

Football God 161

Chapter 161 Premier league is back!

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 1:)

(Manchester United – Fulham)

(Date: 16th August, 2024)

...

(Ipswich Town – Liverpool)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Arsenal – Wolves)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Everton – Brighton)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Newcastle – Southampton)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Nottingham Forest – Bournemouth)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(West Ham – Aston Villa)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Brentford – Crystal Palace)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Chelsea – Manchester City)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Leicester City – Tottenham)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

There is just this excitement that comes with a new premier league season.

The emotions and expectations of all the fans of the different clubs, the rivalries, the banter, the passion, everything resumes anew.

Manchester United played the opening game against Fulham but all the attention was not just on them for matchday one.

There was a lot of excitement and anticipation around the games of other big English clubs like Arsenal and Liverpool, but the biggest excitement lingered on the heavyweight clash between Chelsea and Manchester City.

To the Fulham players though, none of that concerned them as they arrived in the iconic Old Trafford to play their first game of the season.

In the late 90s, early and late 2000s, going on a trip to Old Trafford was like a death sentence against their star-studded squads.

In recent years, this myth of Old Trafford already more or less died. Literally, the stadium was old and in need of repairs while in terms of football, recent Man United squads were not like those of old that induced fear in opponents.

Fulham went to Old Trafford without an ounce of fear.

Both teams started with their best lineup.

The home team started with Andre Onana in between the posts. Protecting him were the defensive quadruple of Mazraoui, Harry Maguire, Lisandro Martinez, and Diogo Dalot.

Casemiro and the young Kobbie Mainoo partnered in midfield on top the defense, while ahead of them were Ahmad Diallo, Mason Mount, Marcus Rashford, and Bruno Fernandes.

As for Fulham, Muniz led the attack.

Behind the striker were the trio of Samuel Moses, Emile Smith Rowe, and Adama Traore, the imposingly swift attacker.

Sam retained his spot in attacking midfield while Emile Smith Rowe started on the right, they were expected to play close to each other.

Behind them were Alex Iwobi and Lukic who started in defensive midfield, and the 4-man defense comprised Robinson, Basse, Diop, and Tete. Of course, Bernd Leno started in between the posts.

The players made their way into the pitch to start the game.

The commentator started proceedings. "Last time out, Erik Ten Haag's team finished 8th in the table, their lowest placing since 1990".

"The Dutch defender, Mathias De Ligt hoping to make his debut as the evening progresses".

"...the players take the knee to reaffirm that racism or any other type of discrimination has no place in the premier league".

"...Under the Friday night lights in Old Trafford, the kickoff to the new premier league season, a new adventure..."

Hearing the voice of the commentator amid the noise made by the tens of thousands of fans in red, Sam felt his blood heating up.

His face flushed in excitement. 'I've missed this'. He thought.

He jumped, stretching his legs as he reacclimatized to the feeling, and then the referee's whistle finally sounded to kick off this game.

FWEEEE!

Manchester United started kickoff.

Having played a pretty disappointing campaign last time out under Erik Ten Haag compared to their lofty standards, the Manchester United fans were clearly expectant of a fight-back by their team this season.

Afterall, the fans in red were already clamoring on social media about their title-bidding credentials this season.

To back their talk with action, they had to start it this game.

From the very first minute of this game, Manchester United asserted their authority as they put Fulham on the backfoot. They dominated possession but just like late last season, Fulham didn't buckle under the pressure.

Obeying the tactical approach of their coach to a fault, the Fulham players were ok with letting Man United hog the possession as they played and defended like a team. Fulham's shape was extremely solid.

The midfield duo of Casemiro and Kobbie Mainoo impressed as they won the battle in their side of the pitch, and even Sam seemed to be locked out for most of this game in the first half.

Sam kept on doing his thing though. He never got much time or space on the ball, so he simply abused his greatest aspect again, his stamina.

While Fulham struggled to settle into this game, Sam abused his stamina, completely locking out his side of the pitch with sheer work rate.

With time, his teammates used him as a point of reference as they settled into the game, improving their gameplay.

Manchester United was still the more dangerous side though.

The only blemish was their attack. For some reason, the 4-man Man United attack was failing to gel as they barely created any danger of note.

The game continued like this for most of the half. And when Old Trafford thought the first half was going to be like usual, ending in a drab draw, in the 45th plus 3 minutes, Old Trafford was silenced.

It came out of the blue.

After being locked out from most of this game by Harry Maguire and Lisandro Martinez's valiant display, when it seemed like he would disappear all game, Sam finally switched on the gear just once this first half, and that one time brought a tangible result with it.

After receiving a pass from Emile Smith Rowe from the right, Sam took one touch to control the ball, then another touch to nutmeg the onrushing Kobbie Mainoo and as Casemiro closed in, he poked a pass with the outside of his boot to Emile Smith Rowe who ran in tandem with him.

Bam! Bam!

One touch football, short swift one-two passes.

It didn't feel like football at all, rather as the ball moved, alternating between these 2 young midfielders, it felt like some exquisite ancient dance.

Immediately after passing to Smith Rowe, Sam ghosted into Casemiro's blind spot and just like he expected, the ball rolled back into his path.

Harry Maguire charged out to meet him and in one touch, he poked the ball back to Emile Smith Rowe who passed it back immediately in between the 2 Manchester United center backs.

Abusing his superior speed and agility to dash behind Maguire, Sam took one look at goal and then...

WHOP!

He hit the ball with such force with his right foot to the bottom left corner that Andre Onana was left sprawling helplessly.

It was a neat finish to an even neater team move.

"GOALLLL!" The commentator screamed.

"Can you believe it? Fulham scored first!"

"I bet you that few people saw this coming! It's the Nigerian Zidane again, Sam has done it again!"

"Such chemistry between him and Smith Rowe, it's almost like they've been playing together for years!"

"What a goal!"

"Old Trafford is silenced, how will Manchester United respond?"

The first half ended 0-1 in Fulham's favor.

The atmosphere in this iconic stadium became even more oppressive, the tension increasing by the second, turning as thick as a quagmire.

Could Fulham hold on to their lead?

Chapter 162 Telepathic chemistry; a dream start to a new season

Could Fulham hold on to their lead?

This was the prevailing question all across Old Trafford as the 2 teams went into the tunnel for half-time. For the fans in red, they certainly wished for their team to orchestrate a turn-around in the second half.

When the Fulham players entered the away dressing room, all of them were in good spirits as they faced their coach.

They knew that coming to Old Trafford was always going to be tough, but they managed to execute the game plan so far, defending like a team.

By the end of the half, they could tell that the players in red were already becoming flustered; that was exactly what Coach Marco Silva predicted.

Marco Silva faced his players, he smiled. "Congratulations boys, you managed to complete 50 meters of the 100-meter race, and you're in the lead".

"In the second half, I want you all to stick to the game plan".

"Stay tight, zonal mark them to block all dangerous passing lanes. Let your work rate remain high, and remember to keep Bruno Fernandes on a leash".

"I don't know why their coach played him as the striker today," Marco Silva grinned. "But it's clearly not working, and if they don't change things up, we just need to keep him stifled for the rest of the 45 minutes".

He looked at his 2 center backs. "Bassey, Diop, I want the both of you to keep up with your antics, keep on harassing him".

"Fernandes is notorious for losing his cool. Make him lose his cool and we'll have the advantage".

And then he clapped. "That's all boys, let's go out there and create more history!"

"Yeah!" The fired-up Fulham players emerged from the tunnel.

After 10 minutes of half-time, the players of both clubs finally lined up on the pitch again in opposite sides, and then the referee finally restarted the proceedings.

FWEEEE!

This time, Fulham started kick-off and almost immediately, a lack of concentration on the part of the Man United players almost let Fulham score a quick goal as after receiving a long pass from Alex Iwobi, Muniz's lethal shot just grazed against the bar, sneaking behind for a goal kick.

That shot definitely rattled nerves but after it, Man United finally calmed down. Whatever Erik Ten Haag told his players during halftime, it was clearly working as after 5 minutes, this team asserted their authority again.

As the minutes progressed, the Man United players kept on pressing high up into the Fulham half, showing their intent to desperately score a goal.

In front of their home fans, in the first game of the season, Man United did not want to start with a loss, or even a draw, they wanted to win!

Bam!

Bruno Fernandes tested Bernd Leno time and again with his lethal shots.

Marcus Rashford was largely kept out of the game at the left-hand side of this pitch, but when he went on that occasional mazy run, dribbling past players, his final ball let him down as he gave the ball to Fulham players far too easily.

As the half wore on, buoyed by the loud noise being made by their fans, the Manchester United fans played high octane attacking football.

Changes finally started being made as Erik Ten Haag introduced Joshua Zirkzee, Alejandro Garnacho, and eventually Scott McTominay to revive his attack.

