

Football 601

Chapter 601 DFB-Pokal Final

[19:30 | Studio – Live Broadcast]

The broadcast faded to a commercial, but the studio lights dimmed only slightly as Kate, Lothar, and Owen leaned back in their seats, exchanging a few quiet words. Their assistants arrived to check up on them, and the makeup artists came to do some touch-ups. The control room buzzed in their ears, counting down the seconds until they were live again.

Kate straightened the papers in front of her as the staff returned to their positions; the countdown ticked down. "Five, four, three..." the producer's voice crackled, and the cameras cut back to the desk.

Kate's tone was crisp and professional. "Welcome back to our live coverage of the DFB-Pokal Final, Bayern Munich versus Bayer Leverkusen, coming to you from the Olympiastadion in Berlin. Just under thirty minutes to kick-off, and the tension is building."

On-screen, the split broadcast showed some of the shots taken over the past week from both teams. It replayed some of the interviews some of the players had given at training and at designated press zones. Kate gestured toward the screen. "Lothar, Owen—we have been given the official line-ups. What are your thoughts?"

Bayer Leverkusen (4-2-3-1):

GK: L. Hradecky

RB: L. Bender

CB: E. Tapsoba

CB: S. Bender

LB: Wendell

CDM: C. Aránguiz

CDM: J. Baumgartlinger

RM: M. Diaby

CAM: N. Amiri

LM: R. Rex

ST: K. Havertz

Bench: Karem Demirbay, Mitchell Weiser, Kevin Volland, Karim Bellarabi, Jonathan Tah, Leon Bailey, Lucas Alario, Florian Wirtz, Ramazan Ozcan

Vs

Bayern Munich (4-2-3-1):

GK: M. Neuer

RB: B. Pavard

CB: J. Boateng

CB: D. Alaba

LB: A. Davies

CDM: J. Kimmich

CDM: L. Goretzka

RM: S. Gnabry

CAM: T. Müller

LM: K. Comman

ST: R. Lewandowski

Bench: Thiago Alcantara, Philippe Coutinho, Ivan Perišić, Lucas Hernandez, Alvaro Odriozola, Niklas Sule

The line-ups flashed on the studio screen, the familiar graphics showing Bayern in white and red, Leverkusen in deep black and crimson. The camera cut back to the desk, where Kate Abdo guided the conversation once again. "So there you have it, the official elevens for tonight's DFB-Pokal Final. Both sides are sticking to their tried-and-tested 4-2-3-1. Lothar, let me start with you—what stands out?"

Lothar Matthäus gave a small shrug. "Not a surprise. This is Bayern's best eleven. Strong at the back, Kimmich and Goretzka control the middle, with Müller floating behind Lewandowski. Coman and Gnabry wide—it's dangerous everywhere."

Owen Hargreaves leaned in, shaking his head. "Yeah, but Lothar, that back line isn't perfect. Boateng's legs aren't what they used to be. If Leverkusen get Rakim or Diaby running at him, that's trouble."

Lothar smirked at this. "Boateng is a world champion, Owen. Finals require experience, and that man right there has battled against some of the world's best forwards and won. Rakim and Diaby are talented, yes, but come on, this is Bayern Munich we're talking about."

Kate Abdo stepped in, her voice calm but firm. "Alright, so Lothar, you're putting weight on Bayern's stability. Owen, you're highlighting Leverkusen's pace out wide. What about Havertz as a striker? That's a big call."

Owen nodded quickly. "I love it. Havertz is not your typical forward; he's the prototype of what a modern striker ought to be. He can drop back to connect with his teammates and create attacking opportunities for his versatile teammates. Oh, let's not forget his ability to drop into pockets, pull defenders out of position. That opens lanes for Rakim and Diaby. It's a deadly attacking trio."

Lothar shook his head again. "But who scores the goals, Owen? Havertz is an excellent player, I don't doubt that, but he is not Lewandowski. Finals are about strikers who finish, and that is just not Havertz; often, he still plays like a midfielder when his team just needs him to break through and score."

"'Potato potata,' Fact of the matter is that Haverts, on average, creates 30% more goal-scoring opportunities than RL9. Numbers don't lie, a team with Havertz on the team sheet will threaten the goal no matter how good the defensive line is." Owen retorted with a light smile, convinced of his facts.

"Don't get me wrong, I see this game being a very competitive match-up, but to me that Leverkusen offence seems far more dangerous."

"You can't be serious, Kate, are you hearing this? Someone get a doctor because this man is out of his mind." Lothar retorted with exasperation, shooting Kat a questioning glance. "All the numbers in the world don't matter as long as they fail to perform. We saw them fail to do so a couple of weeks ago. What's so different now?"

Kate smiled, letting the tension between them build before stepping in. "Gentlemen, you'll never agree on this one. But let me ask—does the fact Bayern already clinched the league against Leverkusen a few weeks ago weigh on tonight?"

Lothar didn't hesitate. "Of course. Bayern beat them when it mattered, showing they were stronger. That stays in players' minds. Leverkusen can say it's a new game, but deep down, they know Bayern had their number."

Owen shook his head. "I don't buy that. Players don't walk into a final thinking about the league loss—they walk in thinking: this is our chance to put it right. Rakim, Havertz, Diaby—they'll use that as fuel. Young players aren't scared like veterans; they're hungry."

"Hungry or naïve?" Lothar cut back, eyebrows raised.

Kate chuckled softly, leaning in. "Or maybe just fearless, Lothar. Finals have produced plenty of shocks before. And for Leverkusen, it's been 26 years since they last lifted silverware. That's a huge motivator."

"We can debate all we want, but in the end, the winner is decided on the field. Well, he'd gone down to the field following a short break as the two teams took the stage in hopes of becoming champions of Germany." Kate started with a slight smile, bringing the pre-match show to an end with the director's cue.

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[04/07/2020 | Time: 19:50 PM | DFB-Pokal Final | Location: Olympiastadion Berlin]

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this live broadcast for the DFB final clash between Bayer 04 Leverkusen and FC Bayern Munich." He paused for a moment as the camera flew down to face the players lined up in the tunnel in two neat rows.

The three-man referee team stood at the front, led by Mr Tobias Welz, who held the official ball in his hands. A short moment later, accompanied by the official song of the tournament, the procession walked out of the tunnel. Stepping past the gleaming trophy placed on a podium before the field, they neatly took their position for the national anthem.

The Olympiastadion, bathed in gold light as dusk settled over Berlin, echoed with the solemn notes of the German national anthem. The players stood shoulder to shoulder, though the distance of the COVID protocols left small gaps between them. Leverkusen in their striking black and crimson kits, Bayern in gleaming white with red trim.

The camera lingered briefly on Manuel Neuer as it passed over the players, his jaw clenched, eyes forward, already in match mode. It moved past the referee's panning to Lars Bender, who remained composed. The camera moved from player to player, stopping at Rakim at the end of the Leverkusen line.

The young man, who would be playing in his second cup final, calmly took breaths. He didn't sing the anthem like some of the German players, who were too focused on what had been talked about in the pre-match talk. As the anthem ended, the officials guided the captains forward for the coin toss as the players lined up for the official photo.

Neuer won the coin toss, choosing to kick off first as Lars chose to attack from left to right. The official team pictures were taken, and the players jogged to their positions. Tobias Welz performed his final checks before bringing his whistle to his mouth.

[1]

(Fweeet)

Chapter 602 DFB-Pokal Final (2)

[04/07/2020 | Time: 20:00 PM | DFB-Pokal Final | Location: Olympiastadion Berlin]

[1]

The whistle pierced through the Berlin evening air, and the DFB-Pokal Final was underway. Lewandowski rolled the ball back to Müller, who immediately played it wide to Gnabry. The Bayern winger took a touch, sending it back to Pavard before Rakim could close him down.

Passing it among the defenders, they looked to establish a patient build-up from the back. Alaba and Boateng started dictating the passes left and right as they weathered the initial Leverkusen press. Lewandowski jumped into the air trying to bring the ball down, but Tapsoba was having none of it.



The defender's shoulder collided with the Polish striker's shoulder in the air before heading the ball wide to Wendell. The Brazilian trapped the ball under his feet and immediately charged up the flank. Gnabry stepped up to press him, but he merely passed it inwards to Julian, who flicked it to the retreating Rakim at the sideline.

The winger did not try to take on Pavard but merely kicked the ball back down the line to Wendel past the turning Gnabry. The left back flicked it inward, chipping Muller, who tried to close him down. Aránguiz shed the ball down in the central area before dribbling up the field.

The Chilean midfielder used his body to step across Goretzka, who tried to intercept him just as he passed the halfway line. Feinting a cut to the right wing just as Kimich rushed to close him down, he lifted the ball forward. His chipped through ball sailed over the defensive line, heading down the right flank toward the side of the box.

