

## **Football God 191**

Chapter 191 An imperious run of form

(Premier league:)

(Fulham – Brentford)

(Date: 4th November, 2024)

...

(Crystal Palace – Fulham)

(Date: 9th November, 2024)

...

(Fulham – Wolves)

(Date: 23rd November, 2024)

After Sam's brilliant display against Everton, leading his team as they thrashed their rivals, he took his tally for the season to 9 goals and 8 assists in just 12 games, an incredible tally for any player.

Sam was feeling good and in extension, Fulham was feeling good.

After the Everton game, they had more than a week of rest preparing for their next game. And this time, they took on Brentford at home.

Both teams approached this game with their strongest lineups.

With the likes of Bryan Mbeumo and Lewis-Potter all starting for Brentford, they were a threatening side and Fulham was well prepared to face their threat.

Fulham started with a lineup that had only few changes to their old one, as Reiss Nelson started today.

Due to Fulham's form in the premier league though, wary, Brentford approached this game with a defensive mindset despite also playing the same 4-2-3-1 formation as their rivals.

Against the run of play in the first half, Janelt, the Brentford midfielder stunned Craven Cottage as he scored from a header, sending Brentford up front.

In the 24th minute of this game, the Fulham defense was undone as Brentford started losing.

Familiar patterns seemed to be rearing their heads again but this time, led by Sam, Fulham simply refused to give in to whatever pattern.

They played with their head down and in the game.

The first half ended with them losing 0-1 still to their opponents but after second half started, they seemed to come out of their shells. Coach Marco Silva must have given them a hell of a dressing down in the dressing room.

Brentford defended effectively for a time despite the Fulham pressure, but it was a familiar name that rendered all their efforts null.

Sam explosively cut into the Brentford lines like a god.

Nutmegging players, shoving them aside with his physicality, and then the ever-present elastico to cut through them before exercising his impressive finishing.

From start to finish, it was perfection from the young Fulham midfielder as he singlehandedly dragged his team level in the 65th minute of this game.

Game on!

Both coaches made changes as the game wore on, contrasting offensive and defensive changes as clearly, Brentford was fine with settling for a draw while Fulham wanted nothing less than a victory.

Despite Sam playing in an extraterrestrial level this game, after one of the substitutes was assigned to man-mark him in this second half, his influence waned though he remained a threatening presence in the field.

Brentford's defensive approach worked as even at 90 minutes, the score line remained level but this time, Coach Marco Silva's changes worked wonders.

A super sub became Fulham's savior today.

In the 90th plus 2 minute, Harry Wilson became the savior, lashing into a cross from Emile Smith Rowe to score the winning goal.

But not satisfied with that, in the 90th plus 7 minutes, the super sub struck again with his head again. This time, it was a diving header as he got on the end of another perfect Smith Rowe pass.

Incredibly, after an intense affair all night, Fulham won 3-1.

Emile Smith Rowe won the man of the match award.

...

The next game on 9th November against Crystal Palace in away ground was another perfect example of samba football orchestrated by Sam and Smith Rowe.

In this game, despite playing in away ground, Fulham dominated for large swaths of the game as Sam and Smith Rowe continuously combined to devastating effect, cutting Crystal Palace open again and again.

And with the Fulham defense on top of their game, the Palace attack led by Ismaila Sarr and Juan Mateta was completely shut out.

After a series of one-two passes between Sam and Smith Rowe, methodically working their way through the Palace defense, Emile Smith Rowe finally added the finishing touch, scoring a clinical goal to give Fulham the lead.

Fulham led at the 45th plus 2-minute mark, Sam got the assist.

During the second half, Crystal Palace tried to rally but the heat created by Sam and Smith Rowe was too much.

With frustration mounting, one of their players finally made a stupid mistake, collecting a straight red card after a reckless foul to reduce Crystal Palace to 10 players and that was the end of the line for them.

The foul resulted in a freekick for Fulham that didn't result in a goal.

But Sam eventually got in on the fun just 5 minutes later, scoring in the 81st minute of this game before Harry Wilson again as a super sub wrapped up the game in the 83rd minute, dooming Crystal Palace to a resounding defeat at home.

Fulham won 0-3.

Emile Smith Rowe won the man of the match award again.

...

Fulham's next home game against Wolves became the true challenge.

Like usual, both teams started with their strongest lineups and bolstered by their home fans, despite the fact that Fulham got the lead early through an Alex Iwobi goal, Wolves equalized soon after through Matheus Cunha.

Both goals were scored in the 20th and 31st minute respectively.

The first half ended 1-1, but when second half started, Fulham seemed to lose control as a Joe Gomes goal in the 53rd minute exposed them.

In the 53rd minute, they began trailing 1-2 to their opponents.

Fulham fought hard for the equalizer to no avail till the 80th minute. Again, it was Sam getting his name on the scoresheet.

His goal production rate for Fulham was just ridiculous.

His output was unlike an attacking midfielder; it was even higher than that of elite strikers in the premier league.

In the 80th minute, 2-2.

Fulham leveled the game in the 80th minute and started chasing the winner but not done yet, Matheus Cunha pulled the plug again, stunning Fulham in the 87th minute with his second goal of the game.

In the 87th minute, Fulham trailed again 2-3..., it was a crazy game.

But despite the constant trials from their opponents, Fulham simply refused to give up as Sam responded 3 minutes later, scoring an absolute screamer that beat Sa, the Wolves goalkeeper to bring his team level again.

90 minutes, 3-3...

Fulham started chasing the winner again, but then, they were stunned again in the 90th plus 5 minutes by a Goncalo Guedes goal in the 90th plus 5 minutes.

90 plus 5 minutes, 3-4...

"Damn! Incredibly, Fulham are trailing again! Surely, they can't recover from this, can they?"

A minute later, Sam raised a ball above the Wolves defense for Muniz to lash on to, unleashing an instinctive striker's shot to level the game.

"GOALLLLL...!" The commentator was going bonkers. "What a goal! What a time to score it, what a game!"

But the drama was yet to come to an end.

2 minutes after that goal, in the very last minute of play, Fulham won another freekick about 30 yards away from goal.

"Surely he won't think about it".

POW!

"..."

"..."

".....!"

Craven Cottage was briefly stunned, and then... ecstasy.

"GOALLLLL...!" The commentator roared at the top of his voice.

"ZINEDINE SAM...!!!" He screamed.

"Oh freaking Christ! This boy was sent from God himself!"

"What did I just witness?! Holy mother of Gods, what a goal!"

"At the last minute? A freekick? Which other 19-year-old can boast of doing things that this boy do? Forgive me, which other footballer can?"

"Sam is an enigma, a maverick!"

While Sam charged towards the corner flag, removing his jersey and screaming at the top of his lungs, Craven Cottage roared in ecstasy as the fans adored the best player of their team.

After his hattrick and unreal-game winning performance, Sam naturally won another man of the match award.

90 plus 5 minutes, it was 3-4 against Fulham.

Fast-forward to 90 plus 8 minutes, it was 5-4 to Fulham.

The commentator's verdict?

"Damn! What a game!"

Chapter 192 Another hurdle to cross; Tottenham Hotspur

(Premier league matchday 12 results:)

(Leicester City 1-2 Chelsea)

(Date: 23rd November, 2024)

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(Fulham 5-4 Wolves)

(Date: 23rd November, 2024)

...

(Everton 0-0 Brentford)

(Date: 23rd November, 2024)

...

(Arsenal 3-0 Nottm Forest)

(Date: 23rd November, 2024)

...

(Bournemouth 1-2 Brighton)

(Date: 23rd November, 2024)

...

