

Football God 181

Chapter 181 Unbeaten run [2]

(Fulham fixtures:)

(Premier league:)

(Fulham – Newcastle)

(Date: 21st September, 2024)

...

(Premier league:)

(Nottm Forest – Fulham)

(Date: 28th September, 2024)

...

(Premier league:)

(Man City – Fulham)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

After the EFL Cup game against Preston, the next task in Fulham's game fixtures was a lineup of premier league games starting with a clash against Newcastle United at home.

Fulham carried their unstoppable momentum into this game.

Despite playing against a team that was on paper stronger than them, in front of their home fans, Fulham did not let up as Sam orchestrated this game, creating another masterpiece in front of Fulham supporters.

Fulham opened the floodgates as early as the 5th minute as Raul Jimenez lashed into an Emile Smith Rowe pass, unleashing a powerful volleyed shot into the net that left Nick Pope, the Newcastle goalkeeper with little chance.

After that goal, Newcastle upped the tempo as they tried to get into this game but they were thwarted by a single player named Samuel Moses.

Sam started in attacking midfield but considering the threat of their opponents, he often drifted deeper in the midfield to help weather the Newcastle offensive. It was safe to say that this was a defensive masterclass from him.

Defending was never part of Sam's great points, and he didn't exactly like it either, but playing with Austin in the NPFL taught him to do the dirty work.

And since he had the stamina to do it, why not?

Sam ran all over the midfield, playing a free role in this game as he tortured the Newcastle players and their attacking rhythm, winning the ball back at every slight opportunity he got.

He set Raul Jimenez up with another opportunity only for Nick Pope to pull out a sensational save, but Fulham doubled their lead soon after and this time, it was from Emile Smith Rowe.

After a few twists and turns just outside the Newcastle 18-yard box, with a perfectly executed Cruyff turn, Emile Smith Rowe burst into the box before shooting the ball towards the bottom left corner.

Nick Pope stood no chance.

"GOALLL...!" Craven Cottage exploded for the second time this game; the fans felt on top of the world.

The first half ended 2-0 in Fulham's favor.

Immediately after the second half started though, Craven Cottage was stunned as Harvey Barnes scored a goal within just 1 minute after the restart in the 46th minute of this game.

That goal definitely rattled nerves but Sam dug in, locking his area of the pitch completely as with him leading the charge, his teammates stayed compact.

For the next 45 minutes, it was attack after attack from Newcastle United but Fulham thwarted it all as Sam played the role of a destroyer today.

But then, after 90 minutes, in additional time, Sam finally capped off his sensational performance with an assist as he played a perfect cross for Reiss Nelson to poke into the net.

The game ended 3-1 in Fulham's favor.

Sam got only 1 assist today but his all-round game stole the show, he won another consecutive man of the match award.

In exactly a week's time after playing Newcastle United at home, the Fulham squad traveled to Nottingham where they took on Nottingham Forest.

Visiting the City Ground again, it was just as tough as Sam experienced his first time. Against Nottingham Forest at home, Fulham were forced to sweat and work hard.

The first half was a high-octane affair that ended in a goalless draw.

The intensity increased even more in the second half. Unlike the Newcastle game, this was a highly intense game that had everything else except the goals.

But in the end, after constantly torturing the Nottingham defense all night, Raul Jimenez was tripped in the Nottingham box as he won a penalty for his team.

This striker confidently stepped up to score the penalty and he paid back the faith of his coach, scoring the goal to give Fulham the lead.

For the rest of the game, Nottingham Forest tried to no avail to equalize the game. Fulham also tried to extend their lead but buoyed by the loud noise being made by their fans, Nottingham Forest was highly compact defensively.

It was no wonder the only goal of the game so far came from a penalty.

In the end, despite how much Sam tried to impose himself on this game, he could not influence it the way he wanted.

But still, Fulham won. That was what mattered.

Fulham won 0-1, extending their unbeaten run to 8 games.

After 6 exciting matchdays of the English premier league where Fulham was on an unprecedented run of 6 wins out of 6 games, this was how the premier league table looked like currently.

(Premier league matchday 6 results:)

(Newcastle 1-1 Man City)

(Date: 28th September, 2024)

...

(Chelsea 4-2 Brighton)

(Date: 28th September, 2024)

...

(Brentford 1-1 West Ham)

(Date: 28th September, 2024)

...

(Everton 2-1 Crystal Palace)

(Date: 28th September, 2024)

...

(Arsenal 4-2 Leicester City)

(Date: 28th September, 2024)

...

(Nottm Forest 0-1 Fulham)

(Date: 28th September, 2024)

...

(Wolves 1-2 Liverpool)

(Date: 28th September, 2024)

...

(Ipswich Town 2-2 Aston Villa)

(Date: 29th September, 2024)

...

(Man United 0-3 Tottenham)

(Date: 29th September, 2024)

...

(Bournemouth 3-1 Southampton)

(Date: 30th September, 2024)

...

(Updated premier league table standings:)

(1. Fulham GP: 6/ W:6/ D:0/ L:0/ Pts: 18)

(2. Liverpool GP: 6/ W:5/ D:0/ L:1/ Pts: 16)

(3. Arsenal GP: 6/ W:4/ D:2/ L:0/ Pts: 14)

(4. Man City GP: 6/ W:4/ D:2/ L:0/ Pts: 14)

(5. Chelsea GP: 6/ W:4/ D:1/ L:1/ Pts: 13)

(6. Aston Villa GP: 6/ W:4/ D:0/ L:2/ Pts: 12)

(7. Newcastle GP: 6/ W:3/ D:2/ L:1/ Pts: 11)

(8. Tottenham GP: 6/ W:3/ D:1/ L:2/ Pts: 10)

(9. Brighton GP: 6/ W:2/ D:3/ L:1/ Pts: 9)

(10. Nottm Forest GP: 6/ W:2/ D:3/ L:1/ Pts: 9)

(11. Bournemouth GP: 6/ W:2/ D:2/ L:2/ Pts: 8)

(12. Brentford GP: 6/ W:2/ D:1/ L:3/ Pts: 7)

(13. West Ham GP: 6/ W:1/ D:2/ L:3/ Pts: 5)

(14. Everton GP: 6/ W:1/ D:1/ L:4/ Pts: 4)

(15. Ipswich Town GP: 6/ W:0/ D:4/ L:2/ Pts: 4)

(16. Man United GP: 6/ W:1/ D:1/ L:4/ Pts: 4)

(17. Crystal Palace GP: 6/ W:0/ D:3/ L:3/ Pts: 3)

(18. Leicester GP: 6/ W:0/ D:3/ L:3/ Pts: 3)

(19. Southampton GP: 6/ W:0/ D:1/ L:5/ Pts: 1)

(20. Wolves GP: 6/ W:0/ D:1/ L:5/ Pts: 1)

After 6 exciting matchdays of the English premier league, this was how the league table looked like 6 games into the 2024/2025 season.

There were big surprises.