[2]

His sudden through ball set off a foot race between Diaby and Davis, but the Leverkusen man had the advantage of not having to turn. The Frenchman created separation as his marker desperately tried to recover. He managed to do so by slowing down to bring the ball under control, which allowed his pursuer to step in front of him.

Not panicking, he feinted a breakthrough to the byline, getting the Canadian to bite slightly, allowing him to lay it off to Amiri at the edge of the box. Amiri's first touch was silky, cushioning the ball with his right foot before he could be closed down, before curling a teasing cross into the box. It was aimed toward Havertz, who had peeled off Alaba's shoulder with brilliant timing.

The delivery hung for a split second too long, and Neuer came roaring off his line with authority. Arms wide extended, the Bayern keeper punched clear just before Havertz could rise. The clearance, however, didn't travel far—only as far as Rakim, who was lurking on the edge of the penalty arc. "This could be dangerous!" Rae warned as the youngster controlled the descending ball with one touch and lined up a strike with his right.

At this moment, Hansi, on the sideline, was asking his assistant why one of the most dangerous forwards was not marked by their opponent if they were unmarked with the ball. His answer would have to wait, though, as Rakim's boot tore through the ball, sending it fiercely toward the bottom left corner.

But Boateng threw himself across with a slide, managing to deflect the ball with his shin and spinning wide as he slid into the net. "Well defended by Boateng!" Robson interjected. "That was hit sweetly by Rakim, Derek. Neuer was beaten, and that was destined for the back of the net"

[5]

Wendell swung in the resulting corner kick with venom, his left foot sending a dangerous inswinger toward the near post. Neuer, still commanding his area, came out to punch but misjudged the flight slightly. The ball skimmed the top of Goretzka's head and dropped into the six-yard box like a live grenade.

What followed was pure chaos—boots flying, shirts tugged, and the ball ricocheting between ankles as both sets of players piled in. Tapsoba reacted first, swinging a boot through a forest of legs, the shot cannoning off Boateng's thigh before bouncing awkwardly toward Sven Bender. The veteran centre-half lunged desperately, stabbing the ball goalward, but Neuer redeemed himself with a sprawling block, smothering it on the line.

"How did that stay out?!" Derek Rae shouted, his voice almost cracking. Stewart Robson was incredulous: "That's old-fashioned cup final defending, Derek—absolute bedlam in the six-yard box, and somehow Bayern survived it!"

[8]

Bayern tried to respond immediately, looking to assert its authority and slow the tempo down to its preferred pace. They reentered their passing game, keeping the ball flowing in the backfield as they settled in. For a couple of minutes, they kept possession even under the strong pressure from their opponents.

The front quartet of Haertz, Rakim, Amiri, and Diaby were forced to calm down under their calm, structured passes. With Neuer also being active, they were more than outnumbered, forcing them to play zonal marking instead. Around the 9th, Kimmich lost his marker and dropped deep between the centre-backs, receiving possession from Alaba before spraying a long diagonal out to Coman on the left wing.

The Frenchman's first touch was exquisite, killing the pace of the ball instantly before shifting it onto his right foot. Lars Bender closed him down quickly, but Coman did not shy away from the challenge. Feinting a cut inward, he knocked the ball behind the man before making use of his pace to explode past on the flank.

Racing toward the byline, Coman whipped in a dangerous low cross that fizzed across the face of the goal. Lewandowski made his run flawlessly to beat Tapsoba, timing his movement to perfection, but Hradecky was equal to it. The Finnish goalkeeper threw himself down low, getting a hand to the ball to deflect it just wide of the far post.

[12]

The corner that followed was cleared comfortably by Tapsoba's towering header. The clearance sparked Leverkusen's first real counter-attack of the evening. Rakim was alive to it instantly, darting infield to collect the loose ball before Bayern's midfield could reset.

With one quick swivel of his hips, he spun away from Kimmich, the ball glued to his feet, and surged into the open grass. "Here he goes!" Derek Rae's voice lifted with excitement. His long legs began eating up chunks of green as he veered to the flank to avoid the traffic.

Around the halfway line, Pavard stepped up to confront him, but he kept his distance, content with slowing him down. But Rakim feinted a stop before sliding the ball between the Frenchman's legs, racing around the other side, before he could react. A lot of arm pulling and shirt tugging between the two players followed as they raced past the centre line.

Pushing Pavard off him, he slipped a pass backwards into the central channel onto the run of Amiri. He collected the ball in stride, off Goretzka, who tried to muscle him off the ball. With a deft shimmy of his hips, he bumped him off him, creating some separation, faked a turn left before unleashing a through ball up the right flank.

The through ball slid between Boateng and Davis, tearing open the defensive line. Diaby timed his run immaculately as the linesman's flag stayed down, as Boateng tried to play him off to the corner flag. The French winger had had room to manoeuvre, and he used it to pick out a cross. Diaby's cross was whipped in with pace and precision, curling toward the penalty spot where Havertz had slipped between the two centre-backs.

Chapter 603 Heating Up

The through ball slid between Boateng and Davies, tearing open the defensive line. Diaby timed his run immaculately as the linesman's flag stayed down, as Boateng tried to play him off to the corner flag. The French winger had room to manoeuvre, and he used it to pick out a cross.

Diaby's cross was whipped in with pace and precision, curling toward the penalty spot where Havertz had slipped between the two centre-backs. The young German forward rose magnificently, arching his back and powering a header toward the top corner. But Neuer, showcasing exactly why he's considered the world's best, threw himself full length to his right, fingertips stretched to maximum extension.

The ball crashed against his gloves and spun away harmlessly. "What a save!" Derek Rae bellowed. "Manuel Neuer showing his class when his team needs him most!"

Stewart Robson added breathlessly, "That was destined for the top corner, Derek. Absolutely destined. Havertz couldn't have placed it any better, but Neuer defies physics with that reaction!"

[18]

The intensity was building with every passing minute, as the tempo would spike suddenly every now and then as the player found attacking opportunities. Bayern tried to wrestle control back through possession football, but Leverkusen's pressing game was suffocating every pocket of space. Thiago's absence from the starting lineup was becoming apparent as Goretzka and Kimmich struggled to find their usual rhythm under the coordinated Leverkusen harassment.

Müller dropped deeper than usual, trying to create an extra man in midfield, but Aránguiz shadowed his every move like a hunting dog who had caught a sweet scent. The Chilean was on his ass using his body and football IQ to break up plays with perfectly timed tackles, and keeping Bayern's primary creative outlet under wraps. Seeing Müller and the middle being bogged down, Davies tried to spark something down the left flank.

Overlapping with Comman at the halfway line, he skipped past Diaby with pace. Baumgartlinger came in hot, trying to interfere, but the Canadian came to a sudden stop, sending the latter skidding. He beamed a diagonal pass forward to the feet of Lewandowski, who had dropped back slightly.

The striker tapped the ball back into Müller's path, who received it on the run, peeling away from Aránguiz. With one fluid motion, he threaded a through ball into the inside channel for Gnabry, who had crossed Wendell's shoulder. The ball arrived perfectly at the edge of the box, setting Gnabry up to shoot first-time with his right foot.

He lashed at it, the strike rising venomously toward the top corner, but Hradecky reacted brilliantly. The Leverkusen keeper leapt high, palms open, parrying the shot over the bar with a strong hand. The echo of the impact rang around the empty Olympiastadion.

"Hradecky to the rescue again!" Derek Rae's voice sharpened. Stewart Robson followed with conviction: "That's a world-class save. Gnabry couldn't have struck it better, and yet he's denied. Leverkusen owe their keeper big time here." The resulting corner was cleared, but with a mighty header from Baumgartlinger.

[25]

The game's first real flashpoint came not long after. Havertz drifted deeper to help relieve the pressure, calling for the ball from Sven, who was under pressure. Turning with the ball glued to his feet, he skipped past Goretzka with an elegant flick before being scythed down cynically by Kimmich.

The referee wasted no time pulling out a yellow card, the Bayern midfielder raising his hands in protest but knowing full well what he'd done. Tobias Welz was having none of it, even when some of his teammates tried to plead on his behalf. "That's clever from Kimmich," Robson admitted. "He knew Havertz was about to drive into open space. Take the foul, take the booking—it's calculated."

Rae interjected: "But Stewart, that's twice now Leverkusen have looked threatening when Havertz drops deeper. The moment he does that, those wingers push forward with pace, just waiting for an outlet pass to latch onto. Bayern are wary, and rightly so." The free kick did not lead to much as Amiri curled toward the box, but Boateng cleared it back from whence it came.

[30]

In the 30th minute, Goretzka fought off Amiri just outside of his team's penalty box. The midfielder charged up the field, exchanging a one-two with Kimmich, which allowed him to bypass Baumgartlinger. With the ball glued to his boots, Goretzka powered through the centre of the pitch like a steam train, shrugging off Baumgartlinger's tug on his sleeve before releasing it out wide to Coman.