(Aston Villa 2-2 Crystal Palace)

(Date: 23rd November, 2024)

...

(Man City 0-4 Tottenham)

(Date: 23rd November, 2024)

...

(Southampton 2-3 Liverpool)

(Date: 24th November, 2024)

...

(Ipswich Town 1-1 Man United)

(Date: 24th November, 2024)

...

(Newcastle 0-2 West Ham)

(Date: 25th November, 2024)

...

(Updated premier league table standings:)

Fulham GP: 12/ W:10/ D:1/ L:1/ Pts: 32) Liverpool GP: 12/ W:10/ D:1/ L:1/ Pts: 32) Arsenal GP: 12/ W:6/ D:4/ L:2/ Pts: 22) Chelsea GP: 12/ W:6/ D:4/ L:2/ Pts: 22) Brighton GP: 12/ W:6/ D:4/ L:2/ Pts: 22) Man City GP: 12/ W:6/ D:3/ L:3/ Pts: 21) Nottm Forest GP: 12/ W:5/ D:4/ L:3/ Pts: 19) Tottenham GP: 12/ W:6/ D:1/ L:5/ Pts: 19) Aston Villa GP: 12/ W:5/ D:3/ L:5/ Pts: 18) Newcastle GP: 12/ W:5/ D:3/ L:4/ Pts: 18) Brentford GP: 12/ W:5/ D:2/ L:5/ Pts: 17) Bournemouth GP: 12/ W:4/ D:3/ L:5/ Pts: 15) West Ham GP: 12/ W:4/ D:3/ L:5/ Pts: 15) Man United GP: 12/ W:3/ D:4/ L:5/ Pts: 13) Leicester GP: 12/ W:2/ D:4/ L:6/ Pts: 10) Everton GP: 12/ W:2/ D:4/ L:6/ Pts: 10) Ipswich Town GP: 12/ W:1/ D:6/ L:5/ Pts: 9) Crystal Palace GP: 12/ W:1/ D:5/ L:6/ Pts: 8) Wolves GP: 12/ W:1/ D:3/ L:8/ Pts: 6) Southampton GP: 12/ W:1/ D:1/ L:10/ Pts: 4)

After matchday 12 of the premier league, the placements at the top and bottom of the 2024/2025 premier league table solidified.

And by this point, at least, it became clear that Fulham didn't just come on a picnic at the top of the premier league table. It still was not clear if they could maintain their consistency across a 38-matchday season.

But what was clear at this point was that for now, Fulham was staying on top.

After 12 matchdays of the 38-matchday season, incredibly, Fulham retained their spot at the top of the premier league table.

No one saw this coming when the 2024/2025 premier league season just kicked off back in August.

Another big shocker was Manchester United's placement, including Liverpool and Chelsea's resurgence under their new coaches.

In the case of Chelsea, they were not fully firing on all cylinders yet but under Enzo Maresca who replaced Maurizio Pochettino, it was clear that Chelsea now had a game plan that they were playing towards.

There was this sense of inevitability around the team in blue that it was just a matter of time and once they got used to their coach's system, they would form a formidable team.

Compared to Chelsea though, Liverpool was another surprise package of the new premier league season.

Last season when Jurgen Klopp, the legendary Liverpool manager announced that he was stepping down, to lots of Liverpool fans, it felt like the end of the world.

Afterall, Jurgen Klopp was such a world-class coach with a lot of experience that just thinking of a substitute to replace him gave their fans a lot of headache.

Yes, Jurgen Klopp was irreplaceable.

And yes, Arne Slot, the new Liverpool manager was no Jurgen Klopp but he was just that, Arne Slot.

Arne Slot football already mesmerized Liverpool hearts around the globe, and their convincing performances since the beginning of the season already set them up as genuine contenders for the title this season.

They would be the favorites already if not for the surprise package of the new season in the form of Fulham pushing them head-to-head so far.

The 2024/2025 premier league season was already full of many surprises.

Apart from the placements at the top, the highlight of matchday 12 of the English premier league this season was definitely Fulham's incredible comeback win against Wolves.

The whole game, it felt like Fulham was chasing ghosts but then, their talismanic attacking midfielder, Sam awakened at just the right time when his team needed him the most to change the game, just like he had done so many times for Fulham already since signing for the club early in the year.

Sam's performance against Wolves was nothing short of legendary and fans could not stop talking about it, even more so since it took his tally for the season to 14 goals and 9 assists in just 15 games!

Having scored headers, scored freekicks, and a hattrick already, he was having an absolutely terrific season.

Sam's elite performances were synonymous with Fulham's shocking placing in the premier league table.

Another shocking highlight of Matchday 12 was Man City's shocking capitulation to Tottenham at the Etihad.

In the premier league alone, this was Manchester City's 3rd straight loss.

The champions looked nothing like their old selves since they lost Rodri, their ballon d'or winning holding midfielder to injury but still, they were playing far below expectations, extending their losing streak with the Tottenham hammering.

Man City was at its lowest, and it was clear that there were lots of rivals in the premier league who took pleasure in their suffering.

Afterall, one thing people loved more than seeing a hero was seeing a hero fall, and it was the current situation with Manchester City.

While Manchester City was going through a crisis, Fulham thrived and at this moment, they didn't have the time nor the luxury to pay attention to the misery of their rivals.

This was because they had challenges of their own.

After the game against Wolves at home, Fulham faced another big hurdle to cross in the prospect of taking on Tottenham at home.

Playing in the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium for a win was not going to be easy, and this coincided with when the North Londoners just hammered Man City 0-4 at home. Tottenham Hotspur was brimming with confidence, but so was Fulham.

Now, these 2 inform teams would clash on the first day of December.

(Premier league:)

(Tottenham – Fulham)

(Date: 1st December, 2024)

Chapter 193 London clash

What is a derby?

A derby is commonly known as a match between two local clubs that are geographically close to each other, for example teams that are from the same city or from the same part of the country.

Then London derbies, what are they?

London derbies are clashes between football clubs based in London.

Arsenal against Tottenham Hotspur and Millwall against West Ham United are ranked as two of the most ferocious London derbies.

As for Fulham, personally, they contest West London derby rivalries with Brentford, Chelsea, and Queens Park Rangers.

And considering that Fulham is the oldest professional football club, its fans attribute a lot more meaning to derby games.

Fulham may not be the strongest team, and their rivalry with Tottenham may not be the fiercest, but their fans were extremely passionate.

And the rest was done by the media, fanning the flames of 2 in-form teams in the premier league both based in London clashing at the top.

Due to all these reasons and more, the build-up to the game in the Tottenham Hotspur stadium was filled with a lot of banter, boasting, and drama.

And when the D-day eventually came, the atmosphere in the Tottenham Hotspur stadium was electric as the fans gave a hostile welcome to their rivals.

Like expected, both teams started with their strongest lineups.

Forster started in between the posts for Tottenham, and the 4-man defense protecting him comprised of Porro, Dragusin, Davies, and Udogie.

The 3-man midfield comprised of Sarr, Bissouma, and James Maddison, while the 3-man attack started with the trio of Brennan Johnson, Heung Min Son, and Timo Werner, the German attacker.

Tottenham started with their trademark 4-3-3 attacking formation under Ange Postecoglou, their manager.

As for Fulham, Coach Marco Silva approached the game with his usual 4-2-3-1 formation with Raul Jimenez starting again as the striker.

Behind the striker was the trio of Sam, Emile Smith Rowe, and Alex Iwobi, while behind them stood the duo of Berge and Lukic in midfield. The defense contained the regular quadruple of Robinson, Basse, Diop, and Tete.

And of course, Bernd Leno started in between the posts.

It was poised to be an exciting game.

FWEEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded to kick off the game, Tottenham immediately exploded, starting this game on the front foot.

Just like the game Fulham played against Manchester City in the premier league, it was a high-octane game with high energy from the opposing forwards of both sides, the only thing lacking being the goals.

Heung Min Son, the Korean forward had an amazing game in the first half as he continually tortured the Fulham backline to no avail.

There was still no goal to show for his efforts.

On the opposing side, Sam did the same as again, Raul Jimenez did an amazing job upfront, troubling the Tottenham backline also.

With Sam feeding him, Raul Jimenez was having another amazing game.

Throughout the first half, the home fans had their hearts on their throats due to the intense exchange between both teams in this half.

But then, despite the game's intensity, it surprisingly ended 0-0 by halftime.

During halftime, Coach Marco Silva had a little team talk with his players, urging them to up the tempo even more and beat Tottenham at their own game.

This kind of game plan was incredibly exhausting to players but due to the grueling training that his players put themselves through in recent times, it was easier for them now to play such an intense game without gassing out before their opponents.

When second half started, Fulham did just that.

And it was a familiar face that led the press.

Sam flexed his incredible stamina again, running all around the pitch and intercepting balls as he imposed his presence on the pitch.

But then, despite Sam's display, Tottenham were not playing bad either as in front of their home fans, they soon got a reward for their efforts from a stunning Brennan Johnson strike.

After going on a mazy run down the right-hand side of the pitch, the winger turned Robinson inside out before cutting in and curling a shot towards goal.

The shot beat Bernd Leno, going beyond his reach and into the net.

In the 59th minute of the game, the deadlock was finally broken and it was Tottenham who went in the lead.

That goal stunned Fulham but they did not give up, upping their tempo even more. With Sam leading the proceedings still, Fulham's incredible tempo finally caught Tottenham off-guard as Sam set up Cairney, his captain.

Set up one-on-one with the Tottenham goalkeeper, the Fulham veteran did not fumble as he toyed with the goalkeeper, going around him before hitting the ball into an empty net.

Cairney celebrated his goal wildly, running towards the corner flag and sliding on his knees in celebration.

After that goal, the game became even tighter as both sides struggled to create clear-cut chances.

Fulham kept on trying till the 83rd minute when disaster struck.

Cairney got a red card after a reckless tackle on a Tottenham player. The intensity of this game was so high that he couldn't restrain himself.

Again, in another game in the English premier league, Fulham were forced to play with 10 men. It was becoming a trend, a prelude to disaster.

The last time against Aston Villa, Fulham capitulated after going 1-man down as Aston Villa tore them apart. This time though, having learned from their past mistakes, they refused to give up.

Sam stayed fighting, and so Fulham stayed fighting.

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

The mantra was already chanting in his head.

With one man down did he play even more, proving a threat with every touch of the ball that he had, every movement, every pass.

This time, against all odds against a team of Tottenham's caliber, Sam's mamba mentality got him the result that he sought after.

There was little time remaining after Cairney got the red card, but undeterred, Sam did what he did best and it bore fruit.

It happened in the 89th minute.

After another mazy run from deep in his half, Sam was tripped in the Tottenham box after an aggressive tackle.

The player only got a yellow card for it but Fulham got a penalty.

"Come on!" Sam screamed like he just won the lottery.

At this point, he would take anything just to win.

The atmosphere in the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium instantly became hostile as the home fans drowned them in boos, but Sam did not pay attention to them.

Between Raul Jimenez and Muniz, any of the 2 strikers that started in any game was the designated penalty taker.

Today though, having won the penalty and having seen how he was playing, Muniz decided to leave the penalty to Sam. This was the first time that Sam was about to take a penalty in a professional football game.

"Are you sure man?" He looked at Muniz.

The striker patted him on the back. "I trust you, do it".

That was all Sam needed.

Placing the ball down and taking a few steps back, he looked at the goalkeeper who was doing all he could to taunt and get into his head.

Noting his antics, Sam smirked and then he did an angled run towards the ball, then...

BAM!

He whipped a powerful shot towards the top left corner of the net.

The goalkeeper dived but he was never getting there, the power and accuracy behind that shot was just too much.

"GOAL!" The commentator exclaimed.

"A goal and an assist to Sam in another game!"

"The boy wonder has done it again, this time in Tottenham's backyard. Samuel Moses is just incredible!"

Fulham won the game 1-2.

It was a hard-fought victory.

Chapter 194 A generational run of form?

(Premier league matchday 13 results:)

(Brighton 1-1 Southampton)

(Date: 29th November, 2024)

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(Wolves 2-4 Bournemouth)

(Date: 30th November, 2024)

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(Crystal Palace 1-1 Newcastle)

(Date: 30th November, 2024)

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(Nottm Forest 1-0 Ipswich Town)

(Date: 30th November, 2024)

...

(Brentford 4-1 Leicester City)

(Date: 30th November, 2024)

...

(West Ham 2-5 Arsenal)

(Date: 30th November, 2024)

...

(Chelsea 3-0 Aston Villa)

(Date: 1st December, 2024)

...

(Tottenham 1-2 Fulham)

(Date: 1st December, 2024)

...

(Man United 4-0 Everton)

(Date: 1st December, 2024)

...

(Liverpool 2-0 Man City)

(Date: 1st December, 2024)

"Max, once again, here we are with the results from matchday 13 of the English premier league. Which team do you think is the stand-out this time and which player do you think stole the show?"

Hearing this all-familiar question, Max, the premier league pundit for the show threw a knowing look at the host. "Charles, you already know my answer and yet you still ask". He chuckled.

"Come on, it's Samuel Moses again and there's no contender man. The Nigerian Zidane is taking the premier league by storm this season".

Max grinned. "You still remember last time out when Manchester City welcomed Fulham at the Etihad? You still remember our argument, I said Fulham would get a draw and you didn't believe me, fortune favored me, the brave at the end". He chuckled. "In that game, Sam was terrific".

"Today again, it was all Sam man. The boy is just too good".

"An assist and a goal, a penalty? I didn't even know that Sam had that in his repertoire, the boy is just too good".

"He has no weaknesses in his game".

"He's playing so good it's become increasingly difficult to believe that he's just 19 and this is just his second season in professional football".

"And Charles, come on, this is just his first full season in the premier league".

"And from what I read, that penalty against Tottenham is the first in his full career, both in Enyimba in the NPFL and now in Fulham, of course not counting penalty shootouts".

"This is his first penalty kick and did you see that technique?"

"Cooly sending the ball into the top corner despite the goalkeeper diving the right way, man, this boy got balls of steel. He reminds me a bit of Chelsea's Cole Palmer; I'd even argue that he's better".

"I think they should be calling him cold Samuel already, the boy's game is cold, nerves of steel".

"I mean, that's now 15 goals and 11 assists in just 16 games this season, at 19! Charles, do you know what that means?!"

"That's world-class numbers already!"

"In case any other person was still doubting Sam's talent, well, there it is for you. Sam is the real deal, and mark my words, my boy is here to stay".

"With that performance, Fulham retains its spot at the top of the English premier league going into matchday 14. This is unprecedented".

"Take it from me Charles, some may call me foolish but I'm vouching for Fulham now. Fulham to win the premier league!"

Hearing such enthusiasm from the pundit, Charles, the host could only chuckle. He did not have a valid argument to refute him.

It was not just this tv show that broadcasted after matchday 13 of the premier league, and of them all, very few did not focus their show on the young Nigerian midfielder currently plying his trade for Fulham FC.

Others also focused on the blockbuster encounter between Liverpool and Man City. Liverpool's thrashing of the champions was another indicator of the current low point of the reigning premier league champions.