Chapter 182 Matchday 7; a season decider

(Updated premier league table standings:)

- (1. Fulham GP: 6/ W:6/ D:0/ L:0/ Pts: 18)

- (2. Liverpool GP: 6/ W:5/ D:0/ L:1/ Pts: 16)

- (3. Arsenal GP: 6/ W:4/ D:2/ L:0/ Pts: 14)

- (4. Man City GP: 6/ W:4/ D:2/ L:0/ Pts: 14)

- (5. Chelsea GP: 6/ W:4/ D:1/ L:1/ Pts: 13)

- (6. Aston Villa GP: 6/ W:4/ D:0/ L:2/ Pts: 12)

- (7. Newcastle GP: 6/ W:3/ D:2/ L:1/ Pts: 11)

- (8. Tottenham GP: 6/ W:3/ D:1/ L:2/ Pts: 10)

- (9. Brighton GP: 6/ W:2/ D:3/ L:1/ Pts: 9)

- (10. Nottm Forest GP: 6/ W:2/ D:3/ L:1/ Pts: 9)

- (11. Bournemouth GP: 6/ W:2/ D:2/ L:2/ Pts: 8)

(12. Brentford GP: 6/ W:2/ D:1/ L:3/ Pts: 7)

(13. West Ham GP: 6/ W:1/ D:2/ L:3/ Pts: 5)

(14. Everton GP: 6/ W:1/ D:1/ L:4/ Pts: 4)

(15. Ipswich Town GP: 6/ W:0/ D:4/ L:2/ Pts: 4)

(16. Man United GP: 6/ W:1/ D:1/ L:4/ Pts: 4)

(17. Crystal Palace GP: 6/ W:0/ D:3/ L:3/ Pts: 3)

(18. Leicester GP: 6/ W:0/ D:3/ L:3/ Pts: 3)

(19. Southampton GP: 6/ W:0/ D:1/ L:5/ Pts: 1)

(20. Wolves GP: 6/ W:0/ D:1/ L:5/ Pts: 1)

"Max, this is the updated premier league table. There are definitely a lot of surprises, which one do you think is the biggest surprise".

"It has to be Fulham Charles". Max, the premier league pundit laughed out loud. "It definitely has to be Fulham".

"I can confidently say it with my full chest now that when the season started, nobody predicted Fulham topping the league table at any point of the season".

"Fulham has to be the biggest surprise package this season".

"The way they're playing? Come on man, those guys are in a great run of form and I can't wait to see how far they'll go".

"What do you think changed Max?"

"Well, if I have to point out anything". He chuckled. "Don't point me out for being a fanboy but I would have to say Samuel Moses".

"He's been the one big change in Fulham with a big bang impact".

"Last season, he already showed glimpses of what he could do in a premier league team as within just half of the season, he managed to drag Fulham all the way from 14th position where he met them to 9th position at the end of the season".

"16 goals and 15 assists Charles! Do you know what that means for a young 18-year-old attacking midfielder just making his debut in the premier league?"

"The boy's a phenomenon!"

"I won't lie though, despite that, I never thought I would ever experience what Fulham is currently doing in the league but here I am".

"6 wins in 6 games? That's bonkers man!"

"To me, the main difference is Sam but it's not just him. At some point, it's just unrealistic for one player to have so much impact in a team, especially in a league as tough as the premier league".

"I think what really changed is the mentality".

"I did a bit of background check on Sam so I would know. Even during his first professional season when he played for Enyimba, Sam transformed his team's mentality, turning them into even more formidable winners".

"That's the same thing that's happening in Fulham".

"In big clubs like Manchester City and the likes, drawing a game is bad, and losing a game is taboo. The only acceptable result is winning, but this is not the same in lesser clubs like Bournemouth, Fulham, and the likes".

"To these clubs, the status quo is losing a game is not a crisis, drawing a game is not so bad, and winning is something to celebrate. That's the difference in reality and mentality between big clubs and small clubs".

"But since Sam came, that mentality has changed".

"Fulham now think like winners, and it was already apparent from late last season. It's just that it truly picked up now".

"So yes, I'd say Fulham are the real deal".

"Do you remember Leicester of 2016?".

Charles, the show's host laughed as he looked at the pundit. "Are you really making that comparison now?"

"I'm serious Charles," Max laughed. "Their momentum is reminding me of that Leicester team, they have a lot of things in common. And if the big 6 just let up, Fulham may just scoop the league title this season".

"First of all," Charles chuckled. "I think that's impossible. Man City are not about to let some upstart dethrone them after creating history already".

"About Man City, Max, what are your predictions, Man City vs Fulham?"

"A draw, I think a draw". Max rubbed his chin. "Like I already said, both clubs are now thinking like winners".

"Man City wouldn't want to lose to the surprise table toppers, and Fulham would not want to lose either to prove their credentials, so a draw is what I think".

"Either ways, it's going to be a truly exciting game".

The host chuckled again. "Well, my prediction is 3-1 to Man City, maybe Sam gets the goal for Fulham since he seems to be fond of scoring against the champions".

After the punditry, the view on the screen finally changed to the fixtures for matchday 7 of the 2024/2025 premier league season.

(Premier league matchday 7 fixtures:)

(Crystal Palace – Liverpool)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Arsenal – Southampton)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Brentford – Wolves)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Man City – Fulham)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(West Ham – Ipswich Town)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Leicester City – Bournemouth)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Everton – Newcastle)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Aston Villa – Man United)

(Date: 6th October, 2024)

...

(Chelsea – Nottm Forest)

(Date: 6th October, 2024)

...

(Brighton – Tottenham)

(Date: 6th October, 2024)

Of the 10 matches of matchday 7 of the English premier league, as highlighted from the focus of this premier league punditry session, it was clear that the clash between Man City and Fulham at the Etihad was the focal point.

And it was not just to the pundits, to the rest of the premier league, this was the focus game of matchday 7.

It was a season decider game for Fulham.

It was the game to know if they were just pretenders or if they were actually contenders for the premier league title.

And knowing the immensity of their next game, the Fulham players put in the work, putting in effort and working like a horse in training.

Sam's mamba spirit infected them all in the build-up to the game.

And when D-day finally came, the Fulham squad didn't go to the Etihad stadium like a team of footballers at all, rather, they went like a troop of warriors going to claim victory in enemy territory.

It was going to be a bloodbath.

Chapter 183 A high octane game

Manchester City...

In recent years in England, this name was synonymous with excellence and greatness. The last few years of the premier league were all Manchester City as under Pep Guardiola, the Manchester-based club already built a dynasty.

The club in sky blue were the new Kings of England.

In the premier league, having won 5 out of the last 6 premier league titles, they were on top and in the 2022/2023 season, they finally broke their European drought, bagging home the elusive champions league trophy.

And they didn't stop with a champions league trophy back in 2023, as with the electric duo of Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne spearheading the team from the front, Manchester City went all the way to win the treble.

Just last season, they broke Manchester United's record of consecutive premier league wins, winning 4 straight premier league titles.

In the modern premier league, Manchester City was a behemoth.

And it was this behemoth that Fulham was going up against today.

This was not Sam's first time facing the champions. Back in the FIFA World Cup final with Enyimba, he already faced them once and lost. And last season with Fulham, he faced them the second time and rescued a point for his team.

He had a good historical record against Manchester City.

But there was a prevalent theme in both games, Manchester City were playing away from their home ground.

In the FIFA World Cup final, they played in neutral ground and last season against Fulham, they played in Craven Cottage.

This time though, Sam did not have that luxury cushioning the lethality of the reigning premier league champions.

This time, the showdown was taking place in enemy territory, the Etihad.

Alongside his teammates, Sam was amazed by the loud noise made by the fans in sky blue around the Etihad stadium as they stepped into the pitch.

Of course, both teams started with their strongest lineups.

Manchester City started with Ederson in between the posts, and the quadruple of Rico Lewis, Manuel Akanji, Ruben Dias, and Josko Gvardiol ahead of him. Mateo Kovacic started as the sole holding midfielder.

Ahead of him comprised of a 4-man offense of Bernardo Silva, Phil Foden, Ikey Gundogan, and Jack Grealish, while leading the line was the prolific Erling Haaland.

For this game, Coach Marco Silva tweaked his formation to make it more defensive in this tough stadium, playing a 5-4-1 formation.

Bernd Leno started in between the posts, while the improvised 5-man defense comprised of Robinson from the left, Bassey, Andersen, and Tete. The 5th face was an unfamiliar one in defense, Alex Iwobi.