The Frenchman, already at full tilt, dropped his shoulder and darted beyond Lars Bender, the Leverkusen captain, hesitant to dive in because of his earlier yellow. Coman drove toward the edge of the area, cutting the ball back cleverly to Müller, who had managed to lose Aránguiz. He took it the first time, letting it fly toward the right side of the goal, forcing Hradecky to shimmy across his line.

He didn't need to jump in the end as the elevation on the shot was too high, skimming off the bar out for a goal kick. "That's a warning sign," Derek Rae warned. "Leverkusen have gotten too comfortable, this will wake them up."

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Moments later, Alab initiated a counter that saw Kimich flicking the ball wide to Pavard. The French full back picked up speed as he belw past Amiri, trying to get in his way.

A nifty overlap with Gnabry allowed him to skip past Wendell, reaching the side of the box where he whipped in a low cross into the six-yard box. Lewandowski bet Tapsoba toward the ball, sliding in feet first to slot the ball past Hradecky. The net rattled as Bayern's bench leapt to their feet in celebrations; however, it was cut short.

The linesman's flag went up instantly, and the referee's whistle followed, halting proceedings. "Oh, that one will hurt, but the Bayern side doesn't seem to be convinced by the decision," Rae noted as the Bayern players surrounded Tobias, arguing their case.

"Well, you couldn't expect anything less when you get a goal denied," Robson explained. "Well, Hansi flick won't be accepting the decision without a VAR check."

The VAR check took nearly two minutes, with Tobias Welz pressing his finger to his earpiece as the technology officials reviewed the footage frame by frame. On the giant screens around the Olympiastadion, replays showed Lewandowski's run in slow motion—his shoulder appeared level with Tapsoba's hip as Pavard delivered the cross. However, it was his foot that was clearly over the offside line, confirming the linesman's decision.

"Well, Stewart, that's the beauty and the cruelty of VAR. A matter of inches keeps this game level." Derek Rae commented amid the disappointed exclamation of the Bayern players.

"They'll be disappointed by the decision, but those inches are keeping Leverkusen alive, Derek. Bayern are knocking, and you feel like a goal is coming sooner rather than later." Robson replied as the players below set up for a free kick to restart the match.



[37]

The game's tempo remained relentless as both sides refused to give an inch. Leverkusen, energised by their narrow escape from conceding, immediately looked to hit back. The free kick was played short out wide to Wendell, who dribbled past Gnabry before sending it inwards to Baumgartlinger.

The CDM turned inward, sending a precise pass to Amiri, who had found space just beyond the halfway line. The Iranian playmaker's first touch was sublime, cushioning the ball with the outside of his right boot as Goretzka thundered toward him. With Bayern's midfielder bearing down, Amiri executed a perfectly weighted through ball that sneaked just past Kimmich's reach.

Rakim had timed his run to perfection, staying onside by mere inches as he latched onto the pass before it went out for a throw inside the final third. Pavard stepped up, sidestepping to guide him outward, as the distance between them narrowed.

Rakim shifted the ball onto his right foot, teasing Pavard with a slower dribble, the ball rolling lazily between his studs. The French defender crouched low, arms wide, trying to anticipate the youngster's next move. With a sudden burst, Rakim darted forward, pushing the ball past Pavard's left boot with the outside of his boot before cutting sharply inside.

The elastico caught the full back flat-footed as the ball slotted through his legs. He tried to get in his way, tugging at his shirt, but the winger fought past him, driving into the edge of the box. Alaba slid across with a crunching slide tackle, hitting the ball off Rakim's shin before sweeping his feet.

The ball spilt loose, ricocheting dangerously toward Havertz, at the top of the box, but Boateng muscled across, clattering into the Leverkusen forward as he tried to shield it. The whistle shrilled immediately—foul to Leverkusen, right on the corner of the penalty arc.

"Boateng's late there, Derek," Robson remarked as the replay showed Havertz rolling under the heavy contact. "He didn't need to go through him like that a bit of composure, and he could have held him off. Now Leverkusen have a dead-ball situation exactly where they want it."

Chapter 604 Hunting A Goal

[04/07/2020 | Time: 20:42 PM | DFB-Pokal Final | Location: Olympiastadion Berlin]

[42]

"There was no debate. He wanted this one; he stepped up the moment it was called." Derek Rae's voice cracked with trepidation as the referee set the wall distance from the wall. "He had an opportunity in their last match-up in the league, you reckon this one's personal, Steward?"

"We've had the pleasure of watching him play over the year, and it's safe to say it's definitely personal. How could it not be?" Robson analysed, pointing out how his missing that free kick that could have saved their Bundesliga hopes might affect his thoughts. "Let's not forget that he not only has to beat the wall but also one of the best keepers in the world."

Neuer could be seen organising his four-man wall, which consisted of Kimmich, Goretzka, Gnabry, and Coman. Rakim stood over the ball, adjusting it with meticulous care, his eyes fixed on Neuer rather than the white sphere beneath him. The spot was just outside the D, right of centre—the perfect spot for a left-footer to curl one into the top corner.

Taking measured steps backwards, he waited for the referee to complete his final checks. The referee's whistle pierced the night, and Rakim took his final breath. He watched Neuer's positioning, who stood centrally with his arms spread in a wide stance, slightly bent to react.

Shortly, he began his run-up, doing a couple of side steps to his right, creating an angle. He planted his right foot with a snap, whipping his left foot around with a crisp thud. His boot wrapped cleanly around the ball, sensing it flying around knee height as the wall jumped into the air.

Neuer, between the sticks, stood rooted as he couldn't see the ball, only for it to viciously curl past Kimmich on the right side of the wall. Reacting to the sudden ball, he shifted to his right as the low-flying ball curved downward as it neared the goal. Diving full stretch to his right, he threw his entire frame at it, fingertips stretching desperately.

But the ball had been struck with too much spin, dipping late as it bounced just past the six-yard line. It bounced off the turf, springing up to hug the side of the post as it rattled the back of the net before Neuer could get to it.

The net bulged, and for a second, the only audible sound was that of Rakim roaring in celebration as he charged to the corner flag. The noise from the benches followed as the Leverkusen substitutes leapt to their feet in joy. He slid on his knees, slapping the corner flag as he passed it. Havertz was the first to reach him, wrapping an arm around his neck as they fell forward.

"GOAL! He's done it this time! Rakim Rex bends it beyond Neuer and Leverkusen lead in the cup final!" Derek Rae bellowed, his voice cracking with excitement.

"You can tell he practised that nothing about that hit was an accident. The bend, the dip, the precision—you can't strike a ball any cleaner than that." Robson responded, sounding equally emphatic about the

goal. "Neuer saw it late, but even if he'd seen it early, I'm not sure he'd have got there. Absolutely sensational."

[Bayern Munich 0 – 1 Bayer Leverkusen (Rakim 43')]

[45+1]

Bayern were stung, and their response was immediate from the restart. Kimmich charged forward, sliding it wide to Davies as their lines advanced with the Canadian thundered forward on the flank. Amiri and Diaby tried to corner him, but he blitzed by the Frenchman as if he wasn't there. Cutting inside, as he reached the halfway line, he exchanged a quick one-two with Müller. Racing shoulder to shoulder with the German full-back, they sped toward the byline.

Davis attempted a quick stop-and-go, but couldn't escape Lars. Running out of room, he forced a cross only to have it deflected out for a corner by the German. Kimmich curled in the resulting corner high, dropping just around the middle of the box, where only Lewandowski could reach it. He couldn't bring it down far enough, sending the ball skimming across the roof of the net.

[45+2]

The referee glanced at his watch but allowed Bayern one more wave forward. Alaba carried the ball from deep, striding into midfield with a surge of urgency. He played it square to Goretzka, who tried to bulldoze through Aránguiz but was met with a crunching tackle that sent both men tumbling.

The whistle shrilled again, this time for a Bayern free kick thirty-five yards out, slightly left of centre. "Danger here, Derek," Robson muttered. "It's too far for a direct strike, but with Lewandowski and Müller lurking, this is exactly the kind of ball that causes chaos."

Kimmich stood over it, hands on his hips, eyes scanning the penalty area. His delivery was whipped in with pace, curling toward the penalty spot. Lewandowski broke free of Tapsoba just enough to rise above the crowd, his header arrowing down toward the near corner.

But Hradecky dropped low, parrying the ball with a strong right arm before Sven Bender hooked it clear on the rebound. The referee blew his whistle for halftime immediately after, the echo rolling around the vast Olympiastadion.

Players didn't waste much time, trudging toward the tunnel, sweat streaming, lungs heaving. "Half-time in Berlin," Derek Rae announced, his voice swelling with drama. "Bayern Munich stunned, Leverkusen inspired. Rakim Rex, the teenager, has just written his name into the first half of this final with a free-kick that Neuer could do nothing about. At the break, it's Bayern Munich 0 – 1 Bayer Leverkusen."

