felt Niklas Tauer's robust body on his back, pressing high and hard. The Chelsea midfielder tried to roll away, but Tauer stayed glued to him like a shadow. A slight tug on his jersey out of the sight of the referee, a quick toe poke and the ball was loose. Before Mount could even steady himself, Tauer pounced on the ball, shifting it over to Stiller.

The German holding midfielder wanted to pass the ball forward, but the shape of the front four was disjointed from their chase. So instead of risking a pass, he nimbly turned back with the ball glued at his feet, bodying Declan back. Retaining possession, he deftly knocked the ball back to Bella-Kotchap, who received it with the calm of a seasoned pro.

Now it was Germany's turn to control a spell of possession, and they did so expertly with their passing game. Using their wingbacks and full-backs' movements up and down the flank, they continued to stretch the English side. Wirtz continued popping up in pockets of space created by their movements, playing one or two-touch passes to connect with his teammates.

However, it was the two holding midfielders, consisting of Niklas Tauer and Angelo Stiller, who controlled the flow of the German side. Stiller controlled the pace, and Tauer acted as an enforcer using his physicality to carve out space. They managed to steadily work the ball up the field, pressuring their opponents into the final third.

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In the 52nd minute, they managed to carve out a chance when Tauer nodded the ball to the left side after an aerial duel with Mount. Rakim appeared in front of Reece James, chesting the ball down in the next moment as he used his back to hold him off. A shimmy of the shoulder and a feint outward was all he needed to get his marker to bite before spinning inwards.

Like a sports car, he accelerated from 0-100 in less than a second towards the box. Reece James gave chase, but Rakim was already two steps ahead, his burst too sudden, too violent. The crowd rose in a wave as the German winger surged toward the top corner of the box, cutting in on his right foot.

Teden Mengi sprinted to close down the angle from the central position, but it was already too late. Rakim had already opened his body, his right foot wrapped around the ball with power and let it fly. The strike sizzled through the night air—low, hard, and curling toward the bottom far post.

Dean Henderson saw it late but reacted with brilliant instinct, hurling himself horizontally like a man possessed. With fingertips extended, he pushed the ball wide at full stretch. The shot had the pace and venom to beat most keepers, but Henderson did just enough to keep it away from his goal.

"WHAT A SAVE!" Eddie Hall roared into his mic. "Dean Henderson, again, denying Rakim Rex—this time with a world-class save! That looked destined for the net!"

The German fans clutched their heads, groaning in disbelief. Rakim stood near the edge of the box, hands on hips, lips pursed in frustration as he shook his head. "Don't beat yourself up, Rex, just try again," Lenn said from the side as he patted his shoulder. "Though kinda scary how he managed to reach it, let alone save that shot from his angle."

"Yeah, it must be the hair; ever since I got rid of my dreads, I lost my superpowers." Rakim retorted with a light smile.

"If almost breaking that right back's ankles means you have lost your powers, I need to get me some of that," Lenn retorted before jogging to the penalty spot to get ready for the corner.

Rakim joined suit, taking a spot at the edge of the box, ready to make a run to the area at the back post. "You're not getting away this time," Reece said from his side, placing a hand on his hip to keep him close.

"You think you can keep up this time?" Rakim asked him as a light smile appeared on his face, the whole time his gaze never left Jaimie, who was setting up for the corner kick. "Though, should you worry about that guy over there, he looks like he is ready to run through someone to score,"

Following his gaze, Reece's eyes landed on the tall Niklas Tauer, who could be seen pacing back and forth around the penalty spot like a mad bull. Mount and Bellingham tried to keep him under control, but he wasn't having any of that. At the slightest attempt from either defender to hold him, he would loudly exclaim at the referee in broken English.

"(Fweet) Keep your hands to yourselves," The referee exclaimed before signalling for the corner kick to be taken. Just as Reece looked over at the rowdy trio, Rakim silently moved back towards the edge of the 18-yard box.

"Reece, pay attention," One of the English defenders exclaimed, but it was already too late. Jamie was already making his run-up to the ball, and by the time he was just a yard from the winger, Rakim also began to move.

He sent James a light smile before taking two quick side steps to the left, before accelerating to the area around the back post. Leweling's left boot swept through the ball with a vicious whip. It started out toward the penalty spot, then bent late, arrowing to the back-post corridor just as Rakim arrived in full stride.

He took a step with his left leg, his muscles coiling like a spring before he catapulted forward and up into the air. Teden Mengi had jumped up from his position as he did his best to hold back Lenn. Rakim's momentum was too strong, allowing him to rise two heads above him.

He met the ball with his forehead as his neck was craned backwards to still catch it. Thunk!—A meaty crack resounded as the ball left his head and rocketed through the floodlit air toward the upper-left angle. Dean Henderson back-pedalled, limbs splayed, but the header carried too much venom.

With a dull rustle of nylon, the ball ripped into the top corner, shook the net, and cannoned back out again behind the goal line. The fourth official's watch vibrated; the referee stabbed both arms toward the halfway line. "Goooooaaaaaalllllll!" Gasoline was immediately poured on the German supporters, and the ball impacting the back of the net was the exact spark they needed.

"Rakim Rex is once again the man of the hour." Paul Gartner's magnetic voice resounded as Rakim sprinted to the corner flag, performing his signature Griddy celebration.

Chapter 474 474 Wirtz

[SECOND HALF – 55: 22 | Stadion Widzewa Łódź | Time: 45:00 | England 1 – 2 Germany]

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The VIP suite quivered on its hydraulic stilts as Rakim's thunder of a header replayed for the third time on the big screen. Ben, who had jumped up the moment Rakim scored, now calmed down and took his seat. "That's my boy over there," he boomed, half-laugh, half-roar.

"I never expected to see him score with his head here. Honestly, I can't remember the last time I saw him score with his head." Joe said as a light smile appeared on his face, enhancing his rugged features.

"His last goal using his head was for Celtic in the match against Kilmarnock F.C. They won 3:1." A little girl's voice resounded from the seats behind them, forcing the two men to turn in surprise.

"Oh, it's you, Anna-Marie, I almost thought you wouldn't make it," May exclaimed from a couple of seats next to Ben and Joe as she had instantly recognised the little girl's voice. "Oh, and Hello Mr Wolfgang,"

"Hello, Ladies, I see you have brought more people to cheer on our team," Wolfgang responded with a light nod before stretching out his hand to introduce himself to Joe and Ben.

"This is Ben, my husband, and our family friend Joe," Lis said as she motioned to her husband, who had now fully turned to pay attention to the two newcomers. "And this over here is my daughter Emma,"

For the next few minutes, the two groups spent it introducing themselves as little Anna-Marie jumped into the seat next to May. Anna-Marie swung her legs beneath the padded seat, clutching her little match-program like a hymnbook. "I told Papa Rakim would score before the hour," she whispered to May, loud enough that the adults smiled.