The substitutions made sense as the game wore on, Man United's threat visibly increasing, but then again, they didn't have all the time in the world.

70 minutes passed, no goal...

80 minutes passed, no goal...

85 minutes passed, still no goal...

And just as infuriated Manchester United fans started leaving the stadium, a lapse of concentration by the Fulham defense after playing impressively for almost 90 minutes eventually opened them up.

"Garnacho...!"

"Scott McTominayyyyyy!"

"What a goal!"

"It's Zirkzee celebrating! Oh, the new boy was the one who got his leg to the ball, a goal on his debut! A dream debut!"

That goal definitely seemed to swing the momentum back in Man United's favor as the players in red began running with even greater urgency after the restart, chasing the winner as the Fulham players were finally made to panic.

Throughout most of this second half, even as Manchester United held on to most of the ball, Fulham was still confident as they defended doggedly.

After that 87th minute goal though, canceling Sam's effort in the first half, the Fulham defense in the absence of Adarabioyo finally became a bit shaky.

But then again, in recent times, they already had a beacon to look up to for courage when the going gets tough for them.

Mere 2 minutes after Zirkzee scored the goal for Manchester United, Sam won the ball back in midfield before spraying a pass to the right towards Emile Smith Rowe even as he immediately started a rampaging run towards the United box.

The United players saw his run, Martinez reacted, tracking his run but then again, no one thought his teammates would pass to him.

The game was too tight to play such a risky pass.

But Sam did not hesitate, he continued his run deep, having full confidence in his teammate's trust in him. 'Give me the ball Smith'.

'Give me the ball, you know where I want it'.

'Just like we did in training'.

And then, to the shock of the other Manchester United players, Smith Rowe took one touch of the ball to control it, shifted it a bit from McTominay's press before floating the ball into the 18-yard box.

As soon as Sam heard the ball being hit, his eyes gleamed. 'Yes!'

He was running with his back to the ball towards Manchester United's goal, Sam did not see the ball coming but he trusted in the passing ability of his teammate. And he was right, it was a pin-point accurate cross.

As Maguire and Martinez tried to sandwich him, with eyes widened in intense concentration, Sam still didn't see the ball but he saw the shadow of its descent.

Bam!

Kicking the ground, he leaped into the air.

Rising into the air above the 2 Manchester United center backs, Sam raised his weaker left foot up and with the tip of his boot caressed the ball as it descended.

Bam!

It was a touch that screamed treachery.

Sam's delicate touch killed all the momentum on the ball, taming it on top his leg even as his wide eyes glowed with fire.

"What a touch from Sam!"

"He's in the air! What can he do?"

Thud!

Landing on the ground even as Martinez shoved his body aggressively, Sam stood his ground with his physicality as he raised his right leg, using his lap to control the ball again that was still in the air.

Sam didn't just use his lap to hit and control the ball once, he juggled it, using his lap to hit it 3 times.

While Sam juggled, he was not in one place.

He moved, turning just beyond Martinez's reach of the ball even as he was still sandwiched between the 2 players and then...

BAM!

Sam's right leg hit the ball in mid-air with pure venom, unleashing a volleyed shot that left Andre Onana fumbling in his near post.

For the second time this game, Old Trafford was silenced.

"SAMMMMMMM...!!!" The commentator screamed.

"The Nigerian Zidane is back!"

"What a touch! What a piece of skill! What a goal!"

"First game of the season and he's still the same boy we know!"

"That pass from Emile Smith Rowe was also straight out of the top drawer, what telepathic chemistry between the 2 wonderkids!"

"It's joy for Fulham and woe for Manchester United!"

That goal in the 89th minute sent the world of football reeling in shock.

Manchester United could do nothing in additional time, the game ended 1-2 in Fulham's favor, dooming Man United to a loss in their first game of the season.

Chapter 163 New season, same old Manchester United

(Daily Sun News!)

(New season; same old Manchester United! The Red Devils lose on their first game of the season to a young and energetic Fulham side led by wonderkids!)

...

(National TV!)

(Joy for Fulham, woe to Manchester United! Is it time for Manchester United to finally accept their losses and let go of Erik Ten Haag?)

Matchday 1 of a new premier league season was always under a lot of publicity and scrutiny all across the world, and the first game hoarded a lot of this attention.

This was why Manchester United's matchday 1 loss became a trend.

Ruthless rival fans trolled Manchester United fans on social media, re quoting the new season, same old Manchester united iconic quote by the Daily Sun News.

Most rival fans clamored for Manchester United to offer Erik Ten Haag, the Dutch coach a lifetime contract to manage the club. Others claimed he was already a Manchester United legend on par with the great Sir Alex Ferguson.

Every single Manchester United player was trolled ruthlessly on all social media platforms, and another thing that trend on social media after the game was Mark Goldbridge's reaction in his livestream to the loss.

As soon as Sam scored the 2nd goal for Fulham, starting the season with a brace, the famous Manchester United went on a rant in his livestream, destroying things even as he rained curses on the 2 Manchester United center backs.

"Maguire, f*cking Maguire again!"

"How can both of you be sandwiching him and still let him score? Dammit!"

Well, the first game of the matchday was not the end of the world. After trolling Man United to their satisfaction, premier league fans finally turned their attention to 17th when majority of the rest matchday 1 fixtures would be played.

And it was safe to say that the drama, banter and excitement was back, and with it came with a bang!

Against Ipswich Town, the newly promoted side, Liverpool met them at home and initiated them into the premier league with a 0-2 drubbing courtesy of fine goals from Diogo Jota and Mohamed Salah.

In their first game of the season, Arsenal welcomed Wolves to the Emirates Stadium and there, the Gunners taught the visitors a lesson.

Goals from Kai Havertz and Bukayo Saka doomed Wolves to a 2-0 loss.

Everton vs Brighton was an absolute thriller. Goals from Mitoma and Welbeck gave Brighton a 0-2 lead against Everton at home, but after a 66th minute Ashley Young red card, Brighton ran away comfortably with the lead as they tripled their lead through Adingra's late goal in the 87th minute.

Between Newcastle and Southampton, despite Schar receiving an early red card in the 28th minute of the game, a 45th minute Joelinton goal enabled Newcastle to grind out a grueling 1-0 result.

Nottingham Forest and Bournemouth settled for a draw after goals from Wood and Semenyo.

West Ham vs Aston Villa was another thriller, but Aston Villa managed to edge their rivals away from home with a 1-2 score line with goals from Amadou Onana and Duran. West Ham's goal came from a Lucas Paqueta penalty.

Brentford vs Crystal Palace was another thriller, but goals from Mbeumo and Wissa in the 29th and 76th minute edged Brentford over their rivals as they won the game 2-1 at home.

And then the magnum opus of matchday 1 was played on 18th August.

2 heavyweights of the premier league in Chelsea and Manchester City clashed in Stamford Bridge.

After getting a new coach, Chelsea fans were hopeful of getting a result but Manchester City was still Manchester City, they started the season swimmingly as they set a marker for the rest of the season.

Goals from Erling Haaland in the 18th minute and Mateo Kovacic in the 84th minute doomed Chelsea to a 0-2 loss at home.

And then, on 19th August, the last game of matchday 1 between Leicester City and Tottenham was played. It was safe to say that it was another thriller.

Goals from Tottenham's Porro and Leicester's Jamie Vardy canceled both teams out, leaving them to settle for a tightly contested draw.

Matchday 1 fixtures were finally concluded.

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 1:)

(Manchester United 1-2 Fulham)

(Date: 16th August, 2024)

...

(Ipswich Town 0-2 Liverpool)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Arsenal 2-0 Wolves)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Everton 0-3 Brighton)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Newcastle 1-0 Southampton)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Nottingham Forest 1-1 Bournemouth)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(West Ham 1-2 Aston Villa)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Brentford 2-1 Crystal Palace)

(Date: 17th August, 2024)

...

(Chelsea 0-2 Manchester City)

(Date: 18th August, 2024)

...

(Leicester City 1-1 Tottenham)

(Date: 19th August, 2024)

All in all, the premier league was truly back and it came with a banger. Premier league fans were not left wanting in terms of entertainment.

And after matchday 1, a few names stood out among the players of the 20 football clubs of the premier league.

The premier league's team of the matchday was finally decided.

(Premier league team of the week: Matchday 1!)

(Goalkeeper: Mark Flekken)

>Club: Brentford<

(Right Back: Pedro Porro)

>Club: Tottenham<

(Center Back: Ruben Dias)

>Club: Manchester City<

(Center Back: Josko Gvardiol)

>Club: Manchester City<

(Left Back: Diogo Dalot)

>Club: Diogo Dalot<

(Midfield: Amadou Onana)

>Club: Aston Villa<

(Midfield: Mateo Kovacic)

>Club: Manchester City<

(Midfield: Samuel Moses)

>Club: Aston Villa)

(Attack: Bukayo Saka)

>Club: Arsenal<

(Attack: Yoane Wissa)

>Club: Brentford<

(Attack: Kai Havertz)

>Club: Arsenal<

After impressive performances in their first game of the new premier league season, these 11 players were the best in their respective positions and Sam made the list, once again announcing himself to football fans across the world.