Robson added, "It's been frantic, breathless, and brilliantly contested. Leverkusen have stood toe-to-toe with the champions, and right now, they've got their noses in front. But don't write Bayern off—this is a team that knows how to come back."

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[Leverkusen Locker Room]

"Alright, lads, let me start off by congratulating you on a good first half." His eyes swept the room, briefly glancing at the players, who sat with a towel draped around their necks, their chests still rising and falling hard as they recovered their energy. "You've earned the lead—but don't let up, this game is far from over."

He took a moment to compose himself before continuing. "Now that they are trailing, they'll come at us harder in the second half. I expect Bayern to raise the tempo, pushing their full-backs higher, and they'll try to pin us in. So we need discipline, Aránguiz and Jullian, you two need to step up and keep that shape tight in front of the back four. Don't get dragged too wide, force them central where we can double up."

He turned toward Diaby and Rakim. "Wingers—you've been excellent tracking back, but I want more composure when we break. Too often, you're going up against one or two, or even three players. Use Amiri, use Havertz. Let the ball do the work, not your legs every time."

The physio moved between players, offering water bottles and quick assessments of any knocks picked up during the intense first half. Wendell was having his left ankle checked after a heavy challenge from Gnabry. "My fullbacks, I need you to stop those wingers from cutting in; both of them are dangerous once they get going, so don't let them."

The coach moved toward the tactical board, his marker squeaking as he drew out positioning diagrams. "Charles, Julian—their midfield will push forward more in the second half. This means more space for you to play through balls into channels. Look for Rakim and Moussa making runs behind their fullbacks."

"Five minutes to compose ourselves," Bosz announced, checking his watch. "Use the bathroom, get fresh shirts if you need them, and remember—we're not defending a lead for forty-five minutes. We're hunting for a second goal. The best defence is to score again."

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[Bayern Munich Locker Room]

The atmosphere in Bayern's dressing room was markedly different from that of their opponents down the hall. Where Leverkusen buzzed with the excitement of leading, Bayern's room carried heavy silence as Flick talked. "Forty-five minutes," Flick finally spoke, his voice cutting through the oppressive quiet like a blade.

"Forty-five minutes, gentlemen, is all we have to save our cup hopes. Forty-five minutes to prevent this from becoming the backdrop of someone else's history." He turned to face his squad, his eyes burning with an intensity that made even veterans like Müller straighten in their seats.

Chapter 605 Rising Tension

[Half-Time | Bayern Munich Locker Room]

Flick stood tall in the centre, his voice a mixture of calm authority and simmering frustration. "We're better than this. Right now, we look second to every ball. Leverkusen are sharper, hungrier—and that's unacceptable for Bayern Munich."

He tapped the board with a marker, circling wide areas. "The middle is too congested for us to make things happen quickly enough. So I need Kingsley and Serge to be brave, take your men on, and make them earn their wages. Don't hesitate, we have the better players, Wendell and Lars can't live with you if you're direct."

"Midfielders, I want quicker passes and smart distribution down the channels." He said, outlining what he expected on the board, garnering a few nods from the players. "Rakim and Diaby will continue to

attack the flanks hard, and we won't be able to stop them. However, I want us to lock down any chance at the goal and dominate the aerial battle."

For the next few minutes, he spent outlining areas he wanted the team to force the opposing wingers in. For Rakim, the strategy was to keep him wide to neutralise his long-range threat, while for Diaby, the focus was on stopping him high on the field. He wanted his players to make their opponents uncomfortable holding the ball.

"This is our championship to lose, now go out there and play to the calibre that is expected of you." Flick finally voiced, ending his half-time speech, giving the players a chance to recompose themselves.

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[04/07/2020 | Time: 21:01 PM | DFB-Pokal Final Leverkusen 1 : 0 Bayern | Location: Olympiastadion Berlin]

[46]

The whistle went, and the second half began with a Bayern kickoff. "Bayern Munich trailing by a goal here in Berlin, and they know they've got a huge task ahead of them now. Leverkusen are forty-five minutes away from ending their season with silverware." Derek Rae voiced as the opening clashes of the second half unfolded below.

Robson cut in, doing his job of keeping the viewer entertained. "Derek, Bayern have been here before. I expect them to come out firing, Flick will have demanded a reaction, and the first ten minutes are going to be crucial. If Leverkusen can weather that storm, their confidence will soar."



Bayern wasted no time showing their intentions to attack as Kimmich orchestrated an early switch out to Coman. The Frenchman chested the ball down at the edge of the final third, and he immediately went to Lars Bender. The Leverkusen captain tried to jockey him wide, but a quick shimmy and a burst of acceleration saw him burst down the line before cutting a ball across the six-yard box.

Lewandowski slid in, desperate to make contact, but Hradecky lunged off his lines, his hands grasping the ball before soemothering it. "Quick reaction from the Finnish at the start of the second half." Derek Rae noted. "But a positive start from Bayern. They're not wasting time, Stewart—they want to make a statement."

Robson replied quickly: "That's what we expected. They'll look to overload the wings and feed Lewandowski, but Leverkusen's centre-backs will relish that challenge if they can keep their composure."

[51]

In the first five minutes, things remained stable as possession exchanged quite a few times between both teams. A few threatening chances were created, but none could really mount a worthwhile attack to get the keepers to react. The match began to open up as Bayern didn't relent, steadily pushing up the field.

Their pressure forced the Leverkusen defenders to play quicker passes before they could be isolated. Sven Bender looked to feed a simple ball into Aránguiz, but Müller anticipated it, cutting across to intercept. In a flash, Bayern had bodies pouring forward, charging into the box. Müller drove to the edge of the box before slipping a pass to Gnabry, who had darted inside off the right.

Gnabry wasted no time, striking low across the goal with his left foot. The ball fizzed toward the bottom corner, but Hradecky once again came to the rescue, getting down quickly to parry it wide with his fingertips. "That's another big stop from the Leverkusen keeper!" Rae exclaimed.

[55]

Leverkusen had their first real counter in the second half in the 55th minute when Amiri charged through the middle. He fought past Goretzka marking to unleash a wide through ball onto the left flank for Rakim. The winger latched onto the ball before Pavard could interfere and immediately tried to shimmy away.

Cutting inward ahead of the full back, he sent a through ball into the box, but found himself falling to the ground a second later. The ball whizzed right into the path of Haverts, who timed his run to perfection, holding off Alaba. Receiving the ball with his right, he laid it off for his left, leaning into the Austrian defender as he fired with his left foot.

"Havertz pulls the trigger from close range!" Derek Rae's voice cut through the tension as the German striker struck cleanly with his left, the ball arrowing toward the near post. Neuer reacted in a flash, diving low, left arm stretched out, managing to parry the effort with just enough force to steer it wide.

The rebound bounced dangerously inside the six-yard box, where Amiri chased the second ball. He moved to steady the bouncing ball, but Boateng came sliding in a second later, hacking the ball out for a corner. "That was a massive chance for Leverkusen!" Robson exclaimed. "A test of nerves had Neuer digging into his bag, and if Boaten isn't alert there, that's 2-0."

The corner that followed saw Wendell whip in a curling delivery toward the back post. Tapsoba rose highest, climbing over Lewandowski to meet it, but his header lacked direction, looping harmlessly over

the bar. A sigh of relief swept across the Bayern bench, Flick clapping his hands furiously, urging his men to stay switched on.

[60]

The match had turned into a battlefield, each tackle sparking raw emotion from both sets of players. In the 62nd minute, Leverkusen launched a counter after Bender broke up a Munich attack. Quick sequences of passes saw Aránguiz charging up the middle of the field, dribbling past a couple of defenders.

But Kimmich launched himself into a 50–50 tackle with Aránguiz around midfield, their shins clashed as both men tumbled, rolling on the grass, but the referee waved play on. The ball squirted loose to Müller, who charged forward like a man possessed, only to be stopped dead in his tracks by Baumgartlinger's slide tackle.

"Look at the fight here, Stewart!" Derek Rae cried out, his voice matching the electricity of the contest. "Neither team is willing to give an inch."

[65]

[Leverkusen substitutions: Amiri (out), Volland (In), Aránguiz (Out), Demirbay (In)]

In the sixty-fifth minute, Amiri left the game for Kevin Volland, who took up the striker role, pushing Havertz back to the CAM role. Aránguiz also joined him after being forced to sit down due to the earlier tackle. Kerem Demirbay replaced him, rejuvenating the Leverkusen midfield. The changes had an immediate effect, stabilising the midfield, allowing them to control the ball for longer spells of time.