Wolfgang—salt-and-pepper hair, smart linen jacket—shook hands with Ben and Joe. "Herr Rex, a pleasure. We met the ladies in the semi-final. My daughter insisted we fly back for the final—she's convinced Germany will lift the cup."

Ben chuckled. "Smart kid Rakim trains for these moments." Joe's comms crackled: an all-clear from the lower concourse. He gave Wolfgang a quick once-over—VIP lanyard, background verified—then relaxed a fraction.

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England restarted the game quickly. A crisp triangle from Rice to Bellingham, then to Saka, drew the game over to the left English left flank. He immediately got to work on the flank, performing a few step-overs and attempting some sprints down the flank, keeping Asta honest. Asta stayed tight, mirroring Saka's movements with every shift of weight, every feint.

Saka tried a drop of the shoulder to cut inside, but Asta wasn't buying it. He jabbed out a foot, poking the ball out for a throw-in near the halfway line. Small cheers erupted from the German supporters clustered behind the dugout.

Germany's bench rose slightly, Baum clapping twice with his hands over his head. "Stay disciplined!" he barked. "Keep our shape." England reset with the throw-in, bringing it back through Reece James, who switched the ball with a curling diagonal to the opposite side.

Chilwell collected Reece James's switch pass on the bounce, cushioning it deftly with his instep and letting it roll forward into stride. Jamie Leweling closed the distance, forcing Chilwell to hesitate. England's left-back feinted a quick drive down the line before cutting inside and sliding a pass to Mason Mount, who peeled off his marker between the lines.

Mount took the ball on the half-turn, scanning forward. Greenwood made a diagonal dart between Ehlers and Bella-Kotchap, while Sancho lingered wider on the left. Mount ignored both and instead shuffled the ball laterally to Bellingham, who was already in motion.

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Bellingham let the ball roll across his body and drove forward, shrugging off a brief challenge from Stiller. Just outside the arc, Angelo tracked back and dropped a shoulder into Bellingham's side—not enough to foul, but enough to knock him off rhythm. Tauer stepped in next, toe-poking the ball away with surgical precision before passing quickly to Wirtz.

Germany sprang into transition. Wirtz immediately turned and threaded a ball down the left channel where Rakim had already turned on the jets. Teden Mengi gave chase, Chilwell gave chase, but Rakim reached the ball first, dragging it along the sideline with the outside of his boot before cutting in hard.

Declan Rice slid in to cover the zone ahead of the penalty area, but Rakim adjusted mid-stride, dragging the ball behind his planted leg with a Rivelino elastico. Just as Greece overcommitted, he slotted the ball through his legs, but he didn't get far as a pull by Mengi on his shoulder sent him tumbling to the ground.

The referee's whistle rang sharply across the pitch. The moment Rakim's body hit the turf, hands flung wide in protest, a collective roar surged from the German bench and their travelling supporters. Coach Baum barked at the fourth official, pointing emphatically toward the field.

"That's a yellow, easy!" he snapped, voice barely audible over the din. But the referee was already jogging over, hand raised—not with a card, but to signal a free kick right outside the area.

Rakim sat up, a flicker of pain sourcing through his shoulder, but it quickly subsided after a moment. "You good, bro?" Wirtz asked a few moments later as he held a hand out to Rakim to help him up. "Yeah, I'm alright, just a little banged up,"

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The free kick was placed just inches outside the penalty box, slightly to the left of centre—perfect for a right-footed player to curl it toward the far post. Rakim and Wirtz stood behind the ball with Rakim set up to take it with his left and Wirtz ready to curl it to the far corner. The England wall took shape, Chilwell, Rice, Greenwood, and Mengi lining up with arms locked, faces hard and unreadable.

The crowd at Stadion Widzewa Łódź fell into a breathless hush. Rakim and Wirtz conferred softly, boots scuffing the chalk line just outside the box. Henderson crouched low between the posts, barking instructions as the wall shuffled nervously, trying to cover both the curler and the driven shot. A ripple

of tension ran through the players—everyone knew this was a moment that could swing the final. The referee blew his whistle.

Rakim took a stuttered run-up, looking to swing in with his left foot, and Wirtz got in motion almost at the same time, making a disguised run-up. Two steps from the ball, Rakim suddenly accelerated, but instead of kicking the ball, he jumped over it and sprinted past the wall, unsettling them. The wall hesitated on what to do, but it was already too late as a second later, Wirtz smacked the ball with as much power and curve as he could muster.

The ball dipped and swerved viciously through the air, clearing the jumping wall by mere inches. Henderson's eyes widened as he shifted left—too late. The strike was too pure, too venomous. The ball curled inside the far post, grazing the side netting with a whisper before slamming into the back of the net.

"GOAL!" The stadium exploded—half in celebration, half in despair. German fans threw their arms in the air, hugging, and shouting, while England's section fell silent. Florian Wirtz sprinted toward the corner flag, fingers pointing skyward, Rakim charging behind him with a wide grin and both arms raised. They collided in a chest bump that sent Wirtz staggering back, laughing.

"Florian Wirtz, with a moment of magic!" Paul Gartner exclaimed barely audible over the cheering fans. "And what a routine between him and Rakim Rex! Germany 3, England 1 in 59 minutes and change!" On the sideline, Coach Baum punched the air, his clipboard clattering to the turf. Assistant coaches swarmed him in elation.

Chapter 475 475 Electric Touches

[SECOND HALF – 60: 22 | Stadion Widzewa Łódź | Time: 45:00 | England 3 – 1 Germany]

Keith Downing, England's U-20 coach, could be seen barking instructions at his squad, which looked stunned as they watched the German team celebrate their recent goal. "Jamal and Phil, three minutes!" he exclaimed as he glanced at the group of boys warming up at the side of the field.

"James, your thoughts," He asked his assistant coach as a light scowl appeared face. Nothing has been going right since Rakim scored that header, which came out of the blue.

"Wirtz and Angelo Stiller are our real problem. Rakim's work on the field is so dazzling that the work they do to keep their team's pace goes unnoticed. However, each time they launched an effective attack or counter, one of them was pulling the strings." James calmly analysed, raising a hand to push up the rim of his glasses.

"Musiala should unlock that defence, and Phil should come in handy unlocking that left flank, which should loosen up some pressure on Saka on the right." Keith calmly analysed, just as Greenwood passed the ball back to Mount, restarting the game in the 61st minute.

"You thinking of taking Greenwood off too?" James asked just as their team managed to work the ball up the left flank. Jadon Sancho's movement had become too predictable for Asta, making it far too easy for the German right to contain the winger.

This time was no different as Sancho attempted a stop-and-go, which worked in getting by Asta, but the right-back's agility was top-notch. Sancho barely managed to get a meter from the defender before he came sliding in. His form was a textbook mix of power and control, doing just enough to scoop the ball up with his right foot, sending the ball out for a throw-in.

"Maybe, but that number 3 is living in Sancho's head rent-free, and each time he stops him, he becomes more predictable to him," Keith commented with a light frown, wondering how this young player would develop in the future. "His game is still too one-dimensional right now."