This game, Alex Iwobi was tasked with the role of an inverted wingback. He had the freedom to drift from the back into midfield anytime he wanted.

The 4-man midfield comprised of Adama Traore from the left, Sam, Emile Smith Rowe, and Pereira on the right. Raul Jimenez led the lineup up top.

FWEEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, the game started.

And from the get-go, it was clear that Manchester City meant business.

The media already pushed this game to the front of the masses, painting it as an absolute top of the table clash.

The fans in sky blue were riled up long before the game, they wanted a bloodbath and with their loud noise buoying their players, the Manchester City players played with the intention to slaughter.

Despite playing in the Etihad though, Fulham quickly showed that they had no intentions of rolling their bellies up in defeat due to intimidation.

Fulham was no longer a small club that would be intimidated.

During the first few minutes of this game, Manchester City dominated possession, their forward quadruple of Bernardo Silva, Phil Foden, Ikey Gundogan, and Jack Grealish torturing them with their silky combination plays.

And with them setting up chances, Erling Haaland hit the post twice while forcing Bernd Leno into an impressive save within just the first 10 minutes.

Despite the fluidity of the champions, led by a certain player, Fulham remained as compact as a rock with no openings.

Sam approached this game with the mentality to do the dirty work, he always knew that playing Manchester City at home was going to be a tough game.

In the middle of the park, he locked the game for Fulham, cutting off any passing lanes with his ridiculous work rate and pressing ability.

Following his example, Fulham dug in, defending like a team and when they occasionally won back possession, it was Sam again leading the threat as he made use of Adama Traore's pace to disturb the champions.

During the first few minutes, it was high-octane display, a back and forth game. Man City had their chances but Fulham also threatened.

It was a nervy game but then, the deadlock was finally broken, against the run of play as Fulham stunned the champions.

"Alex Iwobi to Raul Jimenez, and then Pereira..., PEREIRAAAA!" The commentator screamed as the ball suddenly squirmed into the Man City net.

The move was orchestrated by Paul.

Winning a ball deep in midfield, he sprayed it to the right where Alex Iwobi already ran upfield, overlapping.

With one touch, the Nigerian international passed to Raul Jimenez who skipped past a few heavy challenges in the Man City box before passing back to Alex Iwobi. With a silky touch, Alex retained possession and bid his time.

Once the space opened, he passed back into the box for Jimenez who simply poked the ball into Pereira's space for the midfielder to direct into the far corner.

Ederson stood no chance.

"GOALLL...!" The away fan section in the Etihad exploded with cheers.

Charging towards the corner flag, Pereira jumped, screaming loudly in celebration but the Fulham joy was short-lived.

In the 26th minute, Pereira opened the deadlock and just 6 minutes later, the champions responded.

This time, it was from a corner kick.

As soon as the ball was floated into the Fulham box, Ruben Dias, the Man City defender rose highest, bringing the ball down with his head and just as a scramble started in the Fulham box, a certain Mateo Kovacic arrived first.

Bam!

The Croatian international hit the ball on a volley towards goal.

"Kovacicccc...!!!"

Due to the players blocking him in the box, Bernd Leno did not even see the ball move till it was already in the net.

The Etihad exploded as the fans in sky blue roared back to life.

In the 32nd minute of this game, 1-1.

Game on!

FWEEEE!

When the referee's whistle sounded again, Man City's domination continued.

Fulham in Sam's era may be good but one great player could not make a team of that quality compete with another team comprised entirely of great players.

For the rest of the first half, Man City threatened but with Fulham defending so superbly, it never quite came off. The first half ended 1-1.

Man City's dominance was undeniable though.

The only question was, would their dominance turn into results in the second half? Nobody knew, this was an unpredictable game.

...

After 10 minutes, the players entered the pitch to continue this high-octane affair, and just within a minute, it happened.

Just after kick-off by Man City, a bursting run through the left and a tidy cross was thrown in only to land before a rampaging Mateo Kovacic again.

The Croatian international took one touch to bring the ball down and under control, then his next touch...

BAM!

Kovacic unleashed a thunderous shot from outside the box. Bernd Leno dived but the ball just barely bit him with its speed.

"Kovaciccccc...!!!" The commentator roared again.

"The champions are back! Just within a minute of the restart!"

"Fulham are cooked!"

Mateo Kovacic charged towards the corner flag as he slid on his knees in celebration, turning the Etihad into a boiling cauldron of palpable excitement.

"That goal was straight to the heart of Fulham fans around the world!"

"Will their domination continue?"

It did continue, Fulham were having a tough day at work.

Chapter 184 Do you believe in miracles?

FWEEEE!

The Manchester City domination continued.

The Fulham players did everything in their power, trying to force their way into the game but the Manchester City players were just not letting it.

By the 70th minute, both teams already started making changes. For Man City, the likes of Gundogan, Foden, Grealish, and Akanji were eventually replaced by Walker, Stones, Doku, and Matheus Nunes.

For Fulham, Muniz, Reiss Nelson, and Castagne were introduced in place of Alex Iwobi, Lukic, Pereira, and Raul Jimenez.

The Fulham striker, Jimenez had a reasonably great game but at this point, Coach Marco Silva just wanted anything, a miracle probably.

Did he believe in miracles? Yes.

Did miracles happen often against the champions? No.

It was a crazy gamble, Coach Marco Silva had no idea if it would pay off or not, he just wanted any change to switch the game on its head.

The game did change, but not in the way he expected it to.

After toiling hard all game to keep the score line from turning ugly, a moment of individual genius from one of the Man City substitutes curtailed the game completely from Fulham's fumbling grasp.

Receiving the ball in the left, Jeremy Doku, the silky Man City winger bravely took on his man, going on an explosive run.

With his trademark skill, he exploded with speed and power, leaving Castagne for dead and eventually Tete before shooting towards the right side of the post. Leno dived but again, it was just not enough.

Things were not going Fulham's way today.

"Another goal to Man City!" The commentator roared.

"And it's the electric Jeremy Doku again, what a player!"

While Jeremy Doku danced towards the corner flag in celebration, the Fulham players divulged into arguments, accusing each other for not closing the winger down fast enough, letting him shoot.

On the sidelines, Coach Marco Silva also raged as he threw his bottle of water to the ground before stomping over to the bench, visibly frustrated.

Surely, the game was already out of Fulham's grasp by now.

Surely, they were already done and out.

Surely, they no longer believed in miracles at this point but a certain player on the pitch never stopped believing, not even once.

In the desperate moments was when that spirit rears its head in him again, that mamba spirit, that never say never spirit.

'Win!' 'Win!' 'Win!'

The mantra already started in his head.

Sam's whole body already turned into a conduit to channel victory. His eyes dilated in focus, body brimming with adrenaline, he was in a state of ultra-instinct at this moment as sheer willpower became a drive for his physical body.

Doku's goal for Man City came in the 82nd minute, pushing Fulham to despair with only 8 minutes remaining till fulltime but Sam was undeterred.

In the desperate moments was when the monster in him roared in defiance.

FWEEEE!

When the game started again, the Man City domination continued. Willpower could only do so much when the opposition team had so much quality and was playing at such an elite level.

Man City today played at their best.

They toyed with Fulham, until a mistake in the 88th minute of this game allowed Muniz to steal the ball.

A steal inside the 18-yard box..., a fatal mistake.

Instantly after stealing the ball, Muniz turned with it, beating his man before unleashing a low shot at goal that beat Ederson.

"And woah! A consolation goal!"

"Surely, Fulham are not back in this are they?"

Muniz rushed into the net, picking the ball and rushing back to the halfway line as he pumped his fists, motivating his teammates. "Come on!"