Demirbay broke up a pass meant for Muller with a nifty interception before unleashing a pass wide to Rakim. The winger tapped the ball inwards first time into the run of Havertz, who took it on the half-turn and immediately threaded a delicious through ball into the channel for Volland. The striker, fresh off the bench, muscled his way between Boateng and Alaba, bursting into the box.

The Leverkusen bench rose in anticipation as he struck cleanly across the face of the goal, only for Neuer to stick out a boot and deny him at the near post. The rebound split wide to Diaby, who was making a late run. Davis beat him to it, though, sliding forward to poke it toward Neur, who had risen to his feet. Neuer didn't even take a touch before launching the ball clear, ending the panic rising in Flick's heart.

Chapter 606 606 Goals Galore

[04/07/2020 | Time: 21:22 PM | DFB-Pokal Final Leverkusen 1 : 0 Bayern | Location: Olympiastadion Berlin]

[67]

Bayern pushed higher up the pitch as they chased the equaliser. Gnabry cut inside from the right, playing a sharp one-two with Müller before sliding it to Lewandowski on the edge of the box. The striker shifted onto his right foot, opening his body to curl a shot toward the far corner. Hradecky read it well, springing across his line, arms stretched wide to palm the ball away.

The rebound fell kindly for Coman, who struck first time, but Lars Bender blocked with his chest, forcing the ball out for another corner. The corner was swung in by Kimmich, flat and dangerous toward the edge of the box. Goretzka met the incoming ball with a first-time strike, powering a shot goalward.

The ball left his boot with a dull thud, flying toward the left side of the goal, forcing Hradecky to shimmy across his line. However, before he could jump, the ball took an awkward deflection off Bender's shoulder. The ricochet sent it spinning into the opposite corner, wrong-footing the goalkeeper completely. Hradecky stretched desperately as he readjusted, but could only watch as the ball nestled into the net.

"GOAL! Bayern Munich are level!" Derek Rae's voice exploded across the stadium. "Leon Goretzka with the equaliser, and it's taken a crucial deflection off Lars Bender! The Leverkusen captain's clearance has backfired spectacularly!"

The Bayern bench erupted in celebration, Flick pumping his fists as his players mobbed Goretzka near the corner flag. Stewart Robson analysed the goal: "Sometimes you need a bit of fortune, Derek. Goretzka struck it well enough, but that deflection made all the difference. Hradecky was going the right way initially, but physics took over."

[Bayern Munich 1-1 Bayer Leverkusen (Goretzka 67')]

[70]

The equaliser transformed the match dynamics completely. Leverkusen, who had been sitting deeper and looking to counter, suddenly found themselves needing to push forward again. Bayern sensed blood and immediately looked to capitalise on their momentum. Within minutes of the restart, they were pressing high again, forcing errors in Leverkusen's passing.

Kimmich intercepted a loose pass from Wendell and immediately drove forward. His forward pass found Gnabry in space on the right wing, with only Wendell to beat. The Bayern winger feinted a breakthrough on the wing, then shifted the ball onto his stronger left foot. Struggling to keep up, the German cut inside, leaving the Brazilian in his wake.

From the edge of the box, Gnabry curled a shot toward the far corner, but Hradecky stretched to tip it over the bar. The resulting corner caused chaos in the Leverkusen box as Lewandowski met Kimmich's delivery at the near post. He flicked on the ball with a header, finding Müller unmarked six yards out.

The veteran forward connected cleanly, but somehow Tapsoba threw his body in the way, the ball cannoning off his chest and over the bar for another corner. "How did that stay out?" Rae questioned in disbelief. "Müller had the goal at his mercy, Derek. That's world-class defending from Tapsoba, throwing his body on the line when it mattered most."

[74]

[Bayern substitutions: Coman (out), Perisic (in), Gnabry (out), Coutinho (in)]

Flick made his first changes of the match, bringing on fresh legs in Perisic and Coutinho for Coman and Gnabry. The Croatian immediately took up position on the left wing, while the Brazilian slotted into the number ten role behind Lewandowski, pushing Müller out to the right. The tactical shift showed clear effectiveness as Coutinho brought a bit of flair to unlock that tight Leverkusen midfield.

He danced past two defenders after receiving a throw-in before laying the ball off to Kimmich. The midfielder sent the ball wide to Perisic, who flicked it onto Goretzka before Diaby could close him down. He drove down the left channel after a quick exchange with Goretzka that saw him beat his man.

Faced with Lars Bender in front of him, he took the cross early, whipping in a dangerous ball to the near post. Lewandowski had timed his run perfectly, getting ahead of Sven Bender and into the path of the ball. The striker met it with a nifty strike with his left foot, sending it to the near corner.

Hradecky reacted brilliantly, stretching out a foot to try to intercept the ball. Luck wasn't on his side, though, as he barely managed to skim the ball, sending it clanging against the post. "Goal, the post is not there to save them this time. Stewart, your thoughts on the goal?" Derek asked as the Bayern side celebrated, chasing their Polish striker in joy.

"Well, I can't say I was expecting that, Dereck," he started, trying to gather the words for his response, "They caught their opponents sleeping and got goal for their troubles. The buildup was far too easy, taking less than 10 seconds from Coutinho to Lewandowski receiving the assist."

As the two commentators continued to assess the lead-up to the goal, Peter Bosz was having a few choice words with his players. Pulling Lars and the two holding midfielders, he would give weekly instructions on how they should respond. They now faced a situation that the team earned, leading at the end of the first half, only to have the score reversed in the second.

[Bayern Munich 2-1 Bayer Leverkusen (Lewandowski 76')]

[78]

The goal had stung Leverkusen badly, but their response was immediate and furious. Right from the kick off, they attacked with Kai leading the charge following a quick one-two exchange to escape the initial Bayern charge. He glided past Coutinho with a feint and a change of pace before finding Rakim on the flank.

The winger's first touch was featherlight, killing most of the ball's momentum as he redirected it forward, beginning his dribble. As Pavard neared, he heard Volland calling for the ball, and the winger

raised his right leg, shaping up as if to pass. The full back, despite knowing it was like a bait, took it, opening up the flank, which Rakim immediately accelerated towards.

Alaba moved to close him down, but Rakim used feints mixed with step overs to create enough room to send a cross into the box. The ball sailed in with pace as Volland took two steps before raising his head and hammering his head down on the ball. Neuer read the header well, diving low to his left, but the ball took a slight deflection off the inside of his glove, spinning agonizingly wide of the post by mere inches.

"So close for Leverkusen!" Derek Rae shouted. "Volland nearly restored the score sheet with his first real chance since coming on. Neuer got a touch, but that could have gone anywhere!"

Stewart Robson added breathlessly. "Rakim's vision was sublime there, picking out Volland's run perfectly. However, they can't afford to waste chances like that in a cup final; they won't get many."

[82]

[Leverkusen substitutions: Baumgartlinger (out), Bellarabi (in), Diaby (out), Bailey (in)]

Before the corner could be taken, Bosz made his final changes, bringing on pace and fresh legs in Bailey and Bellarabi for the tiring Baumgartlinger and Diaby. The Jamaican immediately took up position on the left wing, as Rakim moved to the right wing, while Bellarabi slotted into the midfield.

Rakim executed the corner, curving it to the area around the back post, aiming for either Volland or Tapsoba. Volland made his run toward the near post, dragging Boateng with him, while Tapsoba



powered toward the back stick. The delivery was perfect, hanging in the air long enough for the Burkina Faso defender to climb above Alaba.

His header was firm and well-directed, but Davis, who was guarding the post, interfered with heading the ball out. The anger wasn't over as a mass of black and red bodies clashed, each trying to reach the ball first. Aránguiz did so first, his leg shooting out, to slot the bouncing ball into the net, sending a feeling of euphoria through the Leverkusen side.

(FWEET)Before he could celebrate, though, the loud whistle of the referee interrupted, calling for a free kick.

Chapter 607 Late Minute Drama

[04/07/2020 | Time: 21:32 PM | DFB-Pokal Final Leverkusen 1 : 2 Bayern | Location: Olympiastadion Berlin]

[82]

The Leverkusen players were already celebrating, arms raised, but the referee's whistle cut through the noise and stopped them in their tracks. Tobias Welz pointed clearly toward the downed Perisic, signalling for a Bayern free kick. "Oh, that's a gut punch for Leverkusen," Derek Rae said, his voice carrying disbelief as he looked at the replay. "The referee has called a foul in the build-up—he judged that Aránguiz's charge to the ball was too reckless, breaking the rules."

The Bayern players swarmed the referee, backing the decision, while the Leverkusen bench erupted in fury. Bosz had his arms in the air, demanding an explanation. Stewart Robson added, "I can see why that's been given, Derek. But the Leverkusen side will claim he went down too easily, especially since he was holding onto the Chilean. It's harsh, but the referee's interpretation is final. That's the risk when you go in with so much force."