"Indeed, shall we get the substitution on? I don't see him breaking through that rut now." James questioned, just as the ball once again went out of play for an England goal kick after a long-range attempt from Rakim from the left flank.

"Sure, have Jamal come over for a short chat." He responded as James went over to call the two players over.

Moments later, little Jamal, standing at 1.84 meters, stood next to him. He wore the three Lions number 11 that looked slightly baggy on him, especially with the white Under Armour long-sleeve compression shirt he wore underneath. He looked youthfully at just 16 with a head of dark short curls as he buzzed with excitement, ready to play despite their team losing.

"When you go, I want you to play the CAM role, have Jude and Declan play in behind. The Germans holding defenders have been too comfortable so far. I need you to unlock that defence and create some chances." He told the kid in front of him, looking into his brown eyes for any hint of hesitation, but he found none.

"Don't worry, Coach, I'll get us back into this fight," He responded with a bright smile as he proceeded to lightly punch the older man on the shoulder. "Haha, that's the spirit, son, now go get on, you have some work to do."

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"Would you look at that, Paul, Keith Downing is finally making a substitution," Eddie Hall spoke into the Mic as the fourth official raised up a board showing a red 17 and a green 7, signalling Phil Foden would be replacing Jadon Sancho. That wasn't all, as a second later a red number 6 appeared with a green 11 signalling Mason Mount's exit for Jamal Musiala.

"Honestly, it's about time he made some sort of move if he wants any chance at a comeback," Paul Garner's voice resounded a second later as the two players jogged to their positions.

"Musiala and Foden are on," Eddie Hall confirmed as the camera panned to the touchline, showing both players crossing into the field with confident strides. "You'd expect some fire and finesse from that pair—Phil has shown real versatility in the tournament, and Jamal with those deceptive touches and that unique burst."

Paul Garner nodded in agreement. "Foden will look to operate just inside from that left flank, giving Asta a new look, while Jamal, that boy's a wild card. You give him space around the box, and he'll make magic. But can he pull it off against this disciplined German core?"

As the game resumed, Germany maintained their compact 4-2-3-1 shape. Angelo Stiller, calm and controlled, dictated tempo like a metronome while Wirtz scanned for gaps between England's back line.

But the introduction of Musiala brought an instant shift. In the 67th minute, after a short exchange with Declan Rice, Musiala dropped deep to receive the ball near the halfway line, turning swiftly on the half-turn to burst past Niklas Tauer. The crowd erupted with renewed energy.

"Oh! That's why you bring on Jamal!" Paul exclaimed, just as Musiala slipped a weighted through-ball into the path of Saka, who darted inside from the right. The ball was carved through the German midfield triangle with surgical precision.

Saka came alive as he took a soft first touch, dragging Noah Katterbach wide with a quick feint. The German left back bit, and he cut the ball back across the edge of the box. Jude Bellingham stepped over it—a dummy that fooled even Bella-Kotchap—and let it roll into the path of Foden.

Foden struck the ball first time with his left foot, aiming for the far-right side of the goal. However, since it was his first touch of the ball, he had not quite gotten a feeling for the ball yet and was struck with too much power. Unbehaun, who had moved to the left side of his goal in anticipation of a shot, now stood rooted, unable to react to the shot.

Luck was on his side, though, as the ball loudly impacted the right post and ricocheted out, spinning away from the goalmouth and rolling harmlessly toward the corner flag.

"Aaaaand that's the post rattled!" Eddie Hall exclaimed, voice rising with the surge of crowd noise. "Foden nearly wrote himself into this game's folklore with his first touch!"

Paul Garner followed up, "That was inches away. You can feel the shift in momentum. Germany needs to steady the ship."

Back on the pitch, Unbehaun exhaled sharply, then jogged over to retrieve the ball, patting the post with a quick gesture of thanks. Meanwhile, coach Baum signalled for a few players to warm up as he also wanted to make some changes. The Germans had been rattled for the first time in over twenty minutes, which was a sign of things to come for the English contingent.

Musiala got right into the midst of things from the moment he stepped onto the field. He was like a fish in water amid the midfield battle, gliding past challenges using little over 3 quick touches. Almost immediately, the England side's ball retention picked up as Tauer and Stiller struggled to contain him.

[69]

He got his chance in the 69th minute after Bellingham's through ball sent Foden running to the left corner flag. The winger managed to catch the ball just before it could go out for a goal kick, but quickly faced an encirclement from Asta and Jamie, blocking his path forward. Reacting on instinct upon seeing Jamal appear in a pocket of space behind Jamie, he didn't hesitate and chipped the ball over the German winger.

Jamal, who was around the corner of the 18-yard box, lightly jumped up to chest the ball down, doing his best to hold Tauer back. The tall German defensive midfielder was mindful not to commit a foul; thus was a step too late to react when the ball hit the ground as the second it did, Musiala disappeared.

His right foot had deftly hooked the ball, dragging it backwards through Tauer's open legs. In the same movement, his left pivoted, and he snaked around his marker, latching onto the ball from the other side. A shooting lane immediately opened up as he wound up for a shot, prompting Arnel Bella-Kotchap to lung in front of him.

The expected shot never arrived, though, as Jamal's right foot merely lightly nudged the ball to his left, followed by a stronger tap to his right. His momentum exploded with the ball, and he was through. Now in the box, he continued forward as he sized up the charging Luca Unbehaun.

Chapter 476 476 Heart Of Bravery

[SECOND HALF – 55: 22 | Stadion Widzewa Łódź | Time: 70:00 | England 1 – 3 Germany]

The crowd held its breath as Luca came charging out, arms spread wide, and stance lowered as Musiala got closer. He took one breath as the world around him seemed to come into focus, and then he struck. He opened his body to shape for a curled shot to the far post—but instead, clipped it low and quick at the near side.

Unbehaun had already committed, leaning toward the expected trajectory. His cleats skidded as he tried to correct himself, but it was too late. The ball zipped under his arm and smacked the back of the net. "GOOOAAAL! MUSIALA!" Eddie Hall's voice cracked through the broadcast, nearly drowned by the roar inside the stadium. "England are BACK in this final! The 70th minute—this game is alive!"

Paul Garner let out a whistle. "The young lion roars. That finish was cold. Calm. Calculated. That's why the big clubs are already circling him. Jamal is made for the big moments, where the words of his U-13 coach."

"And what a big moment it is, Jamal Musiala, a name to remember as England glimpses a chance at raising that cup at the end of the match." Eddie's voice resounded through the speakers of the viewers. "Ladies and Gentlemen, if you are just tuning, the score stands at 2-3 in favour of the German side."

Musiala slid on his knees toward the corner flag, arms spread wide, his face alight with adrenaline and joy. Declan and Jude piled on first, followed by Saka and Foden. The bench was up. Keith Downing pumped a fist on the sideline while James animatedly clapped his hands in joy.