This was not his first time making the premier league team of the matchday, but this time it was different because now, he was no longer an unknown player.

The reason why other Fulham players didn't make the team of the matchday was because Manchester United dominated and were the better side throughout the game, only lacking in their offensive firepower.

Sam singlehandedly won Fulham its first game of the season.

Emile Smith Rowe should have a shout for the team of the matchday after his 2 assists' performance, but still, it was a fair line-up.

To Sam, first mission of the new season accomplished.

And just like he expected, after the game, his system lit up with notifications of new season system quests.

Chapter 164 The Black Mamba of football

~-----~

[Congratulations! You have played your first game of the new 2024/2025 premier league season for Fulham FC; you are now eligible for the season system quest!]

[You have unlocked Season System Quests!]

[Your club, Fulham FC is eligible to compete in 3 fronts; the English premier league, the FA Cup, and the EFL Cup!]

[Season Quest 1: English Premier League]

[Mission 1: Win the English premier league with Fulham FC!]

[Mission Reward: +4 increase to 2 random football attributes, +10000 Skill Points, and a random bonus reward!]

...

[Mission 2: Become the top assist provider of the English premier league!]

[Mission Reward: +5 increase to your passing attribute and a random passing football skill!]

[Season Quest 2: English FA Cup]

[Mission 1: Win the FA Cup with Fulham FC!]

[Mission Reward: +2 increase to 2 random football attributes!]

...

[Mission 2: Win the best player award in the English FA Cup!]

[Mission Reward: Random reward]

[Season Quest 3: EFL Cup]

[Mission 1: Win the EFL Cup with Fulham FC!]

[Mission Reward: +5000 Skill Points and a random bonus reward!]

[Season Quest 4: Champions League Spot]

[Mission 1: Secure a top 4 finish for Fulham FC, guaranteeing Champions League football for your club in the next season!]

[Mission Reward: +5 increase to your physicality and defending attributes!]

[System Remark: The art of defending is not just for defenders, it's a big step towards becoming an all-rounded midfielder!]

[Season Quest 5: 30 goals contributions!]

[Mission 1: Register at least 30 goal contributions in the 2024/2025 professional football season!]

[Mission Reward: A legendary inheritance!]

~----~

After the game against Manchester United, getting back home to his hotel room, when he saw the notification from his system about a new season system quest, he half expected it to be unlike any other one he had experienced in his 2 and half seasons of professional football but still, Sam never expected this.

The premier league, EFL Cup, and FA Cup season system quests were within his expectations, but he didn't see the last 2 coming till it came.

In a way, the 4th season quest was a bonanza since it went hand in hand with the 1st season system quest. It was also like a compensation, in the very possible scenario that Fulham did not win the premier league.

"Honestly, I'm being a bit delusional". Sam chuckled. "When did Fulham winning the premier league ever become a likely scenario?"

But then his eyes gleamed. "It doesn't matter". He grinned. "What matters is what I want and to what extent I'm willing to go to get it".

"If I say Fulham wins the premier league," his eyes glinted with determination. "Who dares to stop me?"

Maybe he really was just being delusional, maybe at the end of the season, Fulham would come crashing down in a painful fall but Sam didn't care. To him, what mattered was giving his all.

He thought of the late legendary NBA player, Kobe Bryant then he grinned again. 'This season, I shall be the Black Mamba of football!'

And then, he focused on the 5th season quest, the one that surprised him the most. He paid attention to the mission itself, but his attention lingered more on the reward. 'Damn! Another legendary inheritance?'

At this moment, Sam felt his body shaking in excitement.

The elastico dribble was still the most lethal weapon in his arsenal of football skills. With it, he had destroyed unknown and famous football stars already.

It was the purest expression of his determination on a pitch, his best skill.

And now, Sam just got the opportunity to get another legendary inheritance.

"Hehe," he chuckled. "Bring it on!"

"30 goal contributions?" He laughed. "I will score 30 goals in all competitions this season!"

Saying that and remembering something, Sam suddenly picked his iPhone and accessed social media. 'Talking of goal contributions, how many goals and assists have I given since I started my professional football career?'

He never really paid attention to the details since the football just kept on coming with such speed since he made his professional debut.

But now, Sam wanted to know and google gave him his answer.

Well, he didn't just know, it was safe to say that google took him through a rollercoaster of emotions of the past 1 year plus of his life.

Sam smiled as he stared at the information before him. 'I almost forgot already; my first goal contribution was in my debut game against Nasarawa United'.

'I assisted Austin's goal to seal a 1-3 win for Enyimba'. His smile widened. 'I think that's the same day that I did a mistake earlier, giving a goal to the opponents'.

'But I managed to redeem myself with that late assist'. He smiled again, feeling nostalgic as he laid down on his bed while looking at his ceiling. 'Thinking back now, I've improved so much since that game'.

'Then, literally all my attributes were in the 70s and I think my dribbling attribute was in the 60s then but now,' he grinned. 'I'm a whole other level of player. Besides, I'm now even playing in the premier league'.

'How time flies'.

He kept on reminiscing. 'After my debut game, in the other game, my first home game for Enyimba against Akwa United,' he grinned. 'I got my first man of the match award after my game-winning 1 assist and 1 goal display'.

'That was my very first goal in professional football'.

"Ah!" He sighed. "It feels like ages ago".

Sam always knew about his talent, which became ridiculously amplified after getting the Ultimate Football System but still, he underestimated himself a bit.

Apparently, Enyimba FC fans regarded him as a legend of the club despite his 1 and half season spent there.

Well, his numbers certainly backed up the claim.

Smiling, Sam looked at his iPhone for a few minutes before navigating to his contacts and dialing a certain number for the first time in a long time.

(Outgoing call to Captain Austin...)

After almost 6 months since last speaking with his original captain, Sam now yearned to speak with him again after his reminiscing.

Chapter 165 A phone call to an old friend

Click!

As soon as the phone call connected, a familiar voice came from the other side. "And see who decided to call me today!" Austin said in a loud voice.

Sam chuckled. "Hey boss, long time".

"What?!" Austin exclaimed from the other side of the phone. "How dare you call me boss?"

Sam was startled at first, wondering what he said wrong till Austin continued. "The Nigerian Zidane himself calling me boss, Sam, are you mocking me?"

"Wait, what? No, come on..."

"You're definitely mocking me, right?"

"No, Austin, come on!"

Austin laughed on the other side of the phone. "Chill out man, I was just pulling your legs. You've never changed despite spending so many months in England already".

Sam frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing," Austin chuckled. "You're still the same Abraka rat I know".

"Werey". Sam cursed in pidgin.

Austin laughed. "So how are you doing man? You never call, hope I'm safe this one you called today, how's football?"

Hearing that question, Sam smiled again. "Football is great man, really great".

Austin chuckled again. "You don't need to tell me man. Honestly, who doesn't know after you singlehandedly demolished Manchester United 2 days ago?"

Sam chuckled. "That's not funny, I didn't do it alone".

Austin sighed exaggeratedly. "It's relieving and at the same time really annoying to know that you're still the same humble Sam I know".

"Honestly man, you don't know how annoying it feels for you to say humble words like this after doing ridiculous things on the pitch. It's f*cking infuriating!"

"..." Sam was dumbfounded.

In the end, he just laughed. "Whatever you say man. Actually, I was feeling a bit nostalgic as I decided to go over my career again".

"Man, do you know that we played a total of 33 games including the playoff games in the 2022/2023 season?"

"Yeah, I know".

"Really?"

"Yeah. Who didn't know?"

Again, Sam was dumbfounded; he coughed. 'I didn't know!'

"Anyways man, I checked my goal contribution tally and I was shocked".

"43 goal contributions in 33 games right?"

"..." Again, Sam was dumbfounded.

"How did you know?!" He asked in a shrill voice.

Austin chuckled. "Who wouldn't know man? Like, you're seriously so annoying Sam!" He growled sarcastically. "How would you expect me to forget after witnessing such a legendary season in person?"

"To you, it may be normal that's why you can afford to forget, but not a single day passes that I don't remember that season Sam".

"With 24 goals and 19 assists in 33 games, making a total of 43 goal contributions, honestly, Sam it didn't seem like your first professional season at all".

"I've said it many times but you're a freak man!"

Sam blushed. "Stop saying such embarrassing things!"

Austin chuckled again. "Anyways, you were really amazing that season man. The best memories of my football career till now are from that season!" Austin's voice rose up a crescendo as he also started reminiscing.