[85]

The controversy only seemed to fuel Leverkusen's determination. From the free kick, Bayern tried to play out from the back, but the pressing was relentless. Bailey and Bellarabi, fresh off the bench, were hunting in pairs, forcing Bayern into hurried clearances. The pace of the substitutes was causing real problems for Bayern's ageing centre-backs.

In the 85th minute, Demirbay won possession in midfield with a crunching tackle on Coutinho. The Brazilians' protests were ignored as the ball broke loose to Bailey on the left flank, and the Jamaican immediately set off. His blistering pace down the touchline allowed him to fly past two Bayern defenders with only Pavard to beat.

He may not have the same flair as some of his country's compatriots, but he had enough to sell a cut inward with a feint. Before the French defender could say, "Danm, he is fast," the winger blew past him. He sent a low driven cross hard across the six-yard box, where Volland had ghosted in behind Alaba.

The striker met it first time with his right foot, but his shot cannoned off Neuer's outstretched leg. The rebound spun high into the air, sailing past the penalty spot as both sets of nearby players converged. Havertz reacted quickest, rising above the crowd to meet the dropping ball with a downward header.

The connection was clean, sending the ball bouncing toward goal, but Boateng threw himself across, hooking it clear with his right boot as he fell to the ground. "How close can you get?" Derek Rae cried. "Havertz thought he'd scored, but Boateng's heroics keep Bayern level!"

[87]

[Bayern substitutions: Müller (out), Thiago (in)]

Flick made his final change, bringing on Thiago for the tiring Müller. The Spanish midfielder's introduction saw Coutinho being pushed out to the right midfield position. The introduction was meant to help Bayern retain possession and see out the match, but Leverkusen were having none of it.

With three minutes of normal time remaining, they launched one final assault. Rakim collected possession on the right wing and immediately turned inside, skipping past Perisic as he laid the ball off to Havertz. The CAM held off Kimmich as he spun forward, slipping the ball back to Rakim.

Davis was on him right away, but he didn't hold onto the ball for long as he lopped it over Boateng onto the run of Volland. The striker timed his run perfectly, by a fine margin, fighting off Boateng as they raced onto the pass. Faced with Neuer at the front, the striker kept his composure, holding off Boateng, opening his body to slot the ball into the bottom right corner.

But the Bayern captain spread himself wide, making his body as big as possible, and managed to get a touch with his left foot, diverting the ball just wide of the post. "Neuer again!" Stewart Robson exclaimed. "That's why he's considered the best in the world. When Bayern needed him most, he produced another world-class save!"

[89]

At the corner flag, Rakim stood over the ball once again, his jersey soaked with sweat, chest heaving. The player pushed and tussled within the box, all battling for favourable positions. His delivery was inch-perfect, curling toward the back post where Tapsoba had made his move.

The towering defender climbed above Thiago, meeting the ball with a thunderous header that crashed against the crossbar. The rebound dropped perfectly for Bailey, who had continued his run into the box. The Jamaican winger reacted fast, striking the ball on the half-volley with his left foot.

The shot was destined for the bottom corner, but Neuer somehow managed to get across, diving full stretch to push it wide. "Neuer again with the save of his life!" Derek Rae screamed.

But the ball wasn't cleared. It spun loose to the edge of the box, where Demirbay was waiting. The midfielder took one touch to steady himself before unleashing a fierce drive toward goal. Boateng threw himself into the path, the ball cannoning off his shin and spinning high into the air.

As bodies converged under the dropping ball, Havertz positioned himself perfectly. With Alaba and Kimmich bearing down on him, he cushioned the ball on his chest before swivelling and striking it cleanly with his right foot. The ball flew low and hard, but took a slight deflection off Davies' outstretched leg.

The deflection was enough to wrong-foot Neuer, who was trying to get back up completely. The Bayern keeper tried to dive to his right, but the ball spun away, rattling the back of the net. "GOAL! Kai Havertz has done it!" Derek Rae's voice cracked with emotion. "With just minutes left on the clock, Leverkusen have their equaliser! The deflection off Davies made all the difference!"

Stewart Robson was breathless: "What drama, Derek! That's why they call it the beautiful game. Just when Bayern thought they had it wrapped up, Leverkusen refused to die. Havertz with the composure in the biggest moment of his young career!"

[Bayern Munich 2-2 Bayer Leverkusen (Havertz 89')]

[90+1]

The Leverkusen players erupted in joy, rushing to the corner flag to embrace Havertz in celebration. Bosz was punching the air on the touchline while Flick stood with his hands on his hips, staring at the sky in disbelief. The fourth official raised his board showing three minutes of added time, and both teams knew that anything could happen in those crucial moments.

Bayern tried to respond immediately from the restart. Thiago sprayed the ball wide to Perisic, who skipped past Diaby. Cutting inside, he laid it off to Lewandowski, the striker tapped it back to Goretzka. The midfielder tried to send it wide to Coutinho, but Wendell read the pass and intercepted it cleanly.

Not wasting time, he sent it up the flank to Bailey, who was already sprinting toward the halfway line. The Jamaican winger collected the ball in stride, his fresh legs allowing him to glide past Thiago's desperate tackle attempt. With Pavard backpedalling frantically, and Kimmich closing in, Bailey cut inside, trying to squeeze in between the two.

Bailey squeezed through the narrowest of gaps, brushing past Kimmich before offloading the ball quickly to Volland, who had checked into space on the left side of the box. Volland didn't hesitate; he turned past Alaba and whipped a low shot across the goal with his right foot. Neuer, already braced, dropped low to his right, palming the ball away with both hands.

Rakim and Davis raced to the rebound, but the Canadian won the chase and cleanly cleared the ball away. "So, so close!" Derek Rae bellowed. "Volland nearly won the cup for Leverkusen right at the death!"

Robson quickly added: "He struck it clean as you like, Derek, Neuer was just better, but the margins are razor thin at this level. Flick's men are holding on by a thread."

The Bayern players regrouped quickly, Thiago slowing the tempo with short passes in midfield, clearly trying to run out the remaining seconds. The referee glanced at his watch, and as Lewandowski tried to lay off a final ball to Perisic, Sven Bender intercepted and launched it clear. A moment later, Tobias Welz blew the whistle for full-time. The Olympiastadion roared as the tie went into extra time.

[Full-Time: Bayern Munich 2–2 Bayer Leverkusen]

Chapter 608 One Moment Of Brilliance

[04/07/2020 | Time: 21:45 PM | DFB-Pokal Final Leverkusen 1 : 2 Bayern | Location: Olympiastadion Berlin]

The camera panned across the Olympiastadion as the players huddled at their technical areas, bodies hunched, shirts drenched in sweat, physios spraying cold mist over cramped legs. Derek Rae's voice came in, heavy with the weight of the occasion.

"Well, Stewart, ninety minutes weren't enough to separate them. Both teams have run themselves into the ground, and now it's about who has the legs and the will to carry this through another thirty."

Robson didn't hesitate. "That's exactly it, Derek. This is where tired minds and tired legs make the difference. Flick will lean on his experience—Thiago, Coutinho, Lewandowski—they've been here before, they know what it takes. Bosz, on the other hand, has injected energy with Bailey and Bellarabi, and Rakim is still full of running. He'll tell his side: keep believing, keep pushing."

The camera cut to Bosz crouched in front of his men, gesturing rapidly with his hands. He seemed to want to raise his players' morale forcefully and would drag them across the finish line if he had to. At the Bayern technical area, Flick paced calmly, arms folded, giving instructions to his playmakers. Trainers would go around checking on their players, giving massages and water when needed.

"This, Stewart," Derek continued, "is when you have to dig into reserves you didn't even know you had. One mistake, one moment of brilliance—it turns you into a hero, and could decide the Pokal."

"You can feel it," Rae concluded. "They will want to decide it in one more half-hour to crown the winner in Berlin."

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[91]

The referee's whistle signalled the start of extra time, and both teams trudged back into position with heavy legs but fiery eyes. Leverkusen got the ball rolling, Havertz immediately dropping deep to dictate the tempo. "And here we go again," Derek Rae announced, his voice steady but brimming with tension. "Thirty minutes to decide the German Cup, or penalties if they can't be separated."

Stewart Robson's analysis was immediate: "You can see the difference in body language already, Derek. Bayern's veterans look composed but weary, while Leverkusen's youngsters still have that hunger in their eyes."

The opening exchanges were cagey, both sides clearly feeling the effects of a gruelling ninety minutes. Passes that had been crisp earlier were now sloppy, or too rushed, touches that had been sure were

now heavy. But the intensity never wavered as they fought for every inch with tackles flying left, right, and centre.

[94]

Bailey was causing havoc down Leverkusen's left flank, his fresh legs allowing him to sprint past tired Bayern defenders like they were standing still. In the 94th minute, he collected a pass from Demirbay and immediately set off, forcing Pavard into a foot race. The Jamaican managed to trick him into thinking he would go to the byline, allowing him to cut inside when the full back stepped back.