For Sam in the last few minutes, the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak as Man City relegated him to mostly a defensive role this game.

But this time, Sam had help.

Muniz bailed him out when he needed it the most, giving his team some much needed infusion of momentum. Momentum that Sam gladly took advantage of, riding it as if he was a surfer surfing a giant wave.

After the 88th minute, Samuel Moses came to life!

Not in a flashy way, not in a samba way, but in a simple, pound-for-pound, warrior style as Sam chased after the ball like a Hound.

Man City started kick-off but with him chasing so relentlessly, they could only pass around, toying with him.

It seemed demeaning; the Man City players were clearly toying with him.

It was prime meme material, but it only remained meme material till it ceased to be meme material...

Swoosh!

Sam stole the ball..., just outside the Man City 18-yard box!

It was a poor pass from Matheus Nunes as he became complacent due to his team toying with the young Nigerian midfielder. He never expected Sam to read his intentions like a telepathist, jumping on a sliding tackle just after he passed.

Bam!

As soon as Sam stopped the ball, his whole body surged to life, tingling from the sensation of all electrons in his body entering an excited state.

Truly, he was in a state of ultra-instinct, the zone state.

After losing the ball, Matheus Nunes rushed forward immediately to redeem his mistake but rushing an ultra-instinct Sam was a big mistake.

Bam!

One push of the ball and it rolled in between the legs of the onrushing midfielder as Sam nutmegged him, redeeming himself for how they toyed with him since but restoring his pride was not his goal.

As soon as he nutmegged Matheus Nunes, Kovacic charged in but pushing the ball to the left, Sam shrugged off this midfielder's press with his physicality.

He charged to the left where Rico Lewis camped in right back for Man City.

Sam didn't want to go through the middle where the stalwart figures of Ruben Dias and John Stones were, his instincts warned him against it.

And since Man City had the ball before, the ageless Kyle Walker was caught out of position, leaving Rico Lewis to cover for him.

Kovacic charged after Sam again, pulling at his shirt.

Sam's running momentum was killed, but instead of falling down and settling for a foul, he simply slowed down, letting Kovacic overtake him, then...

Bam! Bam!

A lightning-fast maneuver of the ball.

In a slick move, Sam used the la croqueta skill in his repertoire to obliterate the Croatian international as Kovacic collapsed to the ground.

With that maneuver, the ball moved a bit further from him than he expected.

Sensing weakness, Rico Lewis charged in but Sam was faster.

Arriving first, Sam trapped the ball but Lewis was already on him. For a brief moment, Sam's brain froze as he was unsure of the correct move to make to escape out of this situation, he could not afford to lose the ball!

And as Lewis charged in, Sam's instincts took over.

He did something he had never done on the professional stage before.

Lewis was too close to use his normal tricks, so Sam simply put his body forward, wrapping both of his legs around the ball behind him, then he flicked...

"Uhhh! A rainbow flick!"

"Such a silky move from Sam! He's gone past Lewis!"

The young Rico Lewis was left tracking the ball back, staggering till he also collapsed on the pitch.

Sam got to the ball, pushing it away from Rico Lewis who was already on the floor and then, he dashed into the 18-yard box.

John Stones finally reacted but just as this player stuck out his leg, Sam flicked the ball to the right, setting himself up in the box, and then he took his shot.

Bam!

But Ruben Dias reacted, jumping on a desperate block.

...but Sam expected this, Ruben Dias was playing too well this game not to react to such an obvious shot from him.

This was why it was not a shot, but a feint, a fake shot.

With that fake shot, Sam cut through the 2 Man City central defenders but he was still not safe. This was because the pacey Kyle Walker already recovered and was closing in on him, not giving him time on the ball.

"...!" Sam's brain froze again.

Ruben Dias was already recovering too; he would soon close him down.

He had no time to settle down and take a proper shot with his right foot after faking the ball back to the left, and he didn't have enough confidence in his left foot, bringing the dilemma.

But in desperate situations, Sam thrived.

'If I can't shoot with my left, and I'm not positioned to shoot properly with my right, I must improvise!'

'I must make my own luck, create a miracle!'

And Sam did just that.

BAM!

Sam took his shot but it was not what Ederson expected.

Instead of taking the risk to shoot with his left foot, he used his right at that awkward angle but it was a special type of shot.

Wrapping the outside of his boot around the ball, Sam tried a shooting technique he had never used before in the professional stage, a trivela shot.

"...!" The Etihad stadium became as silent as a graveyard.

Holding their breaths, tens of thousands of fans in sky blue watched as Ederson reacted late to the trivela shot.

He dived but it was a late dive, the ball already went past him.

Time seemed to slow down as they watched this ball curl to the right and just as it seemed like it would go outside for a goal kick, it snuck into the very edge of the top right corner of the net.

It was a goal!

Chapter 185 The John Wick of football!

"GOALLLLLLLLLLLLLLL...!!!" The commentator screamed at the top of his lungs.

"Zinedine Sam!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAMMMMM!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAMMMMM...!!!"

"The Nigerian Zidane has struck a dagger straight into the heart of the champions a second consecutive time in the premier league".

"Last season, it was all him as Fulham rallied to a draw against the champions at home! This season again, it is him, he is HIM!"

"Sam has rescued a point again for Fulham in the 90th minute!"

"What a goal! What a play leading to the goal!"

"He stole the ball from Nunes, he sent Nunes to no man's land, he sat Kovacic on the ground! He rainbow-flicked Rico Lewis! ...leaving the poor boy on the ground".

"He turned Ruben Dias and John Stones, 2 of the best defenders in the world inside out, and that trivela..., oh my wife's left nipple!"

"John, profanities are not allowed in commentary..."

The over the moon commentator ignored his partner, rambling on. "That was straight out of the top drawer!"

"That is a goal that can only be thought of by the legendary Quaresma himself, the lord of trivela shots!"

"That is stuff of legends, stuff attributed to legends of the game like Luka Modric and the likes, that is what this young 19-year-old is doing, my God!"

"Show me a better 19-year-old in the world and I will show you a mad man!"

"Sam is insane!"

"Sam is out of this world!"

"Sam is currently in a level of his own! This is Messi-class!"

"He is the John Wick of football!"

While the commentator raved on about him, it took a moment for Sam to realize that he just scored a goal and when he did, he let loose.

Charging towards the corner flag, Sam was not patient enough to remove his jersey as he simply ripped it apart, reminiscing of a prime Cristiano Ronaldo in the champions league stage.

With his jersey ripped apart, exposing his fit body and perfect abs, Sam arrived at the corner flag and jumped.

All the veins in his legs were exposed as he stretched his body.

He jumped 3 times, stomping the ground hard in excitement every time even as he pumped his fists in ecstasy, basking in his moment.

His teammates soon arrived the next moment, jumping all over him.

The Manchester City fans could not even bring themselves to boo him as Sam did all these antics before. All of them could tell that they were witnessing something special, they could tell that they were witnessing greatness.

Perhaps, he really was the John Wick of football.

In the away fan section, a familiar chant broke out, a chant that no one expected to hear in the Etihad stadium.

"Sam!" "Sam!" "Sam!"

Sam felt on top of the world.

While the Fulham players celebrated, the Manchester City players reacted in baffled manners, ruing the manner in which that goal was scored.

Mateo Kovacic remained on the ground, wondering how on earth he ended up there in the first place. 'This guy...', he thought.

Ruben Dias and John Stones were left wondering even more, trying to piece together the insane logic behind that goal. What was the probability of it even ending up in goal, that shot? Probably below 5%.

But 5% was just enough for Sam to work with, to create his miracle.