"Man, do you remember our CAF champions league run?" Austin sighed exaggeratedly. "Crazy times man, crazy times".

"Of course I do!" Sam said as he also remembered.

"You remember our semifinal battle against Al Ahly? The one that ended in a penalty shootout. Damn! That game was nerves personified!"

"Crazy stuff happened that game man! Damn!"

"Don't shout in my ear on the phone". Sam complained.

"Shut up and listen!" Austin snapped. "That game was legendary man, Enyimba fans won't forget it even in years".

"Back in Nigeria, in Aba, they take me and you as legends already. Honestly, I never thought I would ever get such a status in this life".

"Then, what of the quarterfinal game? Even the final game against Wydad, and then the FIFA Club World Cup next season". Austin sighed. "Mannnn, it was the greatest season of my life bar none".

In the end, Sam could no longer bring himself to interrupt Austin as these 2 players drowned in memories, reminiscing together.

At some point, Sam even wanted to cry. 'F*ck! That's embarrassing!'

'But he keeps on making me remember such sweet memories, that bastard!'

In the end, after they were done reminiscing, they finally started talking about their personal lives and goals.

When Austin heard that Sam's big ambition for this season was to win the premier league, the first reaction of this player was to erupt in laughter but when he eventually calmed down, he became serious.

"Sam, are you serious?"

"Yeah".

"Wow!" Austin was amazed. "Honestly, I would say its bullshit coming from any other player but if it's you, I won't doubt it".

"There's only one problem," Sam sighed. "The premier league is not like the NPFL Austin. I'm a far better player than then now, but so is the competition, the competition is so much harder to play against".

"The defenders, all of my opponents are an upgrade".

"Remember those games when I singlehandedly take the game by the scruff of the neck and win? Here in the premier league, it's far harder to do so".

"It's just not sustainable every game when I go up against the likes of players that are even better than I am in pure skill and technique".

"Sam, you do know that your greatest attribute has never been your skill, right? But it's actually your mentality".

Sam kept quiet, letting him continue.

"Back in Enyimba, that mentality of yours affected all of us, making us play better. Honestly, that is what earned me my move here to Wolfsburg in Germany".

"I've watched a few Fulham games, I don't know if you see it yet but Sam you're already affecting that team, morphing it in your image".

"Fulham was a perfect example of a mid-table team in the premier league before your arrival but now, here you are winning against Manchester United".

"Honestly, Sam, that's a big step in the right direction".

Remembering something, Austin added. "I think something that helped us play so well in the CAF champions league was the good vibes around the team".

"If you really want to win the league, yes, you can't do it alone but if you manage to build the same good vibes in Enyimba in Fulham, I believe together alongside your teammates, you can".

"Ah!" Austin sighed. "I miss being your teammate man, I envy those mother*ckers so much. They better treasure you".

Sam cringed. "That sounds gay".

"Get lost!"

They both laughed.

By the end of the call, Sam felt so good and had so much clarity in his head.

In the end, he agreed with one thing that his friend said. 'The good vibes, I really need to bring it to Fulham'.

'It's easier for me to enter the zone state when the vibe is good'.

'And in the zone state, I tend to perform miracles'.

Sam's eyes gleamed with determination. 'I will start with Emile Smith Rowe'.

Chapter 166 A surprise

After Fulham's first game of the new season, the league game against Manchester United, they had 7 days to rest and prepare for the next game.

Fulham's next game was to take place between them and Leicester City in the premier league, and it was also their first home game of the new 2024/2025 season in Craven Cottage, making the players even more motivated to show up.

Of course, before the game though, there were certain things that Sam decided to set in order after his call with Austin.

One of these things was building a relationship outside the pitch with Fulham's new signing, Emile Smith Rowe.

The story of how Emile Smith Rowe eventually ended in Fulham was not news to any premier league fan. Afterall, it had been building for a long time.

Emile Smith Rowe alongside Bukayo Saka of Arsenal were once dubbed as the 2 star boys having graduated from the academy together.

During the early days of Mikel Arteta in the premier league, when a teenage Bukayo Saka started getting a prominent role in the Arsenal team that was in a transition period, Emile Smith Rowe also had a prominent role in midfield.

He may not be the best player on the pitch, especially when he was lining up with the likes of Martin Odegaard and Thomas Partey in midfield but he was not completely invisible too. Emile Smith Rowe did his thing in the middle of the pitch tidily, helping Arsenal tick and win games.

But then, as Mikel Arteta started building the team in his image, Emile Smith Rowe consistently started being reduced to a peripheral player on the pitch.

First was the acquisition of Kai Havertz from Chelsea as the coach opted to play the German international in midfield at first. And then, later, the acquisition of Declan Rice from West Ham completely destroyed his hopes in consistently making the Arsenal starting XI.

At first, Emile Smith Rowe was determined to stick with his boyhood club since he was a versatile player who could play across the midfield and forward lines.

But even in attacking roles, Mikel Arteta made moves in the transfer market, bringing in the likes of Gabriel Jesus from Manchester City and Leandro Trossard too. These acquisitions finally clarified him of his position in Mikel Arteta's plans.

He was not in the coach's plans.

No matter who you are as a professional football player, no matter your nationality, no matter your mentality, or even your skin color, there was only one reaction after making such a damning realization, devastation.

Even the likes of legendary players like the old version of Cristiano Ronaldo lashed out when he discovered he was not in Erik Ten Haag's plans in Manchester United, Emile Smith Rowe was just a youngster in comparison.

Dealing with such a big blow to his career was hard.

Every academy graduate from most big clubs in the world dreamed of playing for their childhood club till they retire, retiring as a legend but not all of them get to fulfill this big dream, and Emile Smith Rowe unfortunately fell into this category.

Even as Emile Smith Rowe completed his move to Fulham, it was clear that the player was yet to completely let go of his past ghosts from Arsenal.

He was talented, but even the best players don't play close to their best when they are not in the right mental state.

Smith Rowe's performances since coming to Fulham was more or less buoyed by Sam's willingness to strike an understanding with him on the pitch.

And now, after the talk with Austin, Sam decided to take it a step further.

He asked a few teammates and easily got Emile Smith Rowe's number. Sam did not know how to beat around the bush, he went straight to the point.

"Hey, man, you free?"

"Can I come over so we'll work out and train together?"

At first, Emile Smith Rowe was stunned. The media may be concocting stories about their telepathic chemistry on the pitch, but only he truly knew how estranged he still was with the Nigerian prodigy.

This was why when Sam took the initiative to call him, he was stunned but then he agreed. "Are you sure you're not occupied by other...?"

"Nah, don't worry about me," Sam interrupted him with a grin. "I am completely free and available to train with you".

That morning, Sam met up with Smith Rowe in the streets of Fulham where together, they started jogging that early in the morning.

If Smith agreed, Sam wanted to make him his jogging partner just like he did with Austin when they played together in the NPFL for Enyimba.

At the end of their jogging, Sam led him to Craven Cottage where they used the stadium's gym to complete their work out.

At the end of it all, both players were sweating profusely but Emile Smith Rowe had a rejuvenated smile on his face as he looked at the Nigerian.

"Sam, you do this every day?"

Sam grinned, looking at him. "Yeah, there's a reason I'm always fit for training".

"It's nice," Smith nodded. "I think I'll be joining you, that's if it's ok with you of course".

'I didn't even need to ask'.

Sam smiled. "Of course, it's ok with me".

And with that, it was sealed as his system finally lit up with notifications, confirming that his daily system quest was completed.

~-----~

[You have completed System Daily Quest: Mentality Monster!]

[You have been rewarded with a low-grade physical conditioning elixir!]

~-----~

Looking at the English player, Sam wondered. 'Am I the only one that can ingest the elixirs generated by the system?'

He knew it was risky to even think of something like this but looking at Smith Rowe, he could not help but want to help. 'Something like the physical conditioning elixir may help him in recovering his confidence faster'.

'And if we're to keep on winning games, I need him at his best'.

Sam knew right now that it was impossible to share the elixirs he got from the Ultimate Football System, but he wondered if one day he would level up the system to the level where it became possible.

'That's food for thought'.

After bidding farewell to Smith Rowe, Sam challenged the English player to which of them would get home, get set, and return to the stadium faster for training.

Well, Sam failed woefully because once he got home, he was surprised to see what seemed like a surprise box decorated with flowers and balloons by his hotel door. Sam checked with the hotel first to confirm that it was not something dangerous.

The peculiar thing though was that the hotel staff refused to tell him the identity of the person who sent it, only naming the courier man who brought it.

'Hmmm, what are they being so secretive about?'

'But the fact they're being secretive means it's safe and from a familiar person. I wonder who it is'.

Taking the surprise box, Sam entered his hotel room only to be startled by a sudden video call from his mom.

'Hmm, this timing'. He was suspicious.