His move drew Boateng out of position, who looked to shut down the dead space, but the winger slid the ball past him before he could react. Volland had timed his run to perfection, staying onside by inches as he latched onto the through ball. With only Neuer to beat, Volland tried to wrap the ball past the keeper into the far corner.

But the Bayern captain wasn't done yet. Diving full stretch to his left, Neuer managed to get a palm to the ball, deflecting it away from the goal. Alaba shielded the ball, bodying Havertz away before clearing the ball out of the box. "What a save from Neuer!" Derek Rae exclaimed. "And what an opening statement from the Leverkusen side."

"You can tell how much they want this. Derck Bayern will have to earn it." Steward analysed before breaking down what led to the chance.

[98]

Despite starting strongly in extra time, they were still facing Bayern, and their response to the pressure was swift and clinical. Coutinho, who had been relatively quiet, suddenly came alive on the Bayern right wing. Collecting the ball in midfield, the Brazilian danced past two challenges with flair, showing why he was valued at 120 million euros.

He found an opening before Wendell could lock him down and sent a defence-splitting ball into the box. The pass to Lewandowski was inch-perfect, slipping past the outstretched leg of Tapsoba.

The Polish striker angled his run with Bender at his back, receiving the ball inside the box with feather-light grace. Taking the ball away from Bednar behind him, he opened up the angle with the outrushing Hradecky, unleashing a fierce drive toward the bottom corner.

Hradecky threw himself down low, getting a hand to the ball, but couldn't keep it out. The net bulged, and Bayern's bench erupted in celebration. "Lewandowski strikes again!" Stewart Robson shouted. "Just when you thought the well was dry, the Polish master finds another goal! And that, my friend, is why he's one of the best strikers in the world - in the biggest moments, he delivers!"

[Bayern Munich 3-2 Bayer Leverkusen (Lewandowski 98')]

[102]

From the restart, Leverkusen threw everything forward like a pack of starving wolves. Bayern struggled to settle into their familiar passing game, as the ball carrier soon found themselves surrounded by black shirts. Forced to clear it long in the end, Leverkusen recovered possession from an aerial duel.

Rakim collected the ball from Baumgartlinger on the right wing just past the halfway line and immediately cut inside. Beautiful chaos was the only word to describe what unfolded as the youngster went on a run. Two step overs and a shoulder dip, he got Thiago to bite, allowing him to glide past him.

Drifting back right, Goretzka and Davis stepped up to get in his way. He feinted a breakout to the touch line with a step over, but merely tapped the ball to his right into his stride to dodge Goretzka. Before Davis could intervene, he did the opposite with his right foot slipping in between them as he broke past. An arm tugged at his shirt, pulling him back, and he quickened, pulling the ball back before Alba could interfere.

His right had shot out, slapping the hand, tugging him away as he slid the ball to his left, poking through the open legs of Goretzka. Stumbling past his outstretched leg, he shoulder checked Davis, who had gone underneath Goretzka, allowing him to regain the ball. Watching Kimich get closer with a dangerous glint, he released the ball with the outside of his right boot.

The pass curved wickedly along the D like a crooked barber trying to do a line-up, spinning narrowly past Pavard, who had stopped to react to the oncoming ball. That proved to be a mistake as he couldn't reach it, and Bailey, who was making a run in, slipped in behind, latching onto the through ball. Neuer is world-class, but the Jamaican wasn't going to miss this, and he did not, as he calmly slotted the ball far and low, the German wall couldn't reach.

"Oh my lord Steward, they have scored, and what did we just witness?" Derek Rae's voice cracked with pure disbelief. "What a goal! What a run from Rakim Rex! He's torn Bayern apart single-handedly!"

Stewart Robson was equally breathless. "Derek, we talked about one moment of brilliance before extra time and oh boy did we get one. He made Goretzka, Davies, Alaba, and even Pavard look like schoolboys. The kid's got ice in his veins!"

[Bayern Munich 3-3 Bayer Leverkusen (Bailey 102')]

[107]

Bayern tried to respond immediately, but Leverkusen were riding high and were unwilling to give them an inch. Thiago, normally so composed, misplaced a simple pass to Coutinho under the pressure of Baumgartlinger. Demirel pounced on the loose ball and immediately looked upfield.

His diagonal pass found Rakim in space down the right wing, with Davis a couple of yards from him. He didn't do anything fancy as he saw the nearby players react aggressively the moment he got on the ball. Instead, he fought for a yard of space beyond Davis and whipped in a curling cross toward the penalty spot.

Volland exploded forward, leaping into the air between the centre-backs. The striker met the ball with the top of his head but was unable to guide it, sending it onto the back of Boateng's head. It took an awkward deflection flying goalwards, forcing Neuer to backpedal frantically...

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[105+2]

Volland exploded forward, leaping into the air between the centre-backs. The striker met the ball with the top of his head but was unable to guide it, sending it onto the back of Boateng's head. It took an awkward deflection flying goalwards, forcing Neuer to backpedal frantically, but luck favoured him.

The ball did not come down in time, skimming off the top of the bar, bouncing out for a corner. "Almost rocked the Bayern goal for the fourth time in this match." Derek Rae shouted. "But you can see that they caught the scent of victory."

[105+3]

The corner that followed was chaos. Rakim's delivery was perfect, hanging in the air as both sets of players charged toward the goal. Tapsoba rose highest at the back post, his header crashing off the crossbar before bouncing down into the six-yard box.

In the ensuing scramble, Havertz reacted quickest, stabbing the ball goalward from close range. Boateng threw himself across, but the ball squeezed under his body and trickled over the line by inches.

"GOAL! Havertz has done it again!" Stewart Robson screamed. "Leverkusen lead for the first time since the first half! What a cup final this is turning into!"

The goal sparked wild celebrations from the Leverkusen bench. Bosz was on his knees, hands to his head in disbelief, while his players mobbed Havertz near the corner flag.

[Bayern Munich 3-4 Bayer Leverkusen (Havertz 112')]

[106]

The second period of extra time began with both sets of players looking like marathon runners in the final miles. Cramps were setting in, which had been treated by the medics during the intermission, allowing them to function for the final push. The medical staff remained on standby, ready to intervene if anything were to happen.

But the quality of football remained remarkably high for men running on fumes. "Fifteen minutes left, and Leverkusen lead by a single goal. Can Bayern find one more moment of magic, or will this be Leverkusen's night?"

"Normally, I would say no, this late in the competition, but we have seen some phenomenal goals and honestly, I could see this game turning on its head one more time, Derek," Steward commented as the opening exchanges unfolded between both sides.

Bayern, despite trailing, kept its composure, passing the ball through their ranks. They worked the ball patiently, through Thiago and Kimmich combining in midfield as they probed for a breakthrough. Finding it hard to attack through the middle, Thiago sent the ball wide, narrowly skipping over Bellarabi's interception to find Perisic, who received it on the turn.

Holding off Bender, he tapped the ball back to Goretzka, who surged forward, holding off Bellarabi. Goretzka surged forward, driving into space before sliding a pass wide to Coutinho. The Brazilian controlled neatly on the right edge of the box, cutting inside onto his left.

Bailey tracked back to help Wendell, but they couldn't prevent the Brazilian from pulling the trigger. Coutinho let it fly, curling a strike toward the far top corner, narrowly missing the legs that slid in to block it. The players held their breath as they craned their necks to see where the ball would end up.

Hradecky leapt across, fingertips brushing the ball, pushing it wide, but not enough to stop it from flying in. The ball hit the inside of the post, rattling the net as the boys from Munich sprinted off in celebration.

Coutinho leapt up in joy, before racing off to the corner flag, dropping down into a powerful slide that tore up some of the turf. "GOAL! Philippe Coutinho delivers for Bayern!" Derek Rae roared. "And once again, the Cup final is level—this is unbelievable!"

Robson followed up, almost laughing in disbelief. "You can't write this. Derek Coutinho has just produced a world-class finish at the most critical time. Fine margins separate these two teams, and right now, nothing. Both teams are flat-out refusing to lose!"

[Bayern Munich 4-4 Bayer Leverkusen (Coutinho 108')]

[117]

The next ten minutes were a slugfest of attacks, tackles, and defensive brilliance from both sides. Rakim found himself dribbling past a couple of players a few times but was either unable to get a shot off or create a meaningful assist for his teammates. He wasn't the only one struggling to produce, as Perišić found it hard to break past Lars Bender once the full back had adjusted to him.

The German seemed to have a wellspring of stamina that continued to gush out the harder he tried. A couple of times, he wrestled the ball free from Bayern players or came sliding in, winning the ball or taking out the man. It had all become the same as long as the ball did not enter his team's 18-yard box.