On the German bench, Coach Baum stood frozen for a moment, then clapped slowly before barking orders toward his midfield. "Konzentrieren! Weiter! Don't drop your heads!"

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[74]

The game had turned more tumultuous following Jamal's goal, especially with the midfield battle intensifying. Declan Rice and Jude Bellingham began pressing higher, squeezing Angelo Stiller's time on the ball. Musiala floated between the lines, constantly dragging Niklas Tauer out of position.

From the German backline, Bella-Kotchab barked instructions, motioning for Wirtz to drop deeper and help with the build-up. But the England press was suffocating now—waves of white shirts surged forward, fueled by belief and roaring fans. From the German backline, Bella-Kotchab barked instructions, motioning for Wirtz to drop deeper and help with the build-up.

But the England press was suffocating now—waves of white shirts surged forward, fuelled by belief and roaring fans. Rakim, who had gone quiet for a few minutes, came alive in the 76th. Receiving a switch of play from Stiller near the halfway line, he took on Declan Rice in a one-on-one. The crowd hushed as Rakim dropped his shoulder, then danced the ball through a Hocus Pocus move before flicking it around the side and accelerating forward like a slingshot.

Declan spun around, trying to recover, but Rakim was already gone, gliding past the centre circle with speed as his shadow cut long under the stadium lights. Seeing Teden Mengi stepping up to block his path forward, Rakim cut back towards the left flank with a swift Ronaldo chop. Diagonally charging up the field, he quickly came face to face with Reece James, who was side-stepping, angling his body to show him outward.

Reece James readied himself, his frame low and arms tucked, ready to pounce. He hasn't been able to convincingly stop him throughout the match, but he had been studying throughout, and he finally felt ready. Thus, he didn't bite at Rakim's feint inwards as he clocked the slight tilt of his left shoulder. The winger attempted a couple of step-overs as he continued to advance, but none of them made Reece nervous.

He bided his time despite feeling the rising tension all around him as they neared his box, teammates shouting instructions for him to step up or to stand his ground. But he couldn't hear any of that as his mind was now fully focused. He spotted his moment just after Rakim finished another step-over, only to scoop the ball to the left with the inside of his right foot.

Reece didn't jump that way but stood his ground, and in the next moment, it appeared the cut to the right turned into a reverse elastico. Without hesitation, he jumped forward with his foot outstretched, cleanly hitting the ball, breaking it free from Rakim's control. "Crucial interception from Reece James, and here comes the counter," Paul Gartner exclaimed over the cheering England fans just as Reece sent a quick pass forward to Jude.

[79]

Jude Bellingham barely had to adjust his stride as the ball zipped toward him. He brought it under control with a sublime first touch and immediately pivoted on the half-turn, evading Niklas Tauer, who lunged in late and missed. "Look at Jude go!" Eddie Hall cried as Bellingham surged forward, eyes scanning, heart thumping.

Greenwood dropped deep to link up, dragging Bella-Kotchop out of shape. At the same time, Saka darted inside, taking Ehlers with him and cracking open a lane down the left. Foden was already tearing into that space like a man with destiny breathing down his neck.

Jude didn't hesitate in sending a piercing diagonal through ball, splitting the German midfield with scalpel-like precision, landing perfectly at Foden's feet in stride. Foden's first touch was velvet, cushioning the pass as he turned into space. The German defenders scrambled to recover. Asta tried to close the gap, but Foden had already shifted the ball with a tight outside-of-the-boot flick, dragging the play further left.

With the ball now firmly at his feet and momentum behind him, Foden took one more glance toward the box. Greenwood was peeling toward the penalty spot, Saka was crashing the far post, and Musiala, just behind the front line, was making a late run toward the edge of the area. Asta stepped up to meet Foden, but it was too late.

He sliced a perfectly weighted pass into the half-space just outside the six-yard box, threading it between Ehlers and Bella-Kotchap. Greenwood managed to lose Bella-Kotchapin for a second in the scramble with a deft piece of footwork, and that was enough. One touch to settle the ball, and he was staring down the barrel of the gun with a panicked Luca Unbehaun staring down the muzzle.

This should have been a make-or-break moment for him, but suddenly Luca seemed larger than life with that ferocious stare as he came charging forward. Gritting his teeth, Greenwood swung his right foot through the ball with everything he had. It wasn't a delicate finish. It wasn't a placed curler. It was power—pure, violent power—driven high and straight toward the goal like a cannon shot from a man determined to rip through the net.

Luca Unbehaun didn't flinch. He sprang from his line like a sprung trap, throwing his body into the oncoming rocket. The ball flew straight at him, but with such velocity, it looked destined to rip through any obstacle. (Thud) It crashed against his left shoulder, the impact sending him flying backwards as the crowd gasped in shock.

The ball ricocheted up into the air, spinning wildly, and cleared the bar by a wide margin, much to the German fans' joy. They had felt their hearts stop the moment Greenwood appeared at the end of the ball and could only now breathe a sigh of relief.

"Unbehaun again!" Eddie Hall shouted. "That's a save made of iron! Greenwood absolutely lashed it, but Luca stood tall—what a stop!"

Paul Garner cut in, breathless, "That save right there is one he will want to remember for quite some time to come. If anyone wasn't convinced of why this young man is Coach Baum's first-choice keeper, that save right there should be the end of the conversation."

"You're right, he's definitely got the heart to be guarding his nation's goal, even if it is just the under-20 team." Eddie Hall intoned with an exasperated smile as the German keeper could be seen chewing out his defenders as his right hand clutched his left shoulder.

Greenwood stared after the ball, shoulders heaving, a cocktail of disbelief and frustration boiling under his breath. He'd caught it perfectly. Anyone else in between the sticks, and that would have been in. Foden ran over and patted his back, nodding. "Keep your head up, bro. He's not stopping the next one," he muttered.

Chapter 477 477 StarBoy (2)

[SECOND HALF – 82:22 | Stadion Widzewa Łódź | Time: 70:00 | England 1 – 3 Germany]

[82]

The stadium was at a fever pitch now. England's corner was awarded, and Phil Foden jogged over to take it with a burning intensity in his eyes. The chants from the England fans surged with hope, clashing against the roars of the German contingent. Teden Mengi signalled to the near post. Conor Bradley hovered around the back. Greenwood, still breathing heavily, shook the frustration out of his shoulders and readied himself again.

Foden raised his arm and whipped in the corner—a sharp, in-swinging ball with venom and pace. It dipped around the penalty spot as bodies jumped into the air, rising high to meet it. Declan Rice got the faintest of flicks, redirecting the ball toward the back post with a subtle glance off his forehead.

The redirection threw the German defence momentarily off balance; however, the worries quickly disappeared as Noah Katterbach, guarding the far post, headed the ball out. It flew out towards the left side of the box, where Musiala and Rakim could be seen chasing after it. Both of them jumped into the air, with Rakim managing to come out on top, allowing him to head the ball out for a throw-in.