And when he picked the call, still sweaty all over, he was right.

"Happy birthday!!!" His family screamed on the phone.

"...!" Sam was surprised and taken off-guard.

Not only his family was on this video call. Without him knowing, they already created a WhatsApp group with the name Happy birthday to Sam and they put him inside the group without informing him first.

Apart from his parents and his sister, the other people in this WhatsApp group were Ian, his best friend and then Kayla.

He blushed. 'Damn, mom! What were you people thinking?'

'We're not even dating yet!'

He was pretty sure that his mom was the one who suggested adding Kayla to the group. And then, in hindsight, this month really was his birthday.

He was so focused in preparing for the new season and making Fulham competitive for the title that he completely forgot about other aspects of his life.

His birthday was far gone, it was supposed to be on August 6th.

Sam scratched his head awkwardly. "I completely forgot".

"You moron," his mom berated smilingly, "who forgets his birthdays?"

"When Kayla told me you would forget after going to England, I vehemently disagreed since you were always so particular about birthdays while growing up".

She stared at him. "Does this mean my boy has now grown past birthday celebrations?"

"No mom, no!" Sam chuckled cheekily. "I just forgot".

And then, they sang a unified birthday song for him, congratulating him on his achievements so far before eventually asking him to open the surprise box.

Sam already expected to see something ridiculous, after all, his mom had a hand in the preparations but this, he did not expect something this ridiculous.

The first thing in the surprise box was a new food flask. Hesitantly opening it, Sam was flabbergasted to discover homemade Banga soup and starch inside all the way from Nigeria.

"Wait, mom, did you send this all the way from Nigeria?"

"Of course, what do you mean and why are you looking at me like that? It's my son's birthday, I will do anything for him!"

"Right," Sam sighed.

"Make sure you eat it!"

"Yes mom".

After the food flask, the other package in the surprise box was a phone, an iPhone. After more than a year of sticking with his iPhone 12 since his father got it for him, his family finally upgraded him to the latest iPhone 15 pro max.

This time, Sam smiled brightly. "Thanks dad!"

His family wanted to talk more but Sam was on a time schedule. "I'm sorry mom, let's talk later, I have a training session to meet".

And with that, Sam left for training.

He left in an incredibly good mood.

Chapter 167 Potential to become the greatest player in football history!

The next day, when Sam woke up, there was a massive framed picture in his hotel room.

"Finally!" Sam grinned as he stared at this massive framed picture.

He ordered for this framed picture just 2 days ago, and last night, he got it. It was a framed picture tracking his career from Enyimba till date.

A few days ago, he finally did some research to know how many goal contributions he already had in his career and it was safe to say that the figure Sam found left him totally flabbergasted.

Since making his debut for Enyimba, Sam knew that he had been doing some crazy stuff in a football pitch but he was so focused in the moment and trying to win every game that he forgot to pay attention to the statistics.

When he eventually saw the statistics, he finally knew why transfermarkt valued him at an incredible 30 million Euros despite being just 19 years old now.

The framed picture was a treasured possession of his now.

(Name: Samuel Moses)

(Nickname: Zinedine Sam)

(Jersey number: No. 11)

(Image: =)

(First professional football season: 2022/2023- NPFL)

(Goals: 24)

(Assists: 19)

(Games: 33)

(Second professional football season: 2023/2024)

(Half season- NPFL)

(Goals: 17)

(Assists: 12)

(Games: 21)

(Half season- Premier league)

(Goals: 16)

(Assists: 15)

(Games: 21)

(Total goals: 57)

(Total assists: 46)

(Games: 75)

Seeing it when it was just figures online, Sam was already shocked and impressed. Well, seeing it now when it was printed in a framed picture, Sam was beyond flabbergasted and impressed.

"I really am a monster". He muttered.

He had played just 2 seasons in professional football since making his debut in football but to the neutral eye, these stats were the stats of an absolute veteran of the game.

His first season in football with Enyimba went so fast that Sam never even realized that he actually played 33 whooping games in just his first season. Most debutants could not boast of the same amount of games played.

He didn't rack up so many games because he was favored though. Afterall, just like he forced his way into the Fulham starting XI with Coach Marco Silva, he also forced his way into Enyimba's starting XI.

This was all earned by merit.

Moving on from his first season, Sam actually managed to improve in his second season in professional football. With 21 games racked for Enyimba and 21 games racked for Fulham, he played an incredible 42 games as an 18-year-old.

This figure could not help but remind him of a younger Pedri Gonzalez for Barcelona when he played so many games he ended up being plagued by injuries.

Even till now, Pedri was not fully recovered from the strain of playing so many games as a youngster in that particular grueling season.

Sam did the same thing, but yet, he was still performing. The main difference between him and Pedri was the Ultimate Football System.

With the elixirs and gifts that he got from his system, unlike any other professional football player in the world and even in history, Sam could recover fast enough to maintain a consistent level of performance all season.

And a big difference between him and Pedri was that he was not just racking up a large amount of appearances, and he was not just playing well, he was also showing up in the numbers category.

In 75 games across his first 2 seasons as a professional football player, Sam already managed to rack up 57 goals and 46 assists.

That was 103 goal contributions already for a 19-year-old teenager!

It was just borderline crazy.

'Not even Messi or Ronaldo got numbers like this at my age'. This realization left Sam reeling in shock. 'Not even Mbappe, and not even Haaland too, I think'.

After the 2022 FIFA World Cup final, after he just got the Ultimate Football System and it claimed of making him a football God, Sam always thought it was just a big bluff. He accepted it because beggars were not choosers.

But now, seeing all that he had achieved in just 2 seasons of football and this was despite not even hitting his peak yet, he finally believed his system.

That morning, staring at the framed picture, Sam clenched his fists tightly, his eyes shining in unrestrained excitement. 'I have the potential to become the greatest player in all of football's history!'

'I have the potential to become the undisputed G.O.A.T of football!'

'And to think, Messi, you were the catalyst who pushed me into this path'. Sam grinned. 'God bless 2022, God bless Messi, God bless Mbappe, thank you for being my inspirations'.

'Thank you mentor'.

With that, Sam finally went about with his day, swiftly completing his daily system quest with Emile Smith Rowe, his partner before reporting for training.

With the good mood of his birthday still fresh, Sam was in great form as he impressed as the out and out Fulham's best player in training for the next few days in the buildup to matchday 2 of the premier league season.

And eventually, like the flipping pages of a book, the days disappeared.

In no distant time, D-day, the day of reckoning was here.

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 2:)

(Brighton – Man United)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Tottenham – Everton)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Crystal Palace – West Ham)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Southampton – Nottm Forest)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Fulham – Leicester City)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Man City – Ipswich Town)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Aston Villa – Arsenal)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Bournemouth – Newcastle)

(Date: 25th August, 2024)

...

(Wolves – Chelsea)

(Date: 25th August, 2024)

...

(Liverpool – Brentford)

(Date: 25th August, 2024)

It was another exciting matchday of the new premier league season, and on the 24th, Fulham welcomed Leicester City in their home stadium, Craven Cottage.

In this game, Sam felt totally free, carefree, and happy for the first time in a long time. Today, he felt like he could enjoy his game.

His instincts told him that he would not need his robotic level of focus to win since that in itself was incredibly grueling. Today, he was determined to enjoy himself on the pitch before tens of thousands of Fulham supporters.

Back in Nigeria, Enyimba fans were already long accustomed to the version of their star player who thoroughly enjoyed himself on the pitch, totally outplaying every player both in his team and the opposition team.

The Fulham fans in comparison only knew the Sam that always came in clutch, scoring and assisting important goals to help their team get a result.

Today, they were about to get accustomed to the samba Sam.

What is samba?

To Brazilians, in the indigenous language, samba means roda de dança, or a circle of dance since the indigenous people danced in celebration on many occasions, such as the celebration of popular Catholic festivals, Amerindian, or Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies, but it was also practiced at random.

Samba was usually attributed to the Brazilian national team; this was because of the incredible talent and natural flair of their players.

All the way from the era of the great Pele and Garrincha, to the Romario teams, the Rivaldo, then the Ronaldo and Ronaldinho era, the Marcelo and Dani Alves era, and then the Neymar era, all of it was referred to as samba.

Its literal meaning meant a dance, but to Brazilian footballers, the process of practicing their craft on a football pitch, displaying their flair, dribbling through players effortlessly like it was not there, it was part and parcel of the Brazilian football culture, it was samba.

Sam was not Brazilian but he loved Brazilians, he always loved them with Neymar as his Brazilian idol.

When he eventually learned Barca history, learning of the great Barca team led by Ronaldinho Gaucho, the mercurial Brazilian, he loved them even more.

Sam was first and foremost an attacking midfielder but he loved the movement and flair of Brazilians, their dribbling ability, it gave him the kick.