That day, the duo of Manchester City center backs learned to believe in miracles. They could not bear witness to what just happened and still be unbelievers, it would be a blasphemy.

When the celebrations eventually died down, it was clear that all energy was already sapped from this high-octane game.

The referee added only 3 minutes of added time.

In that time, both sides just tried to create something, trying to get the winner but they were too focused defending to put too much bodies upfront.

This resulted in a tight affair that ended after 3 minutes of additional time.

This high-octane game finally ended.

Just like Max, the pundit predicted before the game, it ended in a draw and just like Charles, the host of the show predicted, Sam did get his name on the scoresheet so both of them were right in their predictions.

All in all, it was by far the most exciting game of the matchday.

...

A day after the exciting clash at the Etihad stadium, the rest games of matchday 7 of the English premier league were finally concluded and the premier league table was updated again to show the current team rankings.

(Premier league matchday 7 results:)

(Crystal Palace 0-1 Liverpool)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Arsenal 3-1 Southampton)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Brentford 5-3 Wolves)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Man City 3-3 Fulham)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(West Ham 4-1 Ipswich Town)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Leicester City 1-0 Bournemouth)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Everton 0-0 Newcastle)

(Date: 5th October, 2024)

...

(Aston Villa 0-0 Man United)

(Date: 6th October, 2024)

...

(Chelsea 1-1 Nottm Forest)

(Date: 6th October, 2024)

...

(Brighton 3-2 Tottenham)

(Date: 6th October, 2024)

...

(Updated premier league table standings:)

(1. Fulham GP: 7/ W:6/ D:1/ L:0/ Pts: 19)

(2. Liverpool GP: 7/ W:6/ D:0/ L:1/ Pts: 19)

(3. Arsenal GP: 7/ W:5/ D:2/ L:0/ Pts: 17)

(4. Man City GP: 7/ W:4/ D:3/ L:0/ Pts: 15)

(5. Chelsea GP: 7/ W:4/ D:2/ L:1/ Pts: 14)

(6. Aston Villa GP: 7/ W:4/ D:1/ L:2/ Pts: 13)

(7. Brighton GP: 7/ W:3/ D:3/ L:1/ Pts: 12)

(8. Newcastle GP: 7/ W:3/ D:3/ L:1/ Pts: 12)

(9. Tottenham GP: 7/ W:3/ D:1/ L:3/ Pts: 10)

(10. Brentford GP: 7/ W:3/ D:1/ L:3/ Pts: 10)

(11. Nottm Forest GP: 7/ W:2/ D:4/ L:1/ Pts: 10)

(12. Bournemouth GP: 7/ W:2/ D:2/ L:3/ Pts: 8)

(13. West Ham GP: 7/ W:2/ D:2/ L:3/ Pts: 8)

(14. Leicester GP: 7/ W:1/ D:3/ L:3/ Pts: 6)

(15. Everton GP: 7/ W:1/ D:2/ L:4/ Pts: 5)

(16. Man United GP: 7/ W:1/ D:2/ L:4/ Pts: 5)

(17. Ipswich Town GP: 7/ W:0/ D:4/ L:3/ Pts: 4)

(18. Crystal Palace GP: 7/ W:0/ D:3/ L:4/ Pts: 3)

(19. Southampton GP: 7/ W:0/ D:1/ L:6/ Pts: 1)

(20. Wolves GP: 7/ W:0/ D:1/ L:6/ Pts: 1)

Fulham retained their spot at the top of the premier league table.

Chapter 186 Zinedine Sam; the face of Fulham

After Sam's performance last season in the EFL Cup, dragging an unlikely Fulham all the way to win the EFL Cup at the expense of heavyweights like Chelsea and Liverpool, he got the status of a streets would never forget player in Fulham.

But after his performance against Manchester City on October 5th, his status was truly solidified in the city of Fulham, London.

After the Man City game, a big mural of Sam was made in the city, immortalizing the moment when Sam's rainbow flick took out Rico Lewis.

There were also banners of him all over the city as Fulham fans still basking in their victory despite the fact that it was a draw paraded their star player as the best player in the league.

All of these had a ripple effect in Sam's career.

The premier league was the most broadcasted of the top 5 European leagues in football, and games against elite teams of the premier league was one way for players to put themselves in the limelight.

The game against Manchester City was one such game.

Sam was no longer an unknown player in the premier league. He was well-known in London especially, but after his performance against Man City, his popularity exploded and with it came endorsement deals.

Sam already got his first endorsement deal some time ago during his holiday after his first season with Fulham, and this time, he got 3 endorsement deal offers.

As a professional football player already building his brand, Sam had to be wary of the companies he got associated with though to protect his image.

With this in mind and with Kayla handling the logistics, he rejected one of the company's offers, settling for the last 2 and they were not small contracts.

They were big contracts; the first being the biggest money deal that Sam has ever made in his career till date.

The first company was Lexus, the luxury vehicle division of the Japanese automaker Toyota Motor Corporation.

The contract with the Japanese automaker company earned Sam a whopping 12 million Euros. And all he had to do was be one of the faces of the company brand, mentioning it in all his social media platforms and the company's page.

His second deal was less lucrative but still, considering where Sam was coming from, it was a ridiculous sum of money.

The second contract was a marketing deal with Rolex SA, the leading luxury watch manufacturer in the world. Sam got 4 million Euros for his troubles, and a neat collection of 5 new Rolex luxury watches.

Sam was already a Lexus owner as his car was a gray Lexus IS 350, but the Lexus deal made him a proud owner of a brand-new luxury Lexus car.

Sam got a brand new white 2024 Lexus LX worth approximately \$100,000. It was a full-size luxury SUV, and most definitely, it suited Sam's current status as a rising superstar of the English premier league.

Sam loved his new ride.

Apart from the 2 new endorsement deal contracts that Sam managed to secure with 2 big companies in the world, another thing that excited him after the Manchester City game was more personal than the contracts.

This was related to his football and career.

During the last 10 minutes of the game against Manchester City, Sam felt in a state of unnatural calm and tension, a contrasting mixture that resulted from his strong emotions and willpower to win.

That contrasting mixture of emotions pushed him into the zone state.

Sam was not unused to entering the zone state when he was extremely focused on winning in football, but that day's own, that one was different.

It was that feeling that enabled him to try things out that he had never tried on the professional stage before then.

Not only did he use a rainbow flick to obliterate Rico Lewis, the Man City youngster, but that trivela shot, Sam still did not know where it came from. Everything happened by instinct.

And since his system didn't give any notification concerning that, Sam thought it was just a fluke but the feeling lingered, the feeling that something about him changed fundamentally.

In consequent training sessions with Emile Smith Rowe, the English footballer also told him that he noticed something different in his gameplay.

It took Sam a few days of training for that feeling to finally solidify and when it did, Sam felt like an entirely different player.

And his system finally lit up with notifications, confirming it.

~----~

[Your efforts in training and professional games have borne fruit, you have broken a skill bottleneck!]

[You have unlocked basic mastery level of the football skill: Rainbow Flick!]

[You have unlocked basic mastery level of the football skill: Trivela Shot!]

[Your owned football skill, La Croqueta has automatically upgraded from the basic mastery level to the intermediate mastery level!]

...

[Congratulations! Your dribbling attribute has increased by +2]

[Congratulations! Your shooting attribute has increased by +1]

[Congratulations! Your overall player attribute has increased to 82!]

[Owned Football Skills:]

[Passive skill: Stalwart]

[Active skills:]

[Basic mastery level: Body feint; Power shot; step overs; roulette; knuckle shot; overhead kick; rainbow flick; trivela shot]

[Intermediate mastery level: Elastico, Cruyff turn; La croqueta]

[Advanced mastery level: Spatial awareness]

...