The resulting throw did not result in much as the German defence held strong, with Kevin Ehlers managing to wrestle control of the ball from Greenwood. The defender did not even think about it before booting the ball up the field with force, relieving his team's pressure. This reignited the positional battle as the midfielders did their best to keep their opposition at bay.

[84]

Coach Baum could no longer hesitate and called for a substitution after a long-range attempt from Angelo Stiller sent the ball kissing the stands. Yannik Engelhardt came on to replace Wirtz, allowing him to rest after 80+ minutes of hard work. Jan Thielmann and Lars Mai came on to inject some energy into the German defence, with Lars replacing the tired Kevin Ehlers. Simon Asta left the stage for the first time in this tournament, giving way to Jan.

Keith Downing, England's U-20 coach, also took the chance to sub-Greenwood off for the burly Rhian Brewster. The young striker was a classic target man with a quick first step and an impressive finishing efficiency.

With the substitutions made and new energy coursing through both sides, the tempo spiked once again. Rhian Brewster clapped his hands and barked instructions the moment he stepped on the pitch, rallying

the England frontline like a man on a mission. He positioned himself between Bella-Kotchap and Mai, ready to bully them if need be.

Germany, now with fresh legs in Engelhardt and Thielmann, tucked into a tighter midfield block looking to choke off England's momentum and see out the clock. But England wasn't done as they continued to up the tempo, especially Jude Bellingham. He was everywhere, lunging into tackles like an enraged beast and stringing passes together that allowed Jamal to manoeuvre.

He tracked back to help Declan Rice recover possession after a poor German clearance, then immediately burst forward after receiving the return pass from Musiala.

[85]

Jude Bellingham surged into the final third like a man possessed, brushing past Niklas Tauer with a deft shoulder drop and quick touch before laying the ball off to Saka, who was hugging the right touchline. Saka controlled the ball with the outside of his boot and squared up Noah Katterbach. The young Arsenal hopeful feinted inside, then darted outside in a flash, dragging the ball along the line before cutting it back across the box low and hard.

The ball flashed past Brewster and bounced off Bella-Kotchap's shin, landing perfectly in the path of Foden at the edge of the box. The winger had just lost Jan and didn't hesitate in swinging his foot, tearing a powerful shot to the top left corner.

"(thud) The post comes to the rescue of the Germans once again," Paul Garner's voice resounded as the ball banged off a startled Lars, but Luca was quick enough to pounce on the loose ball, holding onto it tightly. "What more must they do to break this German goal?"

As the commentators did their job of entertaining the viewers, Luca remained down milking as much time as he could, much to the annoyance of the English player. When he finally did get up, he calmly walked to the edge of his box with the ball held in his right hand. He didn't play the ball, though, but proceeded to give instructions like a conductor directing his marching band.

"Camon now let's play," The referee shouted from the side, only to receive a startled nod as if the goalkeeper had just now remembered he still held onto the ball. "Ja," He shouted before calmly dropping the ball to the ground and throwing a thumbs up to the ref.

He waited for Brewster to get closer before booting the ball up the right flank with force. The minutes quickly bled away like raindrops down a windowpane as the battle from both teams intensified. England continued to press while Germany strategically retreated after offering enough resistance.

[90]

Their effort finally paid off as Declan Rice intercepted a loose pass and immediately fired it to Jude Bellingham, who was lurking just outside the final third. Jude turned into space, glanced left, and slipped a sharp pass to Musiala, who performed a quick Messi-esque double touch to snake in between Yannik Engelhardt and Niklas Tauer.

Angelo Stiller was the last line standing before him and the German defensive line, but he knew he would make it as he felt a powerful tug on his jersey. Yannik tug yanked Musiala off balance, just as Stiller stepped across to impede him. Musiala staggered, but he didn't fall. With incredible awareness, he toe-poked the ball forward just before the contact fully knocked him off his rhythm, straight into the path of Saka, who came cutting from the side of the box.

Saka barely broke stride as the ball rolled perfectly into his path, his first touch guiding it into his stride as if the pass had been scripted for him alone. Bella-Kotchap lunged across, legs outstretched, and Lars Mai barrelled toward the near post in a desperate attempt to cover—but it was too late.

Saka wrapped his left foot around the ball, curling it low with precision and venom toward the far post. Luca Unbehaun threw himself across the goalmouth, fingertips stretched to the limit. He didn't get there, though, and the net rippled a second later.

"GOOOOAAAL!!! BUKAYO SAKA!!! IT'S THREE-THREE!!!" Eddie Hall's voice soared above the stadium noise. "ENGLAND HAVE DONE IT! IN THE DYING MOMENTS OF REGULATION TIME!"

"England rises from the grave!" Paul Garner roared. "Just when you think they're down, these young lions breathe life back into this final! It's Arsenal's Star Boy at the end of a collective struggle that gives them hope"

Saka raced to the corner flag, sliding on his knees with both fists clenched, eyes to the heavens. Musiala caught up first, grabbing him in an embrace as the rest of the team descended on them, piling in with screams of joy and disbelief. The German players stood frozen. Coach Baum gritted his teeth, his jaw tightening as he barked for composure, but none of the boys really paid attention.

Chapter 478 478 Knock Out Punch

[SECOND HALF – 82:22 | Stadion Widzewa Łódź | Time: 90:00 +4 | England 1 – 3 Germany]

[90+1]

The equaliser detonated across the pitch like a thunderclap, sending England's bench into delirium and plunging the German side into a momentary haze. A stunned silence fell over the German supporters

while the English fans roared louder than ever, their chants echoing around the walls of Stadion Widzewa Łódź. The players looked to the sideline, gasping for guidance, their legs weary, and lungs scorched.

But the match didn't pause for breath. If anything, it grew more frenzied. England pushed forward again straight from kick-off, emboldened by Saka's leveller, while Germany tried to wrestle back control through quick touches and tactical discipline. The final minutes of added time resembled warfare more than football, as no one could afford to give away the ball easily.

Players on both sides collapsed into last-ditch tackles, boots scraped studs against calves, and sleeves clung to drenched arms. Rice and Engelhardt traded hard fouls, Jamal Musiala was floored and back up within seconds, and even the referee was hoarse from shouting. He blew his whistle more during added time than through the entire match as he handed out quite a few yellow cards.

It did not discourage the players, though, as chaos became the law now. With every clearance and counter, every whistle and slip, the stadium swelled into a storm. Fans continued shouting, cheering and booing like gladiators straight out of Roman times. But amid the madness, as the final minute of added time ticked as Noah wrestled the ball free from Saka down the left flank before sending it down the line to Rakim.

[90+4]

He took control of the ball just a couple of yards before the centre line, doing his best to stay upright despite Declan Rice's best attempt to nip at his heels. He flicked the ball inwards to Angelo for a quick one-two as he rounded Rice from the outside, perfectly receiving the ball despite his tiered gasps. His light green eyes seemed to glow, resembling a hungry tiger who would lose sight of anything and everything once it looked in on its prey.