From Ronaldo to Ronaldinho, to Marcelo, to Dani Alves, to Neymar, these were all points of references that built his excitement in the sport of football.

Perhaps this love was why he inherited Ronaldinho's trademark skill, the elastico dribble.

As Sam walked into the pitch today alongside his teammates and amid the loud roar of cheers from the Fulham fans, he grinned.

'Let me show you samba'. He thought excitedly.

Sam felt adrenaline already flowing through his veins as he lined up on this pitch. Having spent the chunk of the past few days alongside him and training with him, Emile Smith Rowe was the first to notice the change in him.

The English player narrowed his eyes. 'He's different'.

'It's as if... he's happier'.

Yes, Sam was happy, far happier than he had been in months.

Emile Smith Rowe was not worried, because his instincts told him that this change was not a bad change. He was positive that it would benefit the team.

And when the referee's whistle sounded...

FWEEEEEE!

...samba started!

Chapter 168 Samba football

Just like was expected from both teams, Fulham and Leicester City started with their strongest lineup of players.

The home side like usual started with Bernd Leno in between the posts, with the defensive quadruple of Tete, Diop, Basse, and Robinson forming the Fulham defense.

In midfield, the duo of Alex Iwobi and Lukic started, sitting on top the defense while further up top was the trio of Adama Traore on the right, Emile Smith Rowe on the left, while Sam pushed through the middle as the attacking midfielder.

Ahead of them was Muniz who led the line as the striker.

As for Leicester City, Hermansen started in between the posts with the defensive quadruple of Kristiansen, Faes, Vestergaard, and Justin standing in his front as his protectors.

Further ahead were the likes of the Nigerian international, Wilfried Ndidi and Winks. Among the 4 players sitting ahead of the defensive midfielders was a familiar face to the Fulham players.

After a busy time in the transfer market for Fulham, they got Emile Smith Rowe while they sold a few of their players to rivals in the premier league and one of them now plied his trade for Leicester City and today, he was starting against his former club.

Leicester City's attack comprised of Buonanotte in attacking midfield, Fatawu on the right, the legendary Jamie Vardy in attack while on the left side of this attack was the familiar face, De Cordova Reid.

When the referee's whistle eventually sounded though, Sam did not give a damn about the fact that an old friend played for the opposition.

In his eyes, they were all enemies.

FWEEEE!

From the very onset of this game, Sam showed his mood in this game as immediately after kick off as after receiving a pass from Lukic, he took one glance at goal before unleashing an audacious attempt at goal from the halfway line.

Leicester's goalkeeper scrambled back to his goal post but he was not fast enough as the ball beat him, but then the bar came to his rescue.

"And the bar comes to the goalkeeper's rescue!"

"What an audacious attempt from Sam, the player who is in form, the player who is always in form!"

"What a shot!"

Sam licked his lips excitedly as he watched this ball fly over the bar for a corner kick. 'Nearly,' he smirked. 'But nearly cannot kill a bird, I need to do better!'

While Fulham got prepared to take their corner, the commentator went lyrical about the young Nigerian midfielder as he seemingly was not satisfied with what he already said. "But honestly, can we just give a moment to appreciate the talent of this Nigerian midfielder?"

"Clearly, despite the fact that he's still relatively a newbie to the premier league, none of it has affected Samuel Moses. Adaptation time seems like a myth to the young Nigerian, he's taken to the premier league like a fish to water".

"Just take a moment to focus on his statistics from last season for Fulham despite the fact that he only played a fraction of the premier league games after his late signing".

"A lot of people think it's farfetched but take it from me, Sam is the next big thing in premier league football".

When Fulham eventually took their corner kick, it resulted in a scramble in the Leicester City box but after some chaotic play, the Foxes managed to clear the ball upfield.

And there, gentlemen, was the start of samba football.

The shot from Sam was just him testing his legs.

For the rest of this first half, Sam took control, dominating proceedings for his team and fortunately to help his case, the whole Fulham team showed up today as they rode the momentum created by his energy.

From the beginning, Leicester City was already struggling to wrestle authority over this game and now, Sam took it a notch higher.

Bam! Bam!

Forward pass, return pass...; forward pass, return pass...

Tiki taka, Sam played short one touch passes with his teammates in midfield as they thoroughly enjoyed themselves at Leicester's expense.

At this moment, Sam wore his title of Space interpreter on his sleeve as he passed, dribbled, and intelligently intercepted passes while occasionally throwing in the unreal defense splitting passes for the swift Adama Traore to run into.

And most importantly, he played samba football, regularly weaving through multiple players with his impressive technique as every few minutes, the Fulham fans gasped and rose to their feet in amazement.

All this was crammed into the first 15 minutes of this game.

Within this short time, Sam already did enough to prove that he was heads and shoulders above every other player in Craven Cottage today.

And eventually, the floodgates did open.

This time, after exchanging a series of passes between Emile Smith Rowe in midfield, Sam went on a mazy run with the ball, elegantly weaving through Ndiidi in midfield, then Winks as the center defenders closed him down aggressively.

At the end of his rampaging run, Sam threaded a pass in between the 2 center defenders to the right for Smith Rowe who had been chasing him since to run into.

Emile Smith Rowe ran after the ball then...

Bam!

The English midfielder took a venomous shot that seemed to carry a lot of meaning only for it to hit the bar, rebounding back and unfortunately for Leicester City, a Fulham player got to the rebound first.

Having ran upfield alongside Sam as he went on his mazy run, ruthlessly cutting through players like they were not there, Alex Iwobi ended up in the right place at the right time.

In the opposition 18-yard box, he unleashed an unstoppable volleyed shot as the ball tore its way into the top right corner of the net.

Sam didn't get an assist for this goal, but his imprint was all over it.

The crowd at Craven Cottage roared with approval, chanting Sam's name as he high-fived his teammates. Despite not being credited with the assist, Sam's creativity had set the tone for that goal.

Leicester City, now trailing, tried to regain their composure but it was futile.

Fulham remained dominant as after that first goal, Sam grew more into his mojo and that only spelled doom for the opposition.

In the 28th minute, he almost doubled the lead with a curling shot from outside the box, but Hermansen pulled off a brilliant save, diving low to his right.

"Sam is unstoppable today!" The commentator raved. "You can't take your eyes off him for a second!"

Despite several more chances for Fulham, the first half ended with the score line still at 1-0. As the players walked off the pitch for the break, the atmosphere in Craven Cottage was electric.

Sam was clearly the focal point and the fans couldn't get enough of his samba-inspired performance.

Leicester City returned from the break with renewed vigor, determined to wrestle control of the game.

They pressed higher, forcing Fulham onto the back foot. In the 53rd minute, Jamie Vardy found himself unmarked in the box after a quick one-two. With the goal at his mercy, he struck the ball... only to send it sailing over the bar.

"VARDY MISSES A SITTE!" the commentator yelled in disbelief. "You'd bet your house on Vardy scoring from there, but somehow, he's bottled it!"

Leicester's persistence began to pay off as they kept possession, stifling Fulham's attacking rhythm.

Sam found himself tightly marked, often swarmed by two or three players. The fouls began to mount, with Ndidi and Winks taking turns roughing him up. By the 70th minute, Sam's frustration was palpable.

In the 80th minute, Fulham's defense faltered. Alex Iwobi, attempting to dribble past Ndidi, lost possession after a clean tackle. Leicester pounced on the mistake, launching a swift counterattack.

Jamie Vardy sprinted down the right flank, shouting for the ball.

Iwobi chased after him, desperate to recover. As the ball was played into Vardy's path, Iwobi tugged on his shirt. The veteran striker tumbled theatrically to the ground.

The referee blew his whistle and pointed to the spot.

"Penalty for Leicester City! And a red card for Alex Iwobi!" the commentator exclaimed. "What a catastrophic moment for Fulham!"

The Fulham fans fell silent as Vardy stepped up. His penalty was perfect, smashing into the top corner.

"Vardy makes no mistake this time! It's 1-1, and Leicester are back in this!"

With just nine minutes of regulation time left and down to ten men, Fulham faced an uphill battle.

Sam rallied his teammates. "We've got this! Stay compact and hit them on the counter!" he urged, clapping his hands to lift their spirits.

Leicester, sensing blood, pushed forward, leaving gaps at the back. In the 86th minute, Sam finally found his moment.

Receiving the ball in midfield, three Leicester players converged on him. With a quick body feint and a drop of his shoulder, he slipped past them like a ghost.

The crowd erupted.

"Samuel Moses is on fire tonight! He's leading the charge, Fulham are countering!"

With Leicester's defense scrambling, Sam spotted Smith Rowe making a run. A perfectly weighted ground pass sliced through the defense.

"Smith Rowe is through! One-on-one with the keeper!"

The English youngster playing as a makeshift winger today did not hesitate as he chipped the ball delicately over Hermansen; the net rippled.