[Legendary Inheritance: Spatial Awareness]

[Legendary Inheritance: Elastico]

...

Player Attributes:

*Pace: 81

*Shot: 80

*Pass: 80

*Dribbling: 78

*Defending: 38

*Physicality: 76

*Stamina: 84

Overall Rating: 82

~-----~

After a long time of remaining stuck at an overall rating of 81, Sam finally took another big step, jumping to an overall rating of 82 and the Manchester City game was the big catalyst that pushed him towards this step.

Looking at his new skillset, Sam could not help but grin and when he thought back to the Manchester City game, his smile widened in excitement.

"It was a nice game". He mumbled, smiling. "By the course of the season, if I can play a few more games like this to push my limits, my skillset and level will surely improve even more".

"It will prepare me for the big stage next season, the champions league".

He rubbed his palms in anticipation. "I can't wait".

Chapter 187 Just another day at work?

After the game against Manchester City at the Etihad, Fulham FC was in great spirits. They felt invincible already in the premier league.

It was still just the beginning of the premier league but topping the league table, this was something that every single player of this squad had never experienced throughout their whole career.

Experiencing it now felt so strange and surreal, and then came the pressure.

The premier league was a heavily broadcasted league. By staying at the top of the premier league table, Fulham was suddenly under the spotlight.

A lot of people wanted them to fail, even more predicted them to fail, and others were simply watching from the sidelines, waiting to see how long they would keep it up before finally faltering.

And the media publicity?

All of this was putting a lot of pressure on the shoulders of the Fulham players, and after the Man City game, this pressure only increased.

The pressure to keep on performing, the pressure to not let up, even Sam was not immune to it. Despite his mentality, Sam felt the pressure and it made him even more desperate to keep on working hard.

He coped better with the pressure through his occasional meditation routine.

Luckily for them, they were not thrown straight into another game after the Manchester City game. Unlike other premier league clubs that played in European competitions, during this time, Fulham was relatively free.

This was why they had a whopping 13 days to rest after the Man City game.

Their next game was against Aston Villa in the premier league.

(Premier league:)

(Fulham – Aston Villa)

(Date: 19th October, 2024)

With 13 days to rest, take in all the feelings of the last game, shed away the pressure and prepare, the Fulham players were more or less set for their next game far before 19th came.

To them, it was just going to be another day at work; this mindset was what helped them cope with the pressure of staying on top.

Like expected, both teams started with their strongest lineups.

Having displaced Muniz in recent weeks, Raul Jimenez started as the striker for Fulham. Behind him was the trio of Emile Smith Rowe, Sam, and Adama Traore, while the 2-man midfield behind them comprised of Pereira and Alex Iwobi.

The 4-man defense comprised of Tete, Andersen, Calvin Bassey, and Robinson, while Bernd Leno naturally started in between the posts.

For Aston Villa, employing the same 4-2-3-1 formation as Fulham, Ollie Watkins started as their striker while behind him was the trio of Morgan Rogers, Ramsey, and Leon Bailey.

Behind them was the 2-man midfield of Amadou Onana and Youri Tielemans, while their 4-man defense comprised Digne, Torres, Carlos, and Cash.

Emiliano Martinez, the famous Argentine goalkeeper started as the last man in between the posts for Aston Villa.

Having gotten a famous result away from home at the Etihad, the fact that this game was being played in Craven Cottage bolstered the Fulham players even more. They were the favorites to win.

The fans in black, white, and red were loud around the stadium.

And when the whistle eventually sounded, the players rode the momentum and energy that was being generated by their loud noise.

FWEEEE!

From the first minute, Fulham started this game on the front foot.

In terms of recent form, Fulham was dubbed as the superior team this game and they showed it on the pitch as they dominated the proceedings during the early minutes of this game.

Having been largely suffocated at the Etihad, forced into a defensive role, Sam was eager to get back into his mojo and it was showing.

His first dribble with the ball and shot almost resulted in a goal as he hit the post in just the 2nd minute of this game, but that was just the beginning as 3 minutes later, Sam played an unreal defense-splitting pass.

The center back duo of Torres and Carlos were deleted by that unreal pass, leaving Raul Jimenez one-on-one with Dibu Martinez, the Aston Villa goalie.

Jimenez did not miss his mark, rifling the ball into the top corner.

In just the 5th minute of this game, Fulham's superiority showed as they scored and Sam got his 6th assist of the season.

That was now 6 goals and 6 assists in 11 games this season.

When play restarted, Fulham hoped to build on their early momentum and they did as they kept on leading proceedings, until a moment of shock just 4 minutes later against the run of play stunned them.

It was the Aston Villa attacking midfielder, Morgan Rogers that tore the script of this game apart, singlehandedly writing a new one for his team.

Against the run of play, this midfielder stole the ball just outside the Fulham 18-yard box. With a feint, he beat Pereira before setting himself up and unleashing an unreal outside the box shot that homed into the top right corner like a missile.

Craven Cottage was silenced..., no one saw this coming.

"And where did this come from?!" The commentator raved.

"What a goal from Rogers! Quick feet to wriggle past Pereira, and an absolutely thunderous shot to beat Leno, what a goal!"

"And just like that, Aston Villa are back in the game".

"Maybe this is not going to be just another walk at the park for Fulham after all".

In the 9th minute, just 4 minutes after Fulham opened the scoring, Aston Villa equalized, bringing the scores back level 1-1.

FWEEEE!

When the game restarted, the Fulham players pressed on led by Sam but after that goal, Aston Villa became much more solid.

They played like an impenetrable rock with no visible weak points.

Their offense, midfield, and defense were rock solid, not too threatening but they were having a solid game away from home.

After those 2 lightning fast goals in the early proceedings, goals dried up in this game and despite both sides having their moments, none of them could break the deadlock again as the first half ended 1-1.

During halftime, Coach Marco Silva had a little talk with his players before sending them back into the pitch but clearly, his words were not effective enough.

Fulham started the second half weaker than the first as Aston Villa came out roaring from halftime like a Dragon, quickly proving to be the superior team.

It almost seemed like their tactic was conserving their energy in the first half only to show their true colors in the second half.

Fulham tried to regain control of this game even as they lost it but before they could, matters worsened in the 59th minute of this game.

Lashing onto a pass across the face of goal, the sharp Ollie Watkins poked into an empty net to give Aston Villa the lead.

"GOALLLL...!" The commentator screamed.

"Damn! This is football, unpredictable!"

"Nobody saw this coming during that first half, but here we are, Aston Villa are actually leading Fulham at home!"

"Craven Cottage is as silent as a graveyard".

"They clearly didn't see this coming, neither did we".

Charging towards the corner flag, Ollie Watkins slid on his knees in celebration. While they celebrated, the Fulham players focused on themselves.

"Come on!" Sam clapped, riling his teammates up.

They could not draw against Manchester City at the Etihad and come back home triumphantly only to lose in the next game, or even draw again.

When the game restarted, the Fulham intensity increased immediately, almost turning a bit reckless.

Yes, it was reckless because in the 64th minute, disaster struck.

"Oh, what a horror tackle by Andersen".

"What is the referee's decision going to be?"

FWEEEE!

"Oh! It's a straight red card!"

"Wow, Fulham are down to 10 men in the 64th minute!"

Chapter 188 Picked apart

In the 59th minute, Aston Villa scored.

They went ahead for the first time this game.

In the 64th minute, Andersen got a straight red card after an overzealous challenge, dooming Fulham to play the rest of the game with just 10 men.

There was still 26 minutes to play in this game, and not just that, Fulham were trailing one goal behind their opponents.

Immediately after the red card decision by the referee, Coach Marco Silva responded immediately, making changes.