Manchester City were in a period of crisis.

Apart from that, all the other attention was on Sam.

The game against Tottenham was in no way easy for Sam and Fulham, but having built a reputation for showing up in the big moments already, again, he simply did it for his club.

He was already a cult hero in Fulham.

Drawing against Manchester City at the Etihad in the premier league was one thing, after all it was worth only 1 point. But winning against Tottenham in away ground was another thing entirely, it gave Fulham 3 important points!

At the end of the game, returning to Fulham, an ecstatic Coach Marco Silva went all out as he organized a mini party for his players that night.

They didn't hold back as they celebrated the win boisterously.

During the celebrations, Cairney was stunned due to all that was happening. This veteran Fulham player has been in the club for years already, but there were only few times that all the players gathered to celebrate like this.

Afterall, this was not a team that really won trophies.

And that was the crazy fact about it, this was not a trophy celebration, it was a win celebration. Compared to the big clubs, it seemed a bit low but Cairney would take it any time of the day, this was because this doesn't happen before.

This celebration organized by the coach showed the current solidarity in this team, there was unity, and they were enjoying their football.

Cairney stared at his teammates, emotions clouding his mind. 'I love this team man; I love all these guys'.

...

After the Tottenham game, getting home, Sam was surprised to see a familiar yet unfamiliar contact displaying on his phone as it rang.

(Incoming call from Best Mom...)

Badump! Badump!

Sam's heart skipped a beat. 'When last did I call mom for a video call?'

'But wait, when last did she call me too?'

With trepidation, Sam picked up the call only to hear a very calm voice reverberating from the other end that made him shudder even more.

"My son, how are you doing?"

"I watched your game today again against Tottenham..."

She continued but Sam did not pay attention to the other things his mom was saying, this was because he was horrified. 'She actually said Tottenham correctly!'

'F\*ck! I'm in trouble!'

'Mom is really angry this time!'

"Mom, I can explain!"

Mrs. Moses chuckled a bit, and unlike Sam thought, she did not roar at him in anger. She simply said. "Kayla has stolen my boy".

After that, she cut the call.

"..."

Sam was left speechless.

Chapter 195 Matchday 14

Mrs. Moses was just having one of her rants.

Since the last time when Sam and his girlfriend stayed in Nigeria, which coincided with Sam's professional debut for the Nigerian national football team, this Nigerian mother felt her son drifting away from her.

As a mother though, who was once just a wife, and before that a girlfriend too, she understood exactly what was happening.

Sam was simply becoming mature after getting intimate with a woman.

The hierarchy of loved ones in his heart already underwent a bit of a change. She and her husband still ranked high in Sam's heart but it was clear that now, at this early stage of their relationship, Kayla now took the lead.

This mother understood didn't mean that she took it kindly though, after all, emotions don't always follow logic.

She loved Kayla after spending time with her, she was happy that her son met a girl like him, but at the same time she could not help but feel a bit salty.

Who wouldn't feel salty? To have their precious son's attention stolen so suddenly, she was struggling to cope with it emotionally.

Understanding his mother though, Sam knew exactly how to appease her. Immediately after she cut the call, he called back but she didn't pick up his call.

Sam didn't give up though, he kept on calling, giving her 5 missed calls till she finally picked the 6th time. "You finally remember that you have a mother?"

Sam chuckled. "Come on mom, you know you're still number 1 in my heart".

"Hehe, mommy mommy, the only wife of Moses, the most beautiful mother in the whole universe, the apple of Moses' eye, the one who brought Sam into the world, world's best mom!"

Well, that was the charmer.

Mrs. Moses tried to stay difficult and indifferent but she simply couldn't, Sam's sweet words already won her back completely.

"This boy!" She gritted her teeth and cursed through the video call. "Since when did you become such a sweet talker?"

Sam chuckled, then he laid down on his bed, sighing. "Winning in your career builds your confidence," he looked at his mother. "A lot".

"Mom, this season, seeing what I'm doing in the premier league, it's affected me so much psychologically but I'm dealing with it".

His eyes shimmered with an unknown light. "I feel much more mature than I was last year, and with it comes confidence".

He looked at his mom and chuckled again. "I've always been a sweet talker; I just never had the courage to express it till now".

Mrs. Moses looked at her son, suddenly feeling proud. "No wonder you were able to charm a sweet girl like Kayla, you remind me of your dad back in the day".

Hearing that, Sam's ears stood like antennas. "Back in the day?"

He laughed. "Come on, come on, mom, tell me! I want to hear about back in the days! Now that I think about it, you've never told me how the both of you met, tell me, tell me!"

"Calm down..."

"You must tell me!" Sam was adamant. "Tell me the words Dad used to woo you, and when you decided that he will be your husband".

Hearing these words from her son, for the first time in 19 years, Sam saw his mom blush.

"...!" He was shocked.

He never knew that his hard mom was capable of blushing. 'Damn!'

In the end though, a slightly flustered Mrs. Moses postponed the reveal. "Ok, I promise to tell you after your next game if you remember to call me".

Sam's eyes lit up. "Deal?"

Mrs. Moses looked at her son, confused. "Huh?"

Sam palmed his face, muffling a laugh. "Come on mom, you're disgracing me". He laughed aloud. "When someone ask you deal? You say deal to confirm it".

"Hmph!" She harrumphed. "That's such a childish sentiment".

"So deal?"

She looked away from the camera haughtily, but in the end, she nodded, confirming the deal as Sam pumped a fist in celebration.

Only after this did they end the call in a harmonious atmosphere.

...

The next day, while the rave of Fulham's victory over Tottenham continued in the city of Fulham, Sam already resumed his daily grind alongside his friend.

He and Emile Smith Rowe jogged through the streets of Fulham.

A few dozen minutes later...

~----~

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

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

~----~

It was just a first of many from Sam in his preparations to Fulham's next engagement that would also be in the premier league.

Across the next few days, alongside his friend in Emile Smith Rowe, they went about their days, jogging together, working out together, and reporting to training the earliest for team training sessions.

In Craven Cottage, Sam now had a partner in notoriety, Emile Smith Rowe who already built a reputation for himself for his punctuality to training.

Actually, the reputation was because he was involved in a challenge with Sam to see who would report to training earliest after their early morning training.

Mixed in with his daily life heavily filled with football and training were Sam's sessions with his girlfriend, Kayla that he never failed to look forward to.

Talking with Kayla was one of his best activities to kill time these days.

When Sam was exhausted from training, he calls Kayla. When he felt a shift in his mood emotionally, he calls Kayla. When he felt bored, he calls Kayla and Kayla was always available to receive his call.

Sometimes, she even sneaks out of lecture halls at her university just to have some private time and speak with him.

It was weird, Sam felt like a teenager in love.

Sam was unused to the feeling, but all he knew was that the joy he felt from interacting with Kayla aided his increased enthusiasm for football in recent weeks.

Just thinking of Kayla filled him with more energy to work and train.

And like this, the D-day soon came for matchday 14 of the English premier league for the 2024/2025 season.

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 14:)

(Ipswich Town 0-1 Crystal Palace)

(Date: 3rd December, 2024)

...

(Leicester City 3-1 West Ham)

(Date: 3rd December, 2024)

...

(Southampton 1-5 Chelsea)

(Date: 4th December, 2024)

...

(Man City 3-0 Nottm Forest)

(Date: 4th December, 2024)

...

(Newcastle 3-3 Liverpool)

(Date: 4th December, 2024)

...

(Everton 4-0 Wolves)

(Date: 4th December, 2024)

...

(Arsenal 2-0 Man United)

(Date: 4th December, 2024)

...