A faint, almost invisible golden path seemed to illuminate his way forward, teasing him to grasp it. Common sense told him that going down the wing would be more efficient, but his body subconsciously followed the winding golden path. Cutting inward with a deft chop of his right foot was just in time to dodge a risky slide tackle from Rice.

Rakim stumbled as Rice managed to clip his stud but used his hand to push himself up as he dragged the ball behind him with the sole of his boot before springing up with a flick that sent it rolling into a pocket of space near the halfway circle. Jude came at him with a burst of energy, eyes wide, but Rakim, fighting off exhaustion, kept his composure. With barely a breath to spare, he rolled the ball sideways using a lunging inside drag, then reversed into a La Croqueta that glided past Jude's outstretched leg.

The German crowd screamed as Rakim had gotten past the halfway line and still carried the ball. He couldn't hear anyone shout, as all that was on his mind was following after the golden fog that continued to move as the play developed. His instincts told him that it was his most likely chance at scoring, and he trusted it.

He spotted Musiala at the side of his vision, and he knew he could beat him, but he would be too tired afterwards. A green figure popped at the edge of his vision in the direction the golden trail travelled. Not hesitating, he acted with his left foot, sending a crisp 4-meter pass to Jamie Leweling in a pocket of space.

The winger barely had time to control the ball when Rakim once again called for it a few yards ahead. Forced to improvise under Musiala's and Foden's charge, he sent a bouncing pass his way. Rakim at the edge of the other side of the centre circle, with his back towards the goal and Ben Chilwell at his back, deftly didn't stop the bouncing ball.

His left foot lightly flicked the ball up and to the side, causing Ben to react at what he perceived as a loss of control. He was quickly left stupefied as Rakim's left foot once again flicked the ball, this time higher, doing enough to clear the tall defender as he rounded him on his right. Pushing his tired legs to chase after the falling ball, he stretched out his right foot, pulling it to his chest just before Conor Bradley could interfere.

He felt the air being knocked out of his being as he chested the ball down, but he continued to move forward. The ball kissed the turf and rolled slightly ahead of him, but Rakim, despite the burn in his lungs and the ache deep in his calves, lunged forward like a beast unchained. Conor Bradley closed the space, shoulder low and cleats hungry, but Rakim dipped his right knee and rolled the ball under Bradley's challenge with an improvised V-drag behind his standing foot. It was unorthodox and barely controlled, but it worked, leaving the defender twisting into empty space.

His legs throbbed, and his arms swung wider now, as though begging for oxygen. But this wants a time to stop, not when he was so close to the goal that he could practically taste victory.

A white shirt of Teden Mengi clipped his hip with a body charge, and another arm came across his cheek, smacking his face. He barely noticed, though. With the ball still glued to his foot, he burst between them, lowering his centre of gravity as he somehow slipped through.

One of the defender's boots stepped on the lace of his cleat, and Rakim stumbled hard, his knee scraping the ground, but the ball didn't leave his orbit. With the elegance of a dancer, he spun to his feet using his forearm and inner thigh, then performed a tired but effective body feint to send the recovering Declan Rice the wrong way again. He pushed forward, now 25 yards out. Paul Garner was yelling something on commentary, but even the noise of the crowd seemed to blur behind the thrum of his heartbeat.

Reece James was charging back with one last desperate slide tackle, but with Rakim's heightened, he spotted it almost the send the right-back touched the ground. Executing a weary but instinctual heel chop to his left and James slid past like a comet. The ball popped up awkwardly as Rakim's boot caught more turf than leather, and before he could reset, Chilwell charged through the back of him.

The ground gave way, and he was suddenly airborne, followed by gravity and his other 5 senses being reactivated the moment he crashed to the ground. The whistle blew almost immediately, giving the stadium a chance to exhale and take a much-needed breath.

"RAKIM REX! OH, MY WORD!" Eddie Hall practically exploded over the sound of seventy thousand gasps. "What... have... we just witnessed?! That was not football—that was sorcery on Red Bull!"

"Unbelievable," Paul Garner croaked, almost out of breath himself. "He's gone through six—no, seven England players! On his own! And I swear he got kicked, elbowed, stepped on, and still wouldn't go down until the very end! That's a free kick in prime territory!"

The camera panned to a shot of the pitch where bodies in white were left scattered across the grass like fallen dominoes, heads down, hands on knees. Reece James lay flat on his back, palms over his face. Chilwell stood with arms raised, protesting the whistle, but even he knew deep down—he'd chopped down a bird in full flight.

"You couldn't script this," Eddie continued. "A one-man stampede through the heart of England's midfield and backline! The boy is stomping his name with authority, announcing his name across his entire generation. And he's just ripped the script in half, with no intention of taking things to extra time!"

"And look at him now," Paul added, voice low and reverent. "He's not celebrating. He's not even smiling."

The camera shifted again, zooming to showcase the floodlit pitch below where Rakim was back on his feet thanks to the help of a few of his teammates. Chilwell was quickly sent off for his tackle, offering no reason for him to complain. Not that it was even on his mind as he picked up the ball, placing it down ready to execute the set-piece.

Chapter 479 479 Reactions

[Moments earlier]

The tension in the VIP seating area had only continued to heighten following Sakas' goal. Since there were also English businessmen in the area, it made for a divided audience. Some even engage in light betting on who would win, upping the stakes even more. For the Rex family and May, things were more personal, though, as Ben could be seen holding his wife's hand in comfort.

"Maybe I shouldn't have come. My presence must be bringing him bad luck," He found himself saying as he watched the players battle it out as the four minutes of added time commenced. Rakim was also in the thick of things despite usually playing things safe and only taking risks on offence.

"Oh, Hush, we both know he plays harder every time he knows you're coming to watch him." Lisa quickly chastised him with a light slap on his arm, causing the nearby Wolfgang's brows to knit upon overhearing.

"(Sigh) You're right, but he looks more tired than usual. Playing every game for almost 90 minutes is clearly taking a toll on him," Ben commented, and he was right.

Rakim could be seen bent over slightly as he held himself up on his knees just past the halfway line. Jude had just sent a sharp through ball up the flank for Saka to chase, but Noah was right on his shoulder. Despite the battle, Ben's eyes never left his son, who was stationary until he suddenly moved.

Dropping back down the line, he created an option for Noah, who had just won the ball from Saka. "He's got the ball," little Anne-Marie exclaimed from the top of her lungs as she jumped to her feet, dragging Emma and May to stand up as she didn't let go of their arms.

The older girls wanted to complain, but looking at the excited 10-year-old, whose gaze was glued to the field, they simply tightened their grips on her hands and followed her lead. From their elevated view, Rakim looked close yet so far, but even then, his movements still looked sharp to them. He dropped his shoulder, shifting the ball inward toward Angelo for a lightning-quick one-two.

"Rakim on the move," Garner's voice resounded through the speakers just as he received the return pass, spinning into space past Rice. "England needs to make a stop as he is the type to get more dangerous once he gets going."