"GOOOOOOAL!" The commentator screamed.

"Fulham lead 2-1! Down to ten men, and they've done it!"

Smith Rowe sprinted to the corner flag, arms wide in celebration, with Sam chasing him, pointing at his teammate.

The Fulham bench exploded in cheers.

Craven Cottage exploded in loud roars of jubilation.

The clock ticked toward the final whistle, but Leicester weren't done yet. In the 93rd minute, a cross from the left threatened to find Vardy in the box. Bernd Leno soared high, tipping the ball over the crossbar for a corner.

Leicester threw everyone forward, but Leno caught the corner cleanly. Spotting Sam sprinting down the left flank, he launched the ball long.

Sam chased it down, his pace leaving Leicester's defenders in the dust and then one-on-one with Hermansen, he feinted right, dribbled left, and calmly slotted the ball into the net.

"THAT'S IT! GAME OVER! SAMUEL MOSES SEALS IT FOR FULHAM! 3-1!"

"What a game!"

The stadium erupted in pandemonium. Sam slid on his knees; arms spread wide as his teammates piled on him in celebration. The fans chanted his name, recognizing the brilliance that had carried them to victory.

Full-Time.

The final whistle blew; Fulham won.

Sam was named the Man of the Match for his dazzling display. As he walked off the pitch, the crowd's cheers were deafening. The samba football maestro had once again stolen the show.

Chapter 169 New status

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 2 results:)

(Brighton 2-1 Man United)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Tottenham 4-0 Everton)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Crystal Palace 0-2 West Ham)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Southampton 0-1 Nottm Forest)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Fulham 2-1 Leicester City)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Man City 4-1 Ipswich Town)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Aston Villa 0-2 Arsenal)

(Date: 24th August, 2024)

...

(Bournemouth 1-1 Newcastle)

(Date: 25th August, 2024)

...

(Wolves 2-6 Chelsea)

(Date: 25th August, 2024)

...

(Liverpool 2-0 Brentford)

(Date: 25th August, 2024)

...

(Updated premier league table standings:)

(1. Arsenal GP: 2 Pts: 6)

(2. Brighton GP: 2 Pts: 6)

(3. Fulham GP: 2 Pts: 6)

(4. Liverpool GP: 2 Pts: 6)

(5. Man City GP: 2 Pts: 6)

(6. Newcastle GP: 2 Pts: 4)

(7. Nottm Forest GP: 2 Pts: 4)

(8. Tottenham GP: 2 Pts: 4)

(9. Aston Villa GP: 2 Pts: 3)

(10. Brentford GP: 2 Pts: 3)

(11. Chelsea GP: 2 Pts: 3)

(12. West Ham GP: 2 Pts: 3)

(13. Bournemouth GP: 2 Pts: 2)

(14. Leicester GP: 2 Pts: 1)

(15. Crystal Palace GP: 2 Pts: 0)

(16. Everton GP: 2 Pts: 0)

(17. Ipswich Town GP: 2 Pts: 0)

(18. Man United GP: 2 Pts: 0)

(19. Southampton GP: 2 Pts: 0)

(20. Wolves GP: 2 Pts: 0)

After 2 days of premier league football, this was how the premier league table looked. Fulham was in 3rd position, tied at 6 points a piece alongside some illustrious names of the English top tier.

The most shocking entry in the premier league table this season was definitely Manchester United.

Once the King of the English premier league, the English giants were now a shadow of their former selves as after 2 games, they were unable to acquire a single point, falling to 2 damning defeats.

It was safe to say that it was a new low for the Red Devils.

After Fulham's game, racking up another win on the road and personally for Sam, having won another man of the match award, he stood before a reporter again as he addressed another post-match interview.

"Congratulations Sam. Once again, you had an amazing outing in the premier league. That's 2 wins in 2 games for Fulham, how do you feel?"

Sam smiled at the female reporter. "Of course, I feel great. 2 wins in 2 games, that's the perfect start to the new season that we hoped for and now we're getting it, so of course I'm happy".

"I hope we're able to keep this form up in upcoming matches".

The reporter cautiously looked at the Nigerian midfielder. "Sam, there are rumors going round in the internet that you claimed Fulham will win the league this season. How true are these rumors, and what do you feel about it?"

Hearing that question, at first Sam was surprised but then he just smiled. "Like you said, they're just rumors".

He continued. "Personally, I have a lot of ambitions for this new season but it would be quite arrogant of me to outrightly declare that Fulham will win the league this season when you consider how formidable our opponents are".

"All I have to tell you is that we will definitely give our all!" His eyes gleamed.

'And hopefully, our all is rewarded by the ultimate trophy to go with it'. He thought as he looked at the reporter.

Hearing his reply, the reporter smiled. "I hope you achieve your personal ambitions this season Sam".

"Thank you". Sam smiled back at her.

"Sam, we could not help but notice that today on the pitch, you seemed to be enjoying yourself quite a lot. You dribbled far more often than you did before, at least till the second half started. Is this a change of your style?"

Hearing that question, Sam's smile widened. "Well, the simple answer to your question is that I was simply in a very good mood".

But then he grimaced. "Like you said, till the second half. During the first half, I got to enjoy myself on the pitch, do what I love doing, connecting with Smith Rowe till Leicester decided to mark me out of the game".

"Getting swarmed by 2 to 3 opposition players every time you get the ball is not a pleasant feeling," he sighed. "Anyways, I'm glad we won still".

The reporter nodded. "In light of that, Sam, your status in the premier league already changed. To many, you're the best player in Fulham FC currently".

"And with this status comes certain privileges and inconveniences too".

"You experienced one of this inconvenience today. With Leicester, it didn't work but other clubs will definitely try to lock you out of games by sending multiple players to swarm you and cut you out".

"How would you cope with this?"

Sam shrugged. "It's unpleasant but like Bukayo Saka said one time ago, getting targeted by opposition players is a validation of talent and ability".

"So to me, it's an honor, and I will embrace it with full gusto".

He grinned. "They're free to mark me and target me, but I also want to let them know that I won't give up!"

"Typical Samuel Moses". The reporter smiled.

"One last thing, can you tell me about your relationship with Emile Smith Rowe since your chemistry with him on the pitch is very tight. And somehow, Smith Rowe has exceeded all expectations cast on him since his move to Fulham, and many speculate that it's because of you".

This time, Sam thought carefully about it before he responded. "First, I recently took the initiative to become friends with him recently. We're good friends, it's only natural that this friendship also translates to our chemistry on the pitch".

"Another thing is that we're both talented players".

"Sometimes, ability is all that's needed to build chemistry. We're young, we're energetic, we're ambitious, and we're good, all these similar qualities is what endears us towards each other on the pitch".

"I believe that with time, our chemistry would become even more perfect".

The reporter smiled. "I hope so too, it's good to see Smith Rowe happy again".

"Thanks for having us Sam, do have a nice day".

"You too".

As Sam walked out of the interview, he could not help but think back on what the reporter told him about. 'Status..., I guess my status has really changed'.

'Last season, I was just an inexperienced youngster making his debut in the premier league so instinctively, opponents looked down on me'.

'This made it incredibly easy for me to impose my will on the pitch'.

'But now, they've noticed me, they've acknowledged my threat,' he sighed. 'My status in the premier league has changed'.

'Today is just a sample for the future. In future games, it won't be just one player anymore, multiple players will swarm me anytime I have the ball'.

'They'll even start kicking aggressively just to keep me out of the game'.

Sam was supposed to be worried by these thoughts but for some reason, it made him even more excited. 'I've finally made them notice me!' He grinned.

'The likes of Messi and Ronaldo were targeted for almost their whole career, but they lived above it all, building such legendary careers and legacies'.

'I can do the same'.

He clenched his fist. 'I will do the same!'

When Sam returned home that day, the first thing he did was open his diary before updating his own statistics.

{2024/2025 Season:}

{Goals: 1}

{Assists: 2}

{Games: 2}

{Total goal contributions: 3}

As soon as he was done writing, he laid down on his bed, looking at his ceiling idly since he already took his bath and freshened up.

"27 more goal contributions". He muttered with a slight smile on his face.

Before retreating to sleep for the night, Sam did a video call with his family as he spoke with his mom who raved about his performance this game.

Sam felt nostalgic. 'I can't believe it's this same Mom who would raise a storm over the mere fact of me and dad watching football, not to talk of playing'.

'Now, not only is she watching, she's also showing a lot of interest in learning more about it. She's now a lover of football, can you believe it?'

He sighed. 'Time really changes people'.

After the video call session with his family, before sleeping, Sam called another person, Kayla Banks.

And this time, unlike when he called his family when his mom was raving, doing all the talking, Sam did most of the talking this time.

With Kayla, he felt totally free and himself as Sam raved about how he felt before, during, and after the game. He explained what motivated him to play like this today, samba, and he also explained what samba meant to her.