(Aston Villa 3-1 Brentford)

(Date: 4th December, 2024)

...

(Fulham – Brighton)

(Date: 5th December, 2024)

...

(Bournemouth – Tottenham)

(Date: 5th December, 2024)

With most games of the matchday already played, Fulham finally had their go.

In a cool Thursday evening in Fulham, they clashed against Brighton.

Chapter 196 Vintage Fulham

5th December, 2024...

The atmosphere in Craven Cottage was electric.

Afterall, Fulham's main rival of the new premier league season, Liverpool challenging at the top of the table already met a roadblock in the form of Newcastle.

With Liverpool dropping points against Newcastle United, Fulham got an opportunity to go 2 points clear at the top of the premier league table.

In previous years and seasons, going clear at the top of the premier league table, these were phrases and terms that sounded alien to Fulham fans but fast forward to now, and they still couldn't believe that they were using these terms to now describe their club.

To Fulham fans, the 2024/2025 premier league season felt like a season of fantasy football, sometimes they still couldn't believe how good their team was playing against elite opposition.

This was why this evening, the atmosphere in Craven Cottage was at a fever pitch, drowning the tiny voice of the away supporters.

The home supporters were determined to go to war with their players and support them with their loud noise unrelenting from the very beginning this game. The loud noise made it seem like a derby game.

Without a doubt, the Brighton players felt a bit intimidated.

Last season, Brighton, Aston Villa, and Newcastle United were mid-table teams of the English premier league that truly proved their credentials as top challengers, dethroning other teams ahead of them and climbing high through the premier league table rankings.

Aston Villa even managed to sneak into the top 4 spot.

This season though, these 3 premier league clubs were finding it increasingly harder to maintain their challenge for a top 4 spot in the table.

And now, Brighton had to take on the high-flying Fulham away from home.

Besides, they no longer had their revolutionary coach in Roberto De Zerbi since the Italian made the switch to France. This reduced their chances even more.

Before the game even started in Craven Cottage, Fulham already won the psychological battle.

Like expected, both teams started with their strongest starting XI.

Like usual, it was Bernd Leno starting in between the posts and the defensive quadruple of Castagne, Diop, Calvin Bassey, and Robinson stood in front of him. The midfield duo comprised of Alex Iwobi and Berge.

Ahead of them, the 4-man attack comprised of Muniz leading the line as the striker, while supporting behind him were the trio of Emile Smith Rowe, Sam, and Reiss Nelson.

It was a strong team but the Brighton team could not be scoffed at either.

With the likes of Joao Pedro, Kaoru Mitoma, Estupinian, Adingra, and Lewis Dunk all starting in a 3-4-2-1 formation, this was a fearsome Brighton side.

FWEEEE!

Once the referee's whistle sounded to kickstart play though, not all the Brighton players showed up as the psychological inferiority made them play well below their normal standards at the beginning phase of this game.

While Brighton fumbled, Fulham was at its imperious best.

Just 4 minutes into this game, having made a late run from deep in his half, Alex Iwobi controlled a pass from Emile Smith Rowe, set himself up before unleashing a grounded shot into the bottom left corner.

His shot beat the goalkeeper.

"GOALLLL...!" An electric Craven Cottage exploded.

The fans in white, black, and red were in a world of ecstasy.

Alex Iwobi pumped a fist in celebration even as his teammates swarmed him, celebrating with him.

That early goal was the catalyst to a lot of Brighton misery this game.

After that goal, Brighton withered like the leaf of a century-old tree, letting Fulham completely dictate and dominate this game.

The whole Fulham forward line was having an amazing game, riding the energy being made by the loud home fans as they rewarded the fans' passion with amazingly sweet football.

For the rest of the first half, having withered already, Brighton mostly defended, weathering wave after wave of furious Fulham attacks.

Fulham were creating a lot of chances, and at the center of the chance creations was a familiar name, Samuel Moses.

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

The Same chants broke out again around Craven Cottage.

Sam was having an amazing game, feeling his mojo as he dictated the tempo, slowing the game down or accelerating it as the situation demanded to help his team. He played like a midfield maestro today, a veteran controller.

In the end, despite the numerous chances that Fulham got, a dogged defensive masterclass from Brighton for the rest of the first half managed to keep them at bay.

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

During halftime, Coach Marco Silva's speech was very short as he simply told his players to go out there and enjoy their football.

When second half started, the Fulham players did just that.

They continued their domination, running Brighton ragged till a moment of magic stunned Fulham hearts across this massive stadium in the 56th minute of the game. It was completely unexpected, no one saw it coming.

Against the run of play, in the 56th minute of the game, Quomah Baleba, the Brighton midfielder got on the end of a cross inside the Fulham 18-yard box.

No one saw it coming as this midfielder volleyed the ball into the net, beating Bernd Leno at his near post.

"...!" Craven Cottage was silenced as the midfielder celebrated passionately.

His overzealous celebration riled up the Fulham fans, and then...

"BOOOOO...!!!"

Loud boos drowned out the passionate celebration of the Brighton player, the home fans were incensed and their anger soon seeped into their players after the game restarted.

As the game continued, the whole Fulham team improved their gameplay even more, increasing the domination over Brighton.

They tortured the away team for long stretches of this game.

Brighton defended valiantly but, in the end, the pressure was too much as it got to the Brighton players. The 3rd goal of this game was an own goal, and it came from O'Riley as this player attempting to clear the ball, only ended up poking it inside his net.

It was an unfortunate goal for Brighton but heaven for Fulham!

"GOALLL...!!!"

While O'Riley reacted in dejection, Craven Cottage exploded again, roaring in loud cheers as their team went ahead again.

That goal came in the 79th minute of this game.

After almost 80 minutes of holding the in-form team, Brighton finally fumbled and Fulham was not happy with just that.

8 minutes later, in the 87th minute of this game, Alex Iwobi added the final nail to the coffin as he latched on to a free-floating ball from a corner, heading it past the Brighton goalkeeper and into the net.

87 minutes, 3-1 to Fulham.

Immediately after the goal, Coach Marco Silva subbed Sam out of the game to rest his star player.

Sam never had to invoke his mamba spirit to win this game, Fulham dominated throughout and he simply got to enjoy himself.

Despite the fact Sam was out, the game was already over, there was nothing Brighton could do. In Sam's absence, his teammates saw the victory out.

And with it, another impressive victory for the season was added to Fulham's memorabilia for the 2024/2025 season. They were truly high-flying.

Having scored 2 goals and played a big role in the own goal by Brighton, Alex Iwobi managed to scoop home the man of the match award for this game.

With the victory, Fulham moved 2 points clear at the top of the premier league table.

Chapter 197 The pressure and thrill of being at the top, and staying at the top

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 14:)

(Fulham 3-1 Brighton)

(Date: 5th December, 2024)

...

(Bournemouth 1-0 Tottenham)

(Date: 5th December, 2024)

...