Eddie Hall's voice rang out from the nearby speakers: "Rakim Rex, still going here! This is outrageous!" his words caused those around them to subconsciously rise to their feet as if proximity could influence the outcome. And it did, as almost the next moment, Rakim glided past Jude Bellingham with a silky La Croqueta, leaving the England star reaching for air.

Ben's heart hammered against his ribs as he watched his son surge forward, the golden boots flashing beneath the floodlights. The whole Rex family was now standing, their hands clutched tightly in front of them or gripping the backs of the velvet seats. Anne-Marie was practically bouncing, her voice a shrill squeak drowned out by the rising murmur from the crowd.

"He's past Bellingham!" Garner barked through the speakers, urgency threading his voice. "Still Rakim Rex! He's like a ghost between tackles!"

Below, Rakim barely slowed, his body swaying and weaving like a flame against the wind. A white shirt lunged toward him—Ben Chilwell—but Rakim flicked the ball up with the tip of his left foot, then again with the outside of his boot, tossing it delicately over Chilwell's lunge as he darted around the defender with a burst of raw desperation.

"That's disrespectful, He's out there toying with them in the dying minutes!" Eddie Hall's voice cracked with disbelief. "Two touches, and he's left another in the dust!"

"He's going to go all the way, Emma," May exclaimed in excitement. May's words barely left her mouth before Rakim, seemingly conjuring energy from nowhere, controlled the ball beautifully on his chest despite a hard shove from Conor Bradley. The crowd's roar dipped, almost gasping collectively as Rakim's right foot stretched out, reclaiming the ball before it could skitter away.

From the speakers above, Garner's voice was strained with excitement. "He's STILL on his feet! Rakim Rex riding challenges like a man possessed!"

Joe barely breathed; his fists pressed so tightly together that his knuckles paled. His head leaned forward, brows drawn tight, his usual detachment forgotten as the little frail boy he once met on a boat now danced across the pitch like a vision. The growth he had made in little over a decade is quite remarkable, 'I'm going to be a footballer.' Those innocent words from back then have now become reality, and so much more.

Rakim dipped his right knee low, rolling the ball behind his standing foot with a flick that barely made sense to the eye, spinning away from Conor Bradley's desperate lunge. The entire VIP box seemed frozen as Rakim staggered but somehow kept the ball tethered to his feet like an exhausted but defiant magician refusing to lose the final thread of his act.

"Still Rakim Rex!" Eddie Hall shouted through the overhead speakers, his voice cracking with disbelief. "They can kick him, shove him, trip him—but they can't stop him!"

Lisa's hand covered her mouth as if trying to hold in the emotions threatening to burst forth. May gripped Emma and Anne-Marie's hands tighter, her heart in her throat. Ben didn't blink, didn't dare breathe, as he watched his son shrug off another challenge, the sheer force of will keeping him upright.

From their high vantage point, they could see Teden Mengi trying to body him off the ball, clipping his hip. Another arm came across Rakim's face, but he barely faltered, ducking low and slipping through the tightest of gaps. Gasps echoed throughout the VIP section.

"He's still going!" Paul Garner practically screamed over the speakers. "They've thrown everything but the kitchen sink at him!"

Below them, Rakim stumbled as a boot caught his lace—he crumpled toward the ground—but then, unbelievably, rolled back to his feet in a single, fluid motion. He somehow still kept the ball under his control, surging forward once more. "Watch out!" May exclaimed in worry as she spotted Reece James sliding in from the side, her hands subconsciously covering her mouth.

But Rakim, as if seeing it unfold a second early, chopped the ball backwards with the heel of his left boot. It wasn't elegant—more a stuttering, clumsy motion—but it was enough to leave James sprawling in the dirt behind him. "HE SENT HIM FOR A HOT DOG!" Eddie Hall roared, and even the businessmen in English suits behind them couldn't help but release stunned laughter mixed with groans.

The ball popped up awkwardly as Rakim's foot caught more turf than leather, causing it to rise mid-air. He didn't panic and simply adjusted with a delayed chest trap, but Ben spotted Chilwell charging at his son like a desperate man, and he instinctively tensed—too late. Chilwell's body slammed into Rakim's back, knocking the wind out of him as his body bent backwards for a moment before crashing to the ground.

The collision sent Rakim sprawling, and the referee's whistle pierced the thick, roaring air. "FREE KICK! FREE KICK!" Garner yelled in triumph. "Just outside the D! What a run!" The VIP section erupted in a mix of shrieks, claps, and stunned silence. Lisa's hand covered her mouth, eyes shining. Wolfgang was just shaking his head in awe. Anne-Marie bounced on her toes, tears sparkling at the corners of her eyes.

"Chilwell is out this final is over for him on a rather disappointing note, and England are down to 10 for extra time." Eddie Hall stated much to the vindication of the German fans who roared in approval at seeing the person who ended such a beautiful run be punished.

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[A Few Moments Later]

Rakim, bruised and battered, his shirt clinging to him like a second skin, stood alone a few yards back from the ball. His chest rose and fell with deep, ragged breaths, but his head was up, and his pale green eyes locked onto the goal like a predator.

The stadium around him seethed and screamed, but Rakim heard none of it. To him, the pitch, the ball, and the goal were the only things that existed. He waved off any other attempts to discuss the free kick and took 5 steps backwards. 'Activate Bronze Heavy artillery'

[Ding: Bronze (active) skill Heavy artillery Activated: Shot Power Increased by 15% for attempts taking from outside the box. (4/4)]

He felt a surge of power coursing through his body, momentarily alleviating the fatigue he was feeling. Taking a slow, measured breath, he looked at the 4-man wall in front of him and didn't even think about

trying to curve the ball around the wall. (Pfweeeeet) "Here we go, ladies and gents, the last action of this final in regulation time, Rakim with a chance to end things before extra time."

Chapter 480 480 Never In Doubt

[Present]

The stadium held its collective breath. It was the type of silence that thudded against your ears louder than any noise could. Even the buzzing lights above seemed dimmer, the world narrowing into a tunnel with only Rakim, the ball, and the goal at the end of it.

"He's stepping up..." Garner's voice lowered to a reverent murmur. Even Eddie Hall forgot to do his job and merely held his tongue, not wanting to miss a single moment.

Rakim began his run, each step measured and powerful. His golden boots dug into the worn turf as he approached the ball, his entire body coiled like a spring. And then, like a cannon unleashing its fury, his right foot connected with the ball with a loud (\*THWACK!\*).

The sound echoed—sharp, violent, like a gunshot in a chapel, prompting the players in the wall to jump into the air. However, the ball hugged the turf as it rocketed toward the goal, like a blurring missile as it slipped underneath their feet's before gaining some air. Dean Henderson, already anticipating a shot over or around the wall, was caught wrong-footed.