In the midst of this turmoil, Thiago tried to slow the tempo with his passing, under Flick's instruction. However, Leverkusen continued to press hard, hunting down the ball as they ignored their tired legs. In the 18th minute, however, they found a sudden breakthrough after a long clearance from Alaba.

Lewandowski rose above Tapsoba just past midfield, heading the ball to his left into the path of Perišić. The Croatian received the ball on the chest, knocking it into his path, forcing Bender to rapidly back track. In a moment, the entire Bayern team exploded forward as the Leverkusen defensive shape collapsed.

Perisic drove down the left channel, his legs pumping despite the fatigue that had set into every muscle. Bender was tracking him stride for stride, with long, rapid side steps as he kept a hand out to gauge the opponent's distance. The Croatian knew that his opponent was setting him up to take him out, and if he didn't do something, it would be inevitable.

As they approached the penalty area, the winger dipped his left shoulder as if to break through on the flank. He managed to get the German to turn his hip slightly and immediately attacked, breaking inside with a burst of acceleration. Perišić cut inside, driving toward the box with Lewandowski screaming for the ball as he made a run.

The Croatian winger looked up for the briefest moment before deciding to pull the trigger himself. Striking hard and low toward the bottom corner, the ball left his boot with a bang. Hradecky remained alive, though reacting instantly, diving down to his right to smother the shot with both palms.

The rebound splattered out awkwardly into the six-yard box, but the Finnish keeper sprang up to smother it before Lewandowski and Tapsoba came charging in. "Well, Derek, they needed a hero, and Hradecky does what he has done all season comes to the rescue."

[120+2]

In the dying minutes of extra time, Bailey had charged up the left flank, skipping past two defenders before being taken down by a harsh tackle from Pavard. The referee did not even hesitate to blow his

whistle, signalling a free kick as he went into his pocket, giving Pavard his second yellow, sending him off.

"Well, steward, when you go in like that, you can't expect anything less. His night is over and rightly so." Derek exclaimed a strong reply to the tackle that can only be considered late, no matter the angle. "I understand the tactical thinking, but to me, he should have done it further upfield. Especially with the setpiece talent on that Leverkusen side."

"That's desperation from Pavard, he's been struggling all game, and he tried to make up for it in one big moment. The fact of the matter is, Bailey had him beaten for pace, and rather than let him get the cross in, he's taken the man out. The booking is justified, leaving Bayern down to ten men, and a free kick in a dangerous position to defend with time almost up." Stewart calmly analysed, not feeling the slightest bit of sympathy for the Frenchman.

[120+3]

The free kick was positioned twenty-eight yards from goal, slightly left of the box, perfect for a right-footed strike or left-footed cross. Rakim stood over the ball, with Havertz as they discussed what to do with it. Moments later, the pitch fell into silence as the two of them faced the four-man wall in front of them.

Neuer crouched on his line, barking final instructions, his gloves slapping together as he prepared for what could be the decisive moment. "This is it, Stewart." Derek Rae's voice was barely above a whisper.

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[120+3]

Rakim and Haverts exchanged a few more words as they continued to scan the chaos in the box. Players tussled for position, looking to attack the space around the six-yard box. Deciding on a plan, they both stepped back, Havartz with the right-footed inswing and Rakim with the left-footed out swing.

Silence descended as they awaited the referee's go-ahead, which, after a few warnings to some rowdy players, he did. (Fweet) Havartz moved first, raising a hand as he closed in on the ball, prompting Tapsoba at the furthest right side of the cluster of bodies to pull back to the edge. His marker didn't follow him as he moved to cover another player as Haverts sped up toward the ball.

The German came to a sudden stop a couple of steps in front of the ball, tricking the wall into movement. Before they could react, Rakim closed in on the ball with pace, his foot whipping the ball into the air. It catapulted at pace, curving past Perišić's shoulder on the left side of the four-man wall.

The ball spun viciously through the Berlin night air, curling wickedly away across the penalty spot as the bodies of players who had been at the edge of the box raced in side like a tide. Neuer, in front of his goal, stepped up but quickly stepped back after realising how sharply the ball curved. Players jumped into the air, necks craned to reach it first, but none at the front managed to reach it.

Towards the middle, the ball bent back outwards descending, as it skimmed just over Boateng's head before plunging down toward the far post. Tapsoba, who had peeled away as planned, had a clear path completely unmarked. He launched himself forward, right foot first, meeting the ball with a thunderous strike.

Neuer, who had already been shifting across his box, flung out his left hand instinctively, but he could only graze the ball with his fingertips. The power was too much, and the ball ricocheted off his glove and smacked into the roof of the net. "GOAL! Leverkusen have surely won it now!" Derek Rae roared, his voice echoing in disbelief. "Edmond Tapsoba, the towering centre-back, boots it in with authority! In stoppage time of extra time, Leverkusen lead Bayern 5–4!"

The Leverkusen players erupted in joy as they scrambled to chase after the Burkinabé footballer who had raced off to the sidelines. Throwing off his top, his muscles glistened under the flood lights as he slid on his knees, kicking up grass before being tackled by his teammates. Pandemonium ensued as players from the bench rushed to celebrate with them, piling bodies on top of one another.

"I genuinely thought he was going for goal, given his track record, and from the looks of it, Neuer expected the same." Stewart analysed as the Leverkusen players celebrated to their hearts' content. "That's a goal Tapsoba will remember for a long time to come, and the Bayern players will be wondering when they'll wake up from this nightmare."

The camera cut instantly to the Bayern bench, where Flick was frozen in disbelief, not knowing what to do next. They were already in the added minutes of extra time, not to mention that the momentum had been completely knocked out of their souls. Tobias Welz was forced to blow his whistle several times, even booking a few players, or excessively celebrating as he wrestled both teams to the restart.

[120+5]

The whistle went to restart, and Bayern charged forward immediately. Thiago and Goretzka combined to ping a sequence of passes at speed in midfield, as they drove forward. They quickly broke past the first lines of Leverkusen defenders who had dropped back before Thiago slid the ball to Perišić on the left. The Croatian bombed down the line using his pace to skip past the more tiered Bender and whipped in a dangerous cross toward the six-yard box.

Lewandowski flung himself at it, colliding with Sven Bender mid-air, but neither of them could even get close as Hradecky flew up fist-first. With a powerful punch, he catapulted the ball out of his box as he crashed into the two players. Kai picked up the rebound using his body to shield it from Kimmich before launching it up the field with a powerful clearance.

His clearance felt like the final release of pressure as the ball sailed high, spinning under the Olympiastadion floodlights, before landing deep in Bayern's half. Alaba chased it down, but with no support around him and no time left on the clock, all he could do was hook it back toward midfield. Goretzka tried to bring it under control, but Demirbay was on him immediately, snapping into the challenge, forcing the ball out for a throw-in.

Tobias Welz glanced at his watch one last time, raised the whistle to his lips, and brought it to a deafening close. "IT'S OVER!" Derek Rae's voice boomed across the broadcast. "Bayer Leverkusen have done it! In one of the greatest DFB-Pokal finals you will ever see, they have beaten Bayern Munich 5–4 in extra time! Edmond Tapsoba is the man of the hour as he secures glory for Leverkusen here in Berlin!"

Stewart Robson sounded almost out of breath. "What a night, Derek. What a match. Both teams went at each other like warriors, goal after goal, chance after chance. Both teams from the first minute gave it their all, but tonight belongs to Leverkusen as they break a 27-year-old silverware drought."

"What a way to break that dry spell with a game that fans will tell their grandchildren about," Derek commented as down below on the field, the Leverkusen celebrations ensued with joyful chants as they congratulated each other on a job well done. "I feel like we had this conversation a few weeks ago, when the roles of victors and losers were reversed when the two clashed over the Bundesliga title.

Rakim, after a round of celebrating with Wirtz and Diaby, walked toward the Bayern players, taking in the moment as he calmed his breathing. They had finally won a piece of silverware, and what that really meant to the club had yet to really sink in his mind. Finding Gnabry sitting on the turf, he stopped in front of him, casting a shadow over him, prompting the latter to look up.

"Congratulations," the Bayern winger said, his voice barely audible above the celebrations as he grasped Rakim's outstretched hand. "You deserved it tonight."

Rakim helped pull him to his feet, both players sharing a quick side hug before separating. "Thanks, man. This was some game that could have gone either way," Rakim replied, patting Gnabry on the shoulder before the German trudged toward his defeated teammates.

Across the pitch, similar scenes were unfolding as Leverkusen players sought out their Bayern counterparts. Some had National teammates with whom they shared a friendship, while others were just friends or showcased their sportsmanship. Havertz found Müller sitting near the centre circle and offered his hand.

"Twenty-seven years," Havertz said quietly to Müller. "We've waited twenty-seven years for this." Müller nodded, forcing a smile despite the pain. "Enjoy it, kid. Nights like this don't come often." He paused, looking around the stadium. "You played like champions tonight."