(Updated premier league table standings:)

(1. Fulham GP: 14/ W:12/ D:1/ L:1/ Pts: 38)

(2. Liverpool GP: 14/ W:11/ D:2/ L:1/ Pts: 36)

(3. Arsenal GP: 14/ W:8/ D:4/ L:2/ Pts: 28)

(4. Chelsea GP: 14/ W:8/ D:4/ L:2/ Pts: 28)

(5. Man City GP: 14/ W:7/ D:3/ L:4/ Pts: 24)

(6. Brighton GP: 14/ W:6/ D:5/ L:3/ Pts: 23)

(7. Nottm Forest GP: 14/ W:6/ D:4/ L:4/ Pts: 22)

(8. Aston Villa GP: 14/ W:6/ D:3/ L:6/ Pts: 21)

(9. Bournemouth GP: 14/ W:6/ D:3/ L:5/ Pts: 21)

(10. Brentford GP: 14/ W:6/ D:2/ L:6/ Pts: 20)

(11. Newcastle GP: 14/ W:5/ D:5/ L:4/ Pts: 20)

(12. Tottenham GP: 14/ W:6/ D:1/ L:7/ Pts: 19)

(13. Man United GP: 14/ W:4/ D:4/ L:6/ Pts: 16)

(14. West Ham GP: 14/ W:4/ D:3/ L:7/ Pts: 15)

(15. Leicester GP: 14/ W:3/ D:4/ L:7/ Pts: 13)

(16. Everton GP: 14/ W:3/ D:4/ L:7/ Pts: 13)

(17. Crystal Palace GP: 14/ W:2/ D:6/ L:6/ Pts: 12)

(18. Ipswich Town GP: 14/ W:1/ D:6/ L:7/ Pts: 9)

(19. Wolves GP: 14/ W:1/ D:3/ L:10/ Pts: 6)

(20. Southampton GP: 14/ W:1/ D:1/ L:10/ Pts: 4)

After matchday 14 of the English premier league in the 2024/2025 season, this was how the premier league table looked like.

14 games in, there were still mind-blowing placements that regular fans of the premier league simply could not fathom.

The shocking one was still the fact that 14 points in, Fulham was still leading at the top of the premier league table and not just that, they were now 2 points clear of Liverpool who was their closest challenger.

Another shocking fact was the fact that after 14 games, Man City, the reigning premier league champions were now 14 points off the top of the table.

At the beginning of the season, no one saw this coming.

Was Manchester City out of the premier league title race?

What is wrong with the champion team?

Was Rodri really that good that without them, the champions are now playing like a mid-table team?

Questions like this kept on flying around as different speculations boiled, even those of sack revolved around Pep Guardiola and his team.

Another news in the new season was Chelsea FC. After a few seasons of some pretty damaging lows, the pride of London seemed to have found their mojo again as they were now in the top four spot in the premier league table.

And these days, they were truly hard to beat.

Led by the King, Cole Palmer, and with help from capable Generals in the form of Nicolas Jackson, Enzo Fernandez, Moises Caicedo and the likes, Chelsea was playing like a team that may go on and challenge for the title.

Despite the damaging defeat to the high-flying team, Fulham in the last game, Brighton were still 6th position in the premier league table.

Another shock was Tottenham. Last season, after 6 matchdays of flawless football from the North London club, Tottenham led the premier league table at the top for some time as their fans raved that they would win the title.

Come season end, of course they didn't win but still, Tottenham was touted as a powerhouse under the offensive tutelage of Ange Postecoglou.

These days though, you could hardly see a compliment come out of the mouth of Tottenham fans regarding their coach, only offensive comments and talk of sack and Ange Postecoglou out these days.

The situation around the Tottenham coach perfectly depicted the ever-changing nature of football.

Today, you could be on top of the world with millions of fans supporting you around the world and tomorrow, after a few bad performances, be rest assured that all of them would turn on you.

This was the pressure on elite footballers plying their trade in the top 5 European leagues to continue performing.

Apart from Fulham, the greatest shock and reality check to a certain fanbase in this new premier league season had to be that of Manchester United.

After 14 matchdays of the new premier league season, Manchester United were trailing at 13th position with 19 points gotten in 14 games.

And currently, the once biggest club in England was now going through a period of transition as after another furious protest by their fans, Erik Ten Haag was finally sacked from his position as the head coach of the English club.

Ruud Van Nistelrooy, a Manchester United legend who served under Erik Ten Haag served as the interim coach for a while and now, Manchester United finally employed a new head coach in Ruben Amorim.

After the exploits that this coach had with his team, Sporting CP in Portugal, leading them on a generational run, he was finally introduced to the rigor of the English premier league to test his mettle.

The Manchester United fans could only be hopeful.

...

After the game, Sam met up with Emile Smith Rowe as they visited a familiar African food restaurant where they ate and conversed.

They talked about a lot of things, mostly about football, and then they talked about the pressure of being the team at the top of the premier league table.

A title race, especially in a team as prominent and competitive as the English premier league was no easy endeavor.

Sam may not show it, but he felt the pressure, the need to keep on giving his best and perform in every single game.

In today's game against Brighton, he played an amazing game still but he finally met one of those games where he could not get his name on the scoresheet neither did he register an assist.

Despite this though, Fulham didn't fumble as Alex Iwobi stepped up on his absence, delivering the goods.

'I'm glad it happened like this'. Sam thought, smiling.

'I can't always perform at my best every time, knowing that I have teammates who got my back in difficult times is reassuring'.

'It relieves the pressure a bit, so I can reset and refocus'. His eyes gleamed.

Sam set his sights on the future, on maintaining his team's momentous run.

Chapter 198 Lung capacity- engine grade

7th December, 2024, on a Saturday...

2 youthful men energetically jogged through the streets of Fulham, the long legs of the black one easily eating yards of space with every step that he took.

Despite his long strides, the springy steps of the energetic young Englishman beside him enabled him to keep up as they jogged.

Sweat dripped down their faces, giving more credibility to their efforts.

Despite the fact that they were currently jogging through half of Fulham, the black one of the 2 youthful men had a big smile on his face as not breathless yet, with his headset covering his ears, he engaged in a conversation.

"What? He asked if you were single?" Sam chuckled. "Well, what was your reply? Hope you gave him the right answer".

"You bet I did".

"Tell me, tell me exactly how you said it". He chuckled again.

There was brief silence from the other side of the phone, then mischievously, the feminine voice continued. "I'm sorry Josh, I have a lovely boyfriend so I'll have to decline, I can't give you my number for no reason".

Sam burst out laughing on hearing that.

Despite his loud laughter, his lungs were not overstressed as effortlessly, he kept on jogging with an even look of joy on his face.

Beside him, Emile Smith Rowe could not help but pay attention to his friend. Seeing the joy on Sam's face as he jogged and engaged in a conversation with who he knew, Smith could not help but sigh. "Lovers". He muttered, shaking his head.

In recent days, while they engaged in their daily ritual as Sam liked to call it, jogging through the streets of Fulham, this became Sam's new side hobby.

While jogging, he was almost always on the call with Kayla, his girlfriend.

At first, it was weird but now, Smith had no choice but to be used to it.

But this was not what Emile Smith Rowe really paid attention to though.

As they jogged, this Englishman could not help but glance at his friend again. 'What luck or genes does he have to have such an engine of a lung?'

'Is this how Chelsea players then used to feel around N'golo Kante?'

It was already more than a month since he became close friends with Sam and they started doing their daily ritual together, but Emile Smith Rowe never failed to be amazed at the lung capacity of his friend and colleague.

Sam had the lung capacity of a literal beast.

Smith already felt like this for a long time but recently, when Sam started mixing talking with Kayla into his daily ritual, he was even more amazed. 'He's still talking flawlessly despite such a long time?'

'Come on man!' Smith Rowe coughed blood; he felt like crying.

'Damn, I wish I was your brother and I inherited the same genes as you!'

Knowing that this was only wishful thinking though, Smith Rowe had no choice but to focus on controlling his breathing, trying his best to keep up with the young Nigerian while Sam continued like he was just taking a walk around the park.

Sam's effortless outlook while jogging was a result of his sheer stamina and also a result of consistency.

Sam was forced into his daily ritual of jogging and working out every day over a year ago when he first got his system at the eve of the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar. With time though, he learned to love the daily ritual.