After he was done with his own, Kayla finally started as she told him about the full narrative of how her day went.

Before they knew it, they already spent over an hour on the call.

Sam was flabbergasted. 'An hour? Just now?!

In the end, they had to eventually end the call since he was exhausted and wanted to sleep.

When Kayla blew him a kiss, Sam froze and what she said next made him lose control and blush.

"Goodnight, love you".

Well, that was the first time Sam heard that from someone not family!

He forced a smile. "Goodnight, love you too".

'That sounds so weird!'

As soon as he ended the call, Sam slept peacefully with a soothing feeling all over his body like butterflies were fluttering their beautiful wings in his belly.

It felt nice.

Chapter 170 2 games in 5 days

After 2 matchdays of the new premier league season, football clubs in England were finally exposed to other tournaments, the first which was the EFL Cup which Fulham were the reigning champions of.

And like expected, the introduction of other competitions for Fulham meant the schedule was about to ramp up for their players.

After the game against Leicester City, Fulham players had only 2 days of rest before taking on Birmingham in the EFL Cup second round.

And after that game, their next fixture of matchday 3 in the premier league gave them just 3 days of rest to play in away ground against Ipswich Town, the newly promoted club to the premier league.

(EFL Cup- Second round:)

(Birmingham – Fulham)

(27th August, 2024)

...

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 3:)

(Ipswich Town – Fulham)

(31st August, 2024)

It was 2 games in 5 days for Fulham.

For Fulham as a club, it was going to be a monumental 5 days and it was up to their manager, Marco Silva to manage both games in the best way with the goal to win and not overburden his players.

It was not Sam's problem though, rather it was the problem of his coach; this was why after the game against Leicester, on a weekend, Sam had a merry time with his new friend in London, Emile Smith Rowe.

It was not just the both of them though. Weeks after getting his admission to study Medicine in England, Ian finally met up with his best friend again.

It was still a bit unusual for him to accept that his best friend was now a big celebrity, and he was not just meeting him today, he was also meeting another big football celebrity in Emile Smith Rowe.

Sam invited Smith Rowe because first he wanted to introduce him to his best friend. Second, he wanted to indoctrinate Smith into the art of eating African food.

And third, he wanted to talk about football with his partner in crime.

Trust Ian, he only felt a bit of trepidation on meeting Smith Rowe the first time. As soon as they started eating together and Smith commended the food at the African food restaurant, Ian got his mojo and started free talking with the young English professional football player.

They talked so freely you would think they had been friends for years.

'That bastard,' Sam was stunned. 'He's such a smooth talker'.

Sam was glad though. Making Ian meet people like Emile Smith Rowe in itself was a step up in society for his best friend.

Afterall, professional football players, especially those playing in clubs in European leagues were celebrities with a lot of influence and connections.

During their time in the restaurant, they talked about Ian's profession, mostly Sam insulting his best friend for choosing the medical profession just because it granted him easier and licensed access to all types of female.

"Y-you bastard!" Ian was flustered for the first time as he stole a glance at Emile Smith Rowe.

He glared at his best friend. "Werey, you wan ruin my steeze?!" He whispered in pidgin while gritting his teeth.

Sam only laughed. "Did I lie?"

Well, it was safe to say that Emile Smith Rowe was stunned.

In training, on the pitch, in the dressing room, even while jogging, all he saw was a perfect Nigerian machine who only cared about training, playing, and winning games but now, he just found out that Sam was actually not a machine.

Sam was actually not perfect, heck, he was far from it.

He was just like every other person out there, goofy when he wanted to be, playful, heck, he spoke pidgin so naturally too, and he was human..., that last element meant a lot to Smith.

For the first time, he truly relaxed around the Nigerian midfielder. Smith engaged more actively in their conversations as they spoke extensively.

At the end, Sam finally pushed the conversation more towards football. He spoke about their chemistry on the pitch and how he imagined themselves playing better, his vision, and he also spoke of players targeting him more now.

"Like Leicester showed, players will be targeting me more now but I'm ready". Sam grinned. "Afterall, I have elite teammates like you guys!".

"Nah," Smith waved a hand dismissively. "I'm not as good as you".

"You're just being humble". Sam smiled. "Anyways, next time they box me with multiple players like that, you guys will have to step up!" He grinned again.

With Sam staring at him so intensely, Smith flinched. "M-me?"

"I believe you can do it".

Sam relaxed on his chair. "We may have lost a lot of the team's core when we lost players like Palhinha and De Cordova-Reid, but in exchange, we got you".

Smith blushed "I'm not as valuable as Palhinha".

Sam shrugged. "That's to transfermarkt, what do they know? To me, you're more valuable, especially since it synergies with the way I want to play football".

Smith blushed again but hid it with food this time.

Sam continued speaking. "With you, we can practice our combination plays to perfection and with that, I believe I can wriggle off any box". Sam's eyes gleamed with confidence. "If they still want to stop me by all means, they will have to resort to offensive actions that will lead to yellow cards and even red cards".

"And besides, this season, we have a fully fit Adama Traore!" Sam grinned.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Ian asked.

"It has something to do with everything!" Sam raved as he looked at his best friend. "You know what Traore's greatest strength is?"

"His pace". Smith answered.

"Yes, his pace!" Sam grinned. "By losing players like Palhinha and the likes, we may have lost a bit of our backbone but in exchange, we are far more dynamic with you and a fully fit Adama Traore in the side".

"Just imagine, me and you pinging things around in midfield then if we're shackled, abusing Adama's pace and setting him up".

"We definitely have the vision and technique to pick him out in tight spaces".

"Utilizing his speed perfectly will help us a lot this season".

"Adama may not be the best finisher, but his pace and dribbling ability is all we need. It's another alternative to breaking down stubborn defenses".

"Even if he can't score it himself, we have Muniz or Jimenez always at the ready on the box, and I can even chip in with the occasional late runs".

"To me, it's perfect football".

"And this way, we won't even have to cede possession to superior teams anymore". Sam looked at the ceiling of this restaurant dreamily.

Hearing these words come out of the mouth of the Nigerian so freely, Smith was impressed; he admired him. He hesitated before saying. "Sam, do you really think it's possible?"

"Impossible is nothing!" Sam looked at the Englishman. "Honestly, I believe it's possible, we just need to work, work, and work till we get it right".

"And once we do," he chuckled. "Doom to the rest of the premier league".

"Man, let's just eat, I'm tired of all the football talk". Ian finally complained.

Laughing, the 2 footballers obliged their friend and finished their food. A few minutes later, they finally left the restaurant on Smith Rowe's car.

...

27th August, 2024...

Just like expected, Fulham's manager, Marco Silva heavily rotated his team for the EFL Cup game to rest key players.

Most key players like Sam, Basse, Smith Rowe, Alex Iwobi, and Muniz all started in the bench, including Bernd Leno.

Only a few familiar faces like Jimenez, Harry Wilson, and Castagne led the team as against Birmingham, without their bigger stars, they managed to grind out a result in this game.

In the 10th minute, Fulham won a penalty that Raul Jimenez converted.

In the 14th minute, Stansfield, the player who started at left wing today added the nail to coffin as he scored the 2nd goal to doom Birmingham to defeat.

The game ended 0-2 in Fulham's favor.

Sam's presence was never needed on the pitch, so he got to rest through it all, preparing for Fulham's next game in 3 days.

...

3 days later, 31st August, 2024...

Ipswich Town took on Fulham at home.

Both sides started with their strongest lineups, but this time, Marco Silva tweaked his formation to a 4-3-3 with Alex Iwobi and Adama Traore joining Muniz up top, while Smith Rowe, Lukic, and Sam played in midfield.

Today, Sam started at the right side of the midfield trio.

From the onset, it was clear that the Ipswich coach told his players to do just one thing, to lock Sam out of the game.

At first, it was highly effective as Fulham's attack became blunted for a large stretch of the first half. In front of their home fans, Ipswich Town got the opener as their striker, Delap latched into a delicious pass to score.

Fulham did not panic, they continued playing their game till they improvised without Sam at the center of attention.

And still, Sam orchestrated it.

He passed to Alex Iwobi, who played the ball across the face of goal for the rapid Adama Traore to run into, tapping into the net to equalize the game.

First half ended 1-1.

Second half was much more physical and defensive from Ipswich as it was clear they were now ready to settle for a draw, but Fulham were uncooperative.

It took 80 minutes for Fulham to break through their opponents a second time, and this time it was Muniz who provided the goals.

Pouncing on a loose pass from an Ipswich defender, the Fulham striker scored a Luis Suarezish lethal striker's goal from just inside the 18-yard box.

The Ipswich goalkeeper stood no chance.

And with that, Fulham won 1-2, extending their winning run to 4 straight games since the beginning of the new season.

They were already high-flying.