Marco Silva took off Pereira and Emile Smith Rowe who was having a bad game in his standards since making the switch to Fulham. In place of the 2 attacking players, he put in Diop, a defender, and Cairney, a more well-rounded player.

Fulham's playstyle on the pitch changed immediately, becoming a bit more defensive to make up for the loss of one player.

FWEEE!

When play restarted though, it was clear that Fulham was shaky.

Through the course of the past few weeks and months, a lot of pressure was already being mounted on their shoulders, most especially after they did the impossible of actually being at the top of the premier league table.

In the preparations to this game, the pressure mounted, affecting them a bit but they managed to shrug it off due to the time they had to prepare for the game.

But after that red card? Everything crumbled.

Fulham lost their grit and compactness; they were like a chicken without a head as soon as the game restarted after the red card.

And sensing weakness, Aston Villa pounced.

For the second straight game, Sam was forced to track back, putting in defensive work to help his teammates weather the sudden oppression from the Aston Villa players.

The Fulham fans were still loud, roaring on their team, hoping for a miracle but then, just 5 minutes later, the worst happened.

The Aston Villa pressure got so much that one of the Fulham defenders made a mistake, executing an atrocious interception of the ball from an Aston Villa cross.

Instead of clearing the ball or intercepting it, Diop made a fatal mistake, instead poking the ball into his own net and scoring an own goal.

"Oh my God!"

"Fulham are being picked apart!"

"They've been exposed completely after that red card, this is not Fulham, they're crumbling from within and that own goal is the perfect show of it".

"It was just a matter of time".

"You can't challenge for the premier league title with such a squad. It's impressive that they managed to stay up top for so long, but let's be realistic, they never stood a chance".

"If not Aston Villa, another club would have exposed them eventually".

"To me, the Fulham fans should be grateful that it happened at all, the past few weeks and months was an unforgettably terrific time to them".

"Will this dissolve into a rout? Fulham are clearly disorganized, let's watch, time will tell".

The Fulham players deflated after that goal.

Only a certain player was not yet dissuaded as his competitive spirit lit up even more at the challenge of striving for a comeback and winning with 10 men.

'Win!' 'Win!' 'Win!'

The mantra already started in Sam's head. As play restarted, all he thought about was winning but his teammates were just not in the same wavelength as him.

First, Emile Smith Rowe was no longer in the pitch and second, no other Fulham player believed that they could do anything this game.

This forced Sam into a one-man army scenario.

He could tell that no word he said to his teammates at this point would affect a thing. From the look in their eyes, the pressure already got to them and they were already broken, this was not something that could be fixed with mere words.

This was why Sam decided to fix it with his brilliance.

The whole Fulham team was playing bad this second half except one man, Sam. He ignored his coach's orders, running all over the pitch, chasing after the ball as he challenged with his sheer work rate.

"This is what separates Sam from other players. The young Nigerian midfielder does not know how to give up, he keeps on going, striving".

"He's clocked the most kilometers in this game by a significant margin".

"His work rate is insane, he's trying his best, if only he was playing for a bigger club, he would truly have the opportunity to blossom".

Sam kept on doing what he was doing, pushed by only the thought of winning but Aston Villa was too experienced to let one player ruin all their hard work.

Besides, Dibu Martinez was having a terrific game.

Sam already singlehandedly created a few chances for himself, testing the Aston Villa goalkeeper more than once but Martinez always rose up to his challenge every single time.

Frustration started boiling in but Sam did not let it overwhelm him just yet.

He kept on going, he kept on striving.

'I can't lose!'

'I must win!'

'I can't afford to lose, I must win!'

75 minutes passed...

80 minutes passed...

90 minutes passed...

"Surely, it is the end now, Fulham have been picked apart by a rampant Aston Villa side today".

All of Sam's work was in vain, he could not get a second goal for Fulham. But then in the 90th plus 3 minutes, another mistake was added to the catalogue of mistakes in this game as Philogene, the Aston Villa substitute committed a blunder, fouling a Fulham player just outside his box.

FWEEEE!

The referee immediately awarded a straight red card, pointing to the spot for a freekick in favor of Fulham.

"It's a red card to Aston Villa but at this point, it's of no consequence, the game is already over".

The game may be over but as Sam approached the ball, Alex Iwobi was surprised to see a fire still burning in the eyes of this player.

The Nigerian international was amazed. 'He still hasn't given up?'

Standing before the ball, Sam spread his legs in an iconic stance reminisce of the Portuguese legend, Cristiano Ronaldo, and then he took a deep breath.

FWEEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, Sam executed an angled run towards the ball, then...

BAM!

Sam hit the ball low, under the wall of Aston Villa players as it rotated with speed till it nestled into the bottom right corner.

Craven Cottage was again silenced.

Chapter 189 Perfect response to a setback? You bounce back

Craven Cottage was again silenced, then the commentator raved.

"What a brilliant goal!" The commentator screamed loudly. "Damn, to execute that when the game is already over for your team".

"Damn! This boy is brilliant!"

"Mamba mentality at its finest!"

"Sam is the Kobe Bryant of football, go argue with your keyboard!"

"Fulham may definitely lose this game but Sam did not lose, he can end this game with his head held high in pride, what a player!"

Craven Cottage was silenced not because of the goal, not because of the fact that it didn't mean much to the overall goal of Fulham as a team since they were still losing 2-3, but simply because of the mentality of their player to execute it.

At 90 plus 4 minutes, they could tell that all their players already gave up in getting a result from this game since they still trailed 1-3 to Aston Villa.

Heck, even the fans themselves already gave up.

But even in this adversity, to still have the presence of mind, willingness, and drive to go for a goal, the fans were astonished at Sam's mentality.

And then the chants broke out again.

"Sam!" "Sam!" "Sam!"

This was supposed to be a heartbreaking loss for Fulham, having broken their unbeaten streak finally but Sam's performance today felt like a win to the fans.

Sam didn't celebrate his goal, simply pumping a fist to briefly acknowledge the fans before going back upfield to continue the game.

When the referee's whistle sounded, the game only continued for 2 more minutes that were pretty uneventful as Aston Villa resorted to time-wasting till the referee's whistle eventually sounded again for fulltime.

Fulham lost 2-3 to Aston Villa.

Officially, they recorded their first defeat of the 2024/2025 season.

And incredibly, despite being on the losing side this game, Sam won another consecutive man of the match award due to his heroics this game, not only his sheer work rate but his tangible result with a goal and an assist.

When Sam faced the reporters for the post-match interview and he was asked questions, he had only a simple reply for the reporters.

"We will bounce back".

He didn't say more than that, walking out on them for the first time in his career since he didn't feel in a mood to answer questions.

After the game, Coach Marco Silva could not even bring himself to criticize his players, especially Sam. The coach simply patted him on the back, acknowledging his effort in the game.

Before leaving, he looked at his players. "This is a wakeup call for us. We already lost once; do you feel good about it?"

"No coach".

"Do you want to feel this way again?"

"No coach".

"Then work!" This coach's eyes narrowed. "Work your asses off, work like your life depends on it, train! That is the only way to bounce back".

"That is the only way to start winning and keep on winning".

When Sam got back home to his apartment, as soon as he had his bath and laid down on his bed, he got a voice call from a familiar contact.

(Incoming voice call from My Heartbeat...)

Looking at the call contact, he smiled instinctively, already feeling his stress and frustration of today's game partially gone.

He picked up his phone with a big smile. "Hey..."

...

Fulham's next game was another premier league game and it was in 6 days against Everton.

(Premier league:)

(Everton – Fulham)

(Date: 26th October, 2024)

Their defeat in the game against Aston Villa affected the full team, but Sam's defiant performance till the last minute affected them even more.