At first, jogging for so many kilometers felt like a big chore to him as he always ended up breathless and exhausted.

The use of the physical conditioning elixir was what helped him.

But these days, after doing it for over a year, his body already adapted to the stress so much that he completed all the quests in his daily system quest without breaking much of a sweat.

These days, it really felt like a walk in the park.

This convenience gave Sam the luxury of not consuming all his physical conditioning elixirs immediately, storing some for future purposes.

These days, Sam kept them for grueling matches when exhaustion starts seeping in, reducing the level of all the players. While other players have no choice but to succumb to exhaustion, with a physical conditioning elixir, Sam had the choice of actually recovering mid-game.

No other professional football player in the world not called Samuel Moses was capable of this, not even the legendary Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi.

He also used them for extra training sessions that he organized for himself and his friend. With these extra training sessions, Sam could dedicate his time towards mastering specific aspects of his game.

In recent weeks, his main focus was on shooting. He focused on improving his penalty kick and freekick taking abilities.

By the end of his daily system quest that morning, Sam's effort for weeks was finally rewarded as his system lit up with a new notification.

~-----~

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

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

...

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

[You have unlocked basic mastery level of the football skill: Basic penalty technique!]

[You have unlocked basic mastery level of the football skill: Basic freekick technique!]

~-----~

For some time now, Sam had been expecting this breakthrough having been paying attention to his progress, but he never expected that the eventual breakthrough would come outside of training, during his jogging sessions instead.

'Hehe, it's a welcome breakthrough anytime, any day'. He grinned.

With the twin breakthroughs, his owned football skill tab in his system finally changed, now looking like this.

~----~

[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, basic penalty technique, basic freekick technique]

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

[Advanced mastery level: Spatial awareness]

[Legendary Inheritance: Spatial Awareness]

[Legendary Inheritance: Elastico]

...

The changes didn't stop at that either as after a while of staying stagnant, with both his penalty taking and freekick taking technique suddenly improving, his shooting attribute finally increased again by a figure of +1.

His attributes now looked like this.

...

Player Attributes:

\*Pace: 81

\*Shot: 80

\*Pass: 80

\*Dribbling: 78

\*Defending: 38

\*Physicality: 76

\*Stamina: 84

Overall Rating: 82

~----~

Noting these changes, Sam felt like he was just injected by a shot of adrenaline as he felt his motivation levels for Fulham's next game rise even higher.

He could not wait to try his improved skills on the football pitch.

With that, he and his friend finally separated, going their separate ways in preparation for today's training session.

As professional football players playing for a professional club in England, there was little time of rest for them since training can take place any day of the week, including Saturdays and Sundays.

They only had rests on Sundays if the timeline for their next game was still far away, and the only other source of rest was if their coach felt generous and gave it as a bonanza to reward his players.

...

Fulham's next game in the premier league was going to be another season-deciding game since they would be taking on last season's 1st runner up, Arsenal in a top of the table clash.

The whole world watched; they could not wait to see how they would perform against another heavyweight of the modern premier league.

Personally for the Fulham players, the buildup to the game was grueling as expected as they gave their all in preparation for the clash against Arsenal.

Time moved fast and in no time, D-day was here.

It was 8th December, 2024, a Sunday...

Chapter 199 Another season decider- against Arsenal

Another premier league matchday, another set of exciting heavyweight clashes in the most watched football league in the world.

(Premier league:)

(Matchday 15:)

(Everton – Liverpool)

(Date: Postponed- Time TBD)

...

(Brentford 4-2 Newcastle)

(Date: 7th December, 2024)

...

(Aston Villa 1-0 Southampton)

(Date: 7th December, 2024)

...

(Crystal Palace 2-2 Man City)

(Date: 7th December, 2024)

...

(Man United 2-3 Nottm Forest)

(Date: 7th December, 2024)

...

(Fulham – Arsenal)

(Date: 8th December, 2024)

...

(Leicester City – Brighton)

(Date: 8th December, 2024)

...

(Ipswich Town – Bournemouth)

(Date: 8th December, 2024)

...

(Tottenham – Chelsea)

(Date: 8th December, 2024)

...

(West Ham – Wolves)

(Date: 9th December, 2024)

With the Everton vs Liverpool clash postponed, 4 of the 10 exciting clashes of matchday 15 of the English premier league were already played but the Fulham players didn't pay attention to that yet as they focused on their own challenge.

Arsenal was not going to be an easy stumbling block to climb.

At some point in the new season, Arsenal seemed to lose their title-pushing momentum after losing their captain, Martin Odegaard to injury. But now, with their captain's return, Arsenal seemed to be back to their usual imperious form.

Coach Marco Silva was wary about the threat of their opponents but not deviating from his way, this coach set up his team in its normal balanced formation.

Besides, it was a home game, Fulham had no intention of playing cowardly.

Just like expected, both teams started with their strongest starting XI.

For Fulham, the regular, Bernd Leno started in between the posts while directly in front of him was the quadruple of Tete, Diop, Basse and Robinson. Ahead of them was the midfield duo of Berge and Lukic.

Ahead of the midfielders was the attacking triumvirate of Alex Iwobi, Emile Smith Rowe, and Sam. Today, Raul Jimenez started as the striker.

Compared to them though, the Arsenal team lineup looked far more imposing like an all-star gathering of heavyweights.

Starting in their typical 4-3-3 formation, their 3-man attack comprised of Leandro Trossard on the left, Kai Havertz in the middle, and Bukayo Saka mounting his post on the right side of the pitch.

Their midfield trio comprised of Declan Rice, Jorginho, and Martin Odegaard, while their 4-man defense was formed by Jurrien Timber, Kiwior, William Saliba, and Thomas Partey in right back, covering for the injured starting right back for Arsenal.

Naturally, the Spaniard, David Raya started in between the posts.

That Sunday evening, the build-up to this game was already crazy as the Fulham home supporters created an electric atmosphere to support their team.

Even more than the Brighton game, their voice was loud, rising through the roof of Craven Cottage.

It truly felt like a derby game.

And when the referee's whistle eventually sounded, it was the signal to start the tug of war between 2 in-form teams.

FWEEEE!

Arsenal started kick-off and within just a few minutes, they managed to steal authority over this game from Fulham despite the loud noise being made by their fans, signs of a great team with an elite mentality.

Arsenal dominated early, showing signs of getting an early lead but against the run of play in the early proceedings, the home side stunned Arsenal.

And for the umpteenth time this season, it was all Sam-orchestrated.

Whoosh!

Having noticed a weakness in the Arsenal midfield already, Sam slid in as soon as Jorginho got the ball, winning back possession with a perfect sliding tackle.

Before the Italian could recover, he raised his head, spotting Jimenez' run in-behind immediately, then...

Bam!

Sam did not hesitate, hitting the ball up and high as it rose above the imperious Arsenal defense led by William Saliba.

Raul Jimenez just managed to beat the imperious French defender for pace, squirming past Kiwior after before hitting the ball on a first-time volley.

BAM!

One hit, one goal..., the net rippled!

It was Raul Jimenez's first touch of the game and it resulted in a goal.

"GOALLL...!!!" Craven Cottage exploded.

"Damn! What a perfect pass!" The commentator raved.

"That sliding tackle to steal the ball was near perfect, and then that lobbed pass? That was just world-class from Sam, absolute world-class!"

"And then the finish? It was all vintage Fulham in display!"

"Sam, what a prodigy we're bearing witness to!"

While the commentator raved, Raul Jimenez charged towards the corner flag, sliding on his knees in celebration as he pumped his fists excitedly, passionately taking in the adoration of the home fans.

But after standing up, he pointed towards one of his teammates immediately, Sam, attributing the glory of this goal towards him.