His weight had shifted slightly to his left, ready to spring into the top corner — but Rakim's ball zipped under the flying wall, darting low and vicious. Eyes wide, Henderson threw himself desperately back across his body, his gloves stretching out for the ball. For a fleeting second, it seemed he might just reach it. Fingers brushed the spinning leather—but not enough.

The ball kissed the inside of the post due to his redirect, but the metallic clang was unforgiving as it ricocheted into the goal, followed by the rustle of the net. "Goal," someone whispered, or maybe they shouted, but with how hoarse their voice was, it might as well have been a whisper. However, that was all that was needed to detonate the crowd that had been on tenterhooks since Saka scored the equaliser.

The stadium erupted into chaos. The German bench exploded off their seats, arms raised, players sprinting onto the field in celebration. Meanwhile, Rakim stood frozen for a heartbeat, needing a second to believe it had gone in.

A roar ripped from Rakim's lungs, raw and fierce, as he sprinted toward the corner flag, arms outstretched like a man taking flight. His teammates stormed after him, colliding into him in a heap of bodies, laughter, and victorious cries. Shirts were tugged, arms flung around shoulders, and tears weren't far behind.

Above in the VIP box, Ben let out a strangled shout of joy, lifting Lisa clean off her feet before setting her down and kissing the top of her head. Anne-Marie was bouncing so high that she nearly knocked over Emma and May, who were smiling in joy. The speakers above crackled alive with Paul Garner's voice, barely holding back his own emotions: "Rakim Rex putting the finishing touches to an incredible run with an almost equally impressive free kick."

"What a free kick indeed, I'm being told that the ball travelled at 110kmh." Eddie Hall commented as the celebrations unfolded in full swing on the pitch, all the German players and some of the trainers joined in the huddle. Whilst the Germans could be seen celebrating close to the corner flag, the English contingent were on the ground defeated.

They were all gasping for breath, having worked for 90+ minutes, but they still lost in the end. Now they barely had seconds left in which they couldn't do much, even if they wanted to. Dean Henderson slammed his gloves against the turf in frustration before pushing himself back up, but the fire was gone from his movements.

Declan Rice stood with his hands on his hips, chest heaving, sweat dripping from his brow as he stared at the midfield circle, waiting for a restart that everyone knew was little more than a formality. The referee jogged toward the centre spot, glancing at his watch. He placed the whistle between his lips as the English players dragged themselves back into position, shoulders slumped, their faces telling the story of dreams slipping through their fingers.

With a tired tap, England restarted the match with Musiala driving the ball forward immediately. He barely managed to cross the halfway line before the piercing shriek of the whistle cut through the noise. "There you have it, folks, after 38 years, Germany are once again your U-20 World Champions! And at the heart of it is none other than Rakim Rex." Paul Gartner's voice resounded throughout the stadium and the live broadcast as the German players flooded the pitch once more, this time with no need for restraint.

Shirts were ripped off and waved overhead, flags were thrown from the stands, and trainers sprinted to join the mass of Green and white euphoria that had erupted near the centre circle. Rakim plopped down on the turf with a tired exhale, lying on his back as the toll his body had been through called to collect.

He let his arms fall wide, lungs drawing ragged, cooling breaths while the uproar swirled above him like distant surf. For the first time in ninety-plus chaotic minutes, grass smelled simply of earth and made him feel at peace as he closed his eyes. Taking in the moment as he listened to the celebrations around him, his eyes shot open a second later.

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[Ding mission Future Great's progress:]

#Don't lose a match: L7/D1/W0

#Beat Javier Saviola's all-time Goal scoring record of 11 set in 2001: 13/11

#Win the Golden Boot: 1/1 (13, Goals) {Congratulations}

#Lead your team to win the Mini World Cup: 1/1 {Congratulations}

#Win the MVP award: 0/1 {TBD}

Rewards: Calculated based on Performance and achievements: Loading...

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"Yo, bro, get up, we are champions," Wirtz's voice resounded from his front, dressed in the team's tracksuit as he stretched out a hand for Rakim to grasp. Rakim squinted up at Florian Wirtz, the stadium lights haloing his friend's rumpled hair. He grasped the outstretched hand; Wirtz hauled him to his feet and immediately draped an arm around his shoulders.

"We did it, bro, we broke an almost 40-year trophy drought," Rakim stated with an excited smile as they jogged to the sidelines, each picking up a German flag and draping it over their shoulders.

Wirtz thumped his fist to Rakim's chest, right over the embroidered eagle. "Flags on, medals next— Coach is losing his voice trying to line us up." Sure enough, Coach Baum was by his coaching bench, drenched in whatever sports drink the nearby players were able to find.

Jogging over to the side, they were quickly given a white shirt with WORLD CHAMPIONS 2019 in bold gold letters written on it. Rakim slipped the fresh white tee over his damp kit, the fabric clinging to his abs. The gold lettering shimmered beneath the floodlights, and for a second, he just stared at the word CHAMPIONS stretched across his chest, letting the reality sink in.

"Congratulations, boy's you did it, we are the champions, soak in the moment." Coach Baum said in a jovial tone, smiling from ear to ear. "This is what we have shed so much sweat for, pat yourself on the back and make intelligent choices as we celebrate.

"Yes, sir," the players shouted in joy as they broke off the gathering to celebrate with each other and some of the fans. Parents weren't yet allowed on the pitch until the medal ceremony was complete, but that did not stop the players from going around to thank the fans.

Rakim went to his bag quickly, fishing out his smartphone and donning his Titan-Hood as he took a couple of pictures and videos for his social media. The fans at the side of the stadium eagerly joined in as he got roped into a shadowboxing game by a group of teen boys. Signing a few kits, balls, and even someone's forehead, he quickly left that corner before things could get wilder.

"Your Bukayo, right?" He asked after coming across the English number 7, who had matched him for goal contributions.

"Last time that I checked, I am, and you're the Rakim Rex," Saka responded with a bitter smile as he shook Rakim's outstretched hand. "Well played mate, that last run was the most gangster shit I've seen someone do,"

"Thank you wouldn't have had to go through all that battering if you guys hadn't decided to spin back in the second half." Rakim retorted with a tight-lipped smile. "It felt like we were playing a completely different team halfway through the second half, and your goals were insane too."

"I don't want to hear that from you after so ruthlessly finishing us off. Don't worry, though, I plan on paying you back the next time we play, I'll be taking the W," Saka said with a forced smile, probably still reeling from the brutal loss, but the confidence in his voice was undeniable.

"Doubt that, but I'll be ready," Rakim responded, a confident smile appearing on his face. "Let's swap kits for now before you continue dreaming."

"Anyone ever told you're annoying?" He questioned with mock annoyance, but still moved to take off his top as Rakim did the same, removing his champion shirt first.

"Quite a lot, actually, but why would a dragon care about what mortals think of it?" Rakim responded with a light smirk, trying his best to channel his inner Zlatan as he slung Saka's top over his shoulder after once again donning the championship shirt.

"This boy crazy," Saka muttered before moving to walk away as quickly as he could, acting as if he was avoiding the plague.