The team was in a state of uncertainty and sensing it, Cairney, the Fulham captain finally decided to do something since he felt partly responsible for it as the captain. Cairney decided to invite all his teammates for a small dinner party.

Sam was not used to going to dinner parties, but this time, for the team, he decided to go with his friend, Emile Smith Rowe.

Both of them got dressed in a neat black suit.

In the dinner party, apart from feasting on the delicious meal that Cairney's chefs prepared, the players also got themselves entertained by engaging in a few games, question and answer sessions, and truth or dare sessions.

Of course, even in the games, Sam remained the center of attention.

"Who is the most dedicated player in the club?"

"Sam!" His teammates roared, leaving Sam chuckling as he enjoyed himself.

"Who is the most punctual?"

"Sam!!!" They roared in an incredibly loud voice.

"Who is the most aggressive on the pitch?"

"Bassey, that bastard!"

They laughed.

"Who is the best defender?"

"Bassey!"

"Diop!"

"Castagne!"

"Ok, let's do a poll and see who wins".

After the poll, Diop won over Calvin Bassey by a very tiny margin.

"Who is the best midfielder?"

"Sammmm!!!" They roared again.

"The best striker?"

"Ahem," Cairney coughed, stealing a glance at the 2 main strikers of the team. "I think, let's do a poll".

If it was up to him, he wanted them to skip this phase of the question and answer game session entirely but his teammates would clearly not buy that.

In the end, after a quick poll, despite the fact that Muniz was the more regular starter this season, Raul Jimenez won the poll by a tiny margin.

"Who is the strongest player?"

"Bassey!" They echoed.

"Who is the fastest player?"

"Traore, that monster!" They laughed.

"Who always does too much in training?"

"Sam!"

Sam had to protest this one. "Come on guys, really? Do I do too much in training?"

"Yes!" They laughed. "You bastard, you always play like it's a real game in training, humiliating men grown enough to be your father, you insolent bastard!"

Sam laughed. "Well, it's not my fault if my father is not as good as me".

They all burst into laughter, pointing fingers at Cairney.

In the end, it was a good time out between teammates of a club currently hot in England.

After the defeat against Aston Villa, Fulham was out of the top of the premier league table but they didn't pay attention to it as feeling even more motivated and united, they focused on the Everton game.

"Let's show them hell!"

Chapter 190 Tearing Everton apart

(Premier league:)

(Everton – Fulham)

(Date: 26th October, 2024)

Both teams started with their strongest lineups, it was predicted to be a tough away game for Fulham after their blunder at home last time out.

For Everton, Jordan Pickford started in between the posts with a defensive quadruple of Young, Tarkowski, Keane, and Mykolenko ahead of him. The midfield duo sitting on top of the defense comprised of Idrissa Gueye and Doucoure.

Calvert-Lewin started as the striker, while behind him was the trio of Harrison, McNeil, and Ndiaye.

As for Fulham, it was Raul Jimenez again starting as the striker with Alex Iwobi, Sam, and Emile Smith Rowe starting behind him.

Berge and Pereira started as the midfield duo, while their 4-man defense comprised of a familiar lineup of Robinson, Calvin Bassey, Diop, and Tete. Bernd Leno started in between the posts.

Both teams started with their favored 4-2-3-1 formation.

FWEEEE!

When the referee's whistle sounded, it was an even game at first during the first few minutes of this game till Fulham slowly started taking control.

Since Sam was not forced into a more defensive role in this game, he had all the leverage in the world to do what he did best, create and Everton was made to suffer for his brilliance.

All across the first half, Sam played with flair and elegance, showcasing his silky dribbling skills and accurate passing abilities.

He had a 100% passing accuracy in the first half, never misplacing a pass as he pinged the ball left, right, and center, repeatedly cutting through the Everton defense like a hot knife through butter.

Up top, Raul Jimenez was having an amazing game as he was supplied by Sam regularly. Pickford's amazing performance was the only thing currently keeping his name from the scoresheet.

At times, Everton also had their moments buoyed by the loud noise being made by their fans as they threatened.

Despite Fulham's domination towards the later part of this first half though, somehow, the score line remained blank till the referee's whistle sounded, signaling half-time.

It was a wonder how this game was still 0-0 considering that it was so open-ended, both teams seemed like they could score any moment.

During halftime, Coach Marco Silva didn't say too much to his players, simply telling them to keep a level head, to not make reckless mistakes on the pitch and to simply enjoy their football.

When second half started, that was exactly what the Fulham players did, enjoy themselves and it bore result in very little time.

Everton tried to threaten but once Fulham settled, they resumed their domination of this game and 15 minutes after the restart, the game opened up.

After some incredible hold-up play by Raul Jimenez in the Everton box, this striker set up his winger as Alex Iwobi ran in, taking the ball in his strides before Tarkowski could intercept it before simply poking it into the bottom corner.

Jordan Pickford reacted but there was very little that he could do at such close range, Jimenez's pass was just perfect.

In the 61st minute, Fulham finally broke the deadlock, going ahead 0-1.

And that, was a mistake on Everton's part because as soon as the first goal entered, the floodgates were opened.

Just 3 minutes after the first goal, in the 64th minute, Sam played another unreal defense-splitting pass, setting up Raul Jimenez again and this time, the Fulham striker did not miss his mark.

Taking one touch to control the box, Jimenez unleashed a venomous shot towards the bottom right corner. The ball just missed Pickford's outstretched arms.

0-2 to Fulham.

The Fulham players already found their mojo, they were in their zone already as their domination continued.

Everton tried to come back into this game but with Berge breaking up the line, intercepting passes and acting as the destroyer, he protected his defense, ensuring that Fulham always remained in the game.

He left the rest for the more offensive players, and they showed their ability again and this time, Sam got his name on the scoresheet.

This time, it was an outrageous knuckle ball from him from outside the box.

What made it even more impressive was the fact that it was not just a knuckle ball shot, Sam hit it on a volley after a weak clearance from Everton.

"Zinedine Sam at it again!" The commentator raved.

"Is there a game where the young Nigerian doesn't show up?"

"Every game, I'm telling you, he's there. Even in bad Fulham games, in the good ones too, he's the one constant that keeps on performing every game".

"What a monster!"

Sam was not satisfied with just that yet though, he did more.

This time, he was the one who started the play, going on a mazy run as he dribbled through players like they were not there and just as he was about to be tripped, he passed the ball to Emile Smith Rowe who started on the right wing.

He was tripped but having passed the ball already, Sam quickly sprang back up to his feet, charging into the 18-yard box again just in time for Smith Rowe to float a pass in.

Rising above all the Everton players, Sam planted a power header towards goal. Jordan Pickford got his hand to it, but the power behind the ball was too much, it snuck past his grasp and into the net.

"The monster strikes again!"

"That's 2 goals and 1 assist to Sam now, what a player!"

"It's 0-4 to Fulham, they're having a blast!"

But again, Sam was not satisfied with just that. At some point, Muniz already replaced Raul Jimenez in the team.

And this time, after going on another mazy dribble that saw him use almost all the silky weapons in his arsenal, weaving through players like they were not there, he played a perfect pass, slicing the defense open and setting up Muniz; the striker unleashed a perfect shot.

BAM!

One touch, one goal.

Muniz scored with his first touch of the game, and with it, Sam also got his 2nd assist of this game, taking his overall goal contributions to 4!

It was an absolute hammering for Everton, they were humiliated by the rampant Fulham in front of their home fans.

Everton got a consolation goal late after 90 minutes but it meant very little.

When the whistle eventually sounded, the Everton players heaved a huge sigh of relief since they were finally vindicated from the embarrassment.

Sam won another man of the match award; he was on a streak.