And finally getting over their initial excitement caused by the goal, the home fans responded immediately, starting a familiar chant.

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

The chants exploded all across this stadium, a prelude to another Sam masterclass in Craven Cottage.

FWEEEE!

When the game restarted, Arsenal rallied behind their star attacking players, going on deadly attacking raids at the Fulham box.

But Fulham didn't stay idle either.

With Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard orchestrating the threat for Arsenal, Sam and Emile Smith Rowe stayed at the heart of everything Fulham.

These 2 friends entered samba mode on the pitch, passing and showcasing tiki-taka football, then the silky dribbles..., both of them were in imperious form.

Together, they tortured the Arsenal defense time and time again, making this game an even and exciting end-to-end encounter.

All the fans in this stadium, both the home and away fans had their hearts in their throats throughout the first half as both teams kept on having their chances.

Despite trying their best, Arsenal simply could not break the rugged and compact Fulham defensive set-up in the first half as stunning the world of football again, Fulham actually went to half-time leading 1-0 against Arsenal!

The game was yet to come to an end, but the world of football was already experiencing upheavals in social media as fans raved about Fulham's form.

During half-time, Coach Marco Silva only had a little team talk with his players, urging them to do what they do best in the second half against Arsenal.

And finally, the 11 players of both sides made their way to the pitch again.

The atmosphere in Craven Cottage was still fever-pitch.

Chapter 200 The S factor; Sam and Smith

The second half started.

The S factor, what is it?

In this sense, the S factor was different from the X factor. In recent weeks, Fulham fans coined a term to describe the partnership between their 2 maverick midfielders and hence the term, the S factor.

It was a term describing the deadly duo of Sam and Smith.

Since the term was first coined, it was already becoming extremely popular not just among Fulham fans but across the English premier league.

There was hardly any premier league fan that had not heard of the S factor partnership this season, the Sam and Smith factor.

It was a term now reminiscing of legendary partnerships in football, like the legendary Bayern Munich Robbery duo of Arjen Roben and Franck Ribery, or even the legendary MSN, the unstoppable Messi, Suarez, and Neymar triumvate.

It was clear to any sane football fan that the S factor was yet to reach the levels of any of the 2 aforementioned legendary partnerships in football but still, the S factor partnership had similar impact for Fulham as these legendary partnerships had for their clubs in the past.

The duo of Sam and Smith was just unstoppable.

After the start of the second half, from an even game that it was in the first half, the Fulham players finally took control in the second in front of their home fans, stealing all initiative from a determined Arsenal team.

In a clash between 2 determined individuals, one conviction and drive always have to give way in the end and it was what happened between these 2 in-form teams.

Arsenal's conviction gave way to Fulham's as the West London club dominated.

Sam and Smith used their combination plays to tear the Arsenal defense down time and time again, the only reason why the 2nd goal for Fulham was yet to materialize was chiefly due to a single player, a Frenchman, William Saliba.

While the rest of the Arsenal defense struggled to keep up with the electric duo, only William Saliba continued playing at an elite level.

Singlehandedly, the imperious French defender kept his team in the game but not satisfied with just defending, in the 52nd minute of this game, this imperious defender decided to send a dagger straight through Fulham fans across the world.

In the 52nd minute of the game, against the run of play, Arsenal finally equalized and it was from an unlikely player, William Saliba himself.

This season, Arsenal have been dangerous while playing from the corner, evident by their 2 goals from corner kicks with which they destroyed Manchester United just a few weeks earlier.

Today again, this London club struck again from a corner kick as after a scramble in the 18-yard box, the ball landed perfectly for William Saliba to poke in from close range.

"GOALLLLL...!" The mostly silenced away stand for most of this game erupted at this moment, screaming all their frustrations in this first half away as they jubilated.

William Saliba didn't miss the passion of the traveling Arsenal supporters though as dodging his teammates, he faced the fans before raising his arms to rile up the Fulham supporters while bolstering the morale of the Arsenal fans.

"Come on!" The imposing Frenchman screamed.

It was no news in the premier league that William Saliba had a voice that didn't fit his imposing frame and dominating playstyle, but still, at this moment, this roar just after his goal added an extra flavor of spice and chill to this game.

The stakes were raised even higher!

FWEEEEEE!

When the referee's whistle sounded again to restart play, Arsenal tried to ride that momentum and continue in search of the 2nd goal to win this game but they could only keep it up for a few minutes.

In just a few minutes, the S factor struck again.

Sam did the dirty work, winning back the ball and laying it to Emile Smith Rowe and once the Englishman managed to slow the game's tempo down a bit, he passed back to Sam as both players resumed their unstoppable S factor partnership.

With them passing around, Fulham regained contro.

Instantly, all the Arsenal momentum dropped back to square zero.

Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard kept on disturbing, knocking on Fulham's door but their London rivals never let up, defending valiantly.

With the defense being imperious this game, they gave Sam and Emile Smith Rowe the perfect platform to thrive upfront and dish the Arsenal defense misery.

As the game wore on, the partnership only became deadlier.

In the 68th minute of this game, Fulham finally got their closest chance as after receiving a pass from Emile Smith Rowe, Sam skipped past an opposition player, shuffling the ball to his weaker left foot before taking a shot.

POW!

It was a powerful shot but Fulham fans around Craven Cottage gasped, left to rue their luck as they watched the ball beat David Raya only to hit and ricochet off the crossbar back into play.

"Damn! The goalkeeper has the post to thank for that!"

"What a goal that would have been!"

"That's Fulham's best chance to score again in this game!"

The commentator was right, that was Fulham's best chance as Sam also clutched his head in disbelief.

In the end, the game continued.

The S factor partnership continued while William Saliba remained William Saliba, always at hand to thwart them to the best of his ability every single time.

This game, the Frenchman was just imperious.

Arsenal also had their moments but none of them was as close as Sam's earlier effort. In the 82nd minute of the game, Emile Smith Rowe was tripped just outside the Arsenal 18-yard box as the referee awarded a freekick to Fulham.

Walking up to the ball, Sam contemplated using his ability card but he decided against it, eager to test his own freekick ability.

Another reason why he did was because Sam felt that it was not yet necessary.

'We're currently at the top of the league, we're high-flying, it's not necessary now'.

'But the situation may change anytime. When we're desperately in need of it, trailing from our ultimate goal, in desperate situations is when I should use it'.

With that, he made his decision.

After taking a deep breath, Sam took one last glance at goal and did an angled run towards the ball, then...

**BAM!**

He struck the ball perfectly with the inside of his right boot, curling it high and around the defensive block.

David Raya went on a full-stretch dive.

"...!" Craven Cottage was silenced.

With bated breaths, the home supporters watched as the ball beat the Arsenal goalie, moving towards goal.

Thousands of Fulham fans rose up to their feet, raising their arms, about to celebrate only for the ball to swerve slightly and then...

Bam!

The ball hit the crossbar, ricocheting outside for a corner kick.

"F\*ck!" Sam cursed in disbelief.

He was not the only one who felt that way. Literally every fan supporting the white, black, and red cause tonight felt the same way as they watched in disbelief.

Even the commentator could not believe what he just saw as he raved, expressing his wonder about how on earth that was not a goal?

Definitely, the gods were pitying Arsenal this game.

In the end, it was a slightly dangerous corner kick which resulted in no goal.

After a few more minutes of this end-to-end game, the referee's whistle finally sounded, bringing the game to an end.

The game ended 1-1, a draw.

All in all, it was a pulsating encounter and for his valiant performance at the heart of the Arsenal defense, William Saliba won the man of the match award for this game, dethroning the electric duo of Sam and Smith.