

## Football God 321

### Chapter 321 Preparations for a first UEFA Champions League game

"Congratulations Sam! You played an amazing game today on the pitch, helping your team win with your 2 incredible assists, how do you feel?"

"I feel great!" Sam answered in a bubbly manner, wiping off his sweat as he could not contain his excitement.

"I wanted to score but it doesn't matter, I still contributed with 2 assists". He smiled. "Setting up Lamine Yamal to rescue a point already left me satisfied, to assist Raphinha too in such a manner to rescue all 3 points, there's nothing better I could have asked for in my return game".

"What a statement performance it was from you!"

"A lot of people doubted Hansi Flick's decision to push you straight into the deep end immediately after coming out of such a damaging scandal".

"I won't lie, even I was skeptical at first about your match fitness and readiness but after what you pulled off out there on the pitch, I must confess, Hansi Flick didn't make the wrong decision".

"The wrong decision would have been not playing you from the start".

Sam chuckled. "I may still be very young but it's already my 3rd year in professional football. By now, I am already used to people's opinion".

"No matter what you do in this life, people will always have their own opinion so trying to live by their standards and validation is pointless. I try not to think about other people's opinion too much".

"I only think about my opinion and those of my loved ones".

"That way, I am able to focus more on what matters, football a good example". He smiled.

The male reporter also smiled. "Sam, today on the pitch, we could not help but notice a certain connection between you and Lamine Yamal, is there anything that we don't know about?"

Sam chuckled. "Just say what you want to ask, stop beating around the bush. Not like I have any reason to hide it in the first place".

"You must have seen the videos and pictures that trend online a few days ago. Yes, I've built a close friendship with Lamine Yamal these days".

"Not just him, Pedri and Gavi too".

"In a big club like FC Barcelona, I believe that maintaining good relationships between the squad members can keep the vibes positive which can reflect positively in our performances on the pitch".

"Anyways, today is just the prelude," he grinned. "Get ready for more".

"Really? Then I can't wait". The reporter's smile widened.

He looked at his book before asking his next question. "Sam, in your almost 3-year career, you've played for Enyimba FC and Fulham FC, both clubs that do not compete in the UEFA Champions League before this season".

"Due to your heroics last season in the premier league, Fulham are now in the UEFA champions league but even for you, this is your first time facing the prospects of competing in the elite tournament of club football".

"FC Barcelona's next game is a UEFA champions league home game against Brest of France, and it will be your first ever UEFA champions league game".

"Sam, how do you feel about it?"

Sam took a deep breath, going over his thoughts before answering; he laughed. "Honestly, I won't lie, I'm giddy in joy".

"Playing in the UEFA champions league..., it has always been one of the greatest dreams of my football career aspirations".

"The first football game that I ever watched was a UEFA champions league game after all".

"Really? Which one?"

Sam grinned. "2011, Wembley Stadium, FC Barcelona vs Manchester United!"

"Ouch!" The reporter laughed. "That brings memories man, fond memories for FC Barcelona fans and forgettable ones for fans of the Man United persuasion".

"I had the privilege of watching that game live in Wembley Stadium".

"Then do well to watch us live this season too," Sam grinned. "Because we'll be playing the final of the UEFA champions league this season".

"So bold," the reporter clicked his tongue. "I like it from young players like you, it makes our ageing bones burn with fire again".

"How do you think you would perform in front of your home supporters for your first home game since your confinement".

Sam took a deep breath. "I try not to overthink things too much, but I'm definitely going to give my all to create a memorable moment for the fans".

"I promise them, no matter what happens, they will enjoy the game".

With that, the interview finally came to an end.

Getting home, Sam learned that his girlfriend already made his favorite dish, Banga soup and starch. He was left salivating on getting home.

Quickly devouring the food and kissing his girlfriend, he started his post-match recovery in preparations for his very first UEFA champions league game.

Sam was hyper for his first UEFA champions league game.

From the days of watching Iniesta, Xavi, Busquests, and Messi don the famous blue and red of FC Barcelona, to the days of Neymar, Suarez, and Messi, to think that it was already the days of Raphinha, Lewandowski, Yamal, and Sam.

Sam was hyped for his club's next game, too hyped to relax.

All this abundant energy, he channeled it into what he knew how to do best, working out and playing football.

From just jogging alongside his new friends in the city of Barcelona, they graduated to organizing personal training sessions between themselves outside the normal training sessions scheduled by their coach, Hansi Flick.

Like this, the camaraderie and chemistry between the 5 FC Barcelona players improved crazily even as their fitness gained the sharpness of a qi-infused sword.

Like this, the days moved fast and in no time, it was October 1st already.

It was D-day.

...

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Matchday 2 of 8:)

(FC Barcelona – Brest)

(Date: 1st October, 2025)

On the 1st of October, in the matchday 2 fixture of the newly revamped UEFA champions league format that was used to substitute the group stage, FC Barcelona welcomed the France-based club Brest to Barcelona.

It was poised to be an exciting game.

Chapter 322 Disaster

The sun set in Barcelona, the prelude to the clash that was scheduled to take place at night in one of the recognized venues of the Catalan City.

The atmosphere at the Spotify Camp Nou on a UEFA Champions League night is always electric, and tonight was no different.

As the sun set over the city, the towering stands of the legendary stadium began to fill with a sea of Blaugrana-clad supporters, their voices merging into a low, expectant hum that rippled through the air.

In the dressing room, the players sat, letting the electric energy seep into their bones, energizing them and one of the FC Barcelona players felt this energy even more as it infused his body like a super serum.

Sam's body was literally shaking, not out of fear, but out of excitement.

As soon as the champions league anthem started playing, the entire stadium erupted, thousands of scarves held high as chants and cheers echoed off the concrete. Sam resonated with all of it.

The feeling he was experiencing at this moment, he could not describe it.

Euphoria, pure euphoria and nothing else.

When the players finally came out of the tunnel, stepping into the pitch, they felt the energy of this stadium in a more raw form.

The air was thick with the scent of fresh grass, sweat, and the distant aroma of Catalan street food from vendors outside.

A UEFA champions league game in the Spotify Camp Nou, it was a cultural phenomenon as much as it was a football game.

As the players lined up, ecstatic fans stomped their feet, their voices rising in unison as Barca's stars shone like beacons on the field, the lights illuminating every blade of grass like a stage set for war.

Like expected, both teams started with their strongest lineup for this UEFA champions league game.

For the away side, Brest started in a 4-3-3 formation with Lopes as their goalkeeper while ahead of him stood the 4-man defense of Coco, Sow, Castelleto, and Coza.

Ahead of them was the 3-man midfield of Lepenant, Chrivella, and Augusto while the attacking trio comprised Abline in right wing, Moses Simon, the Nigerian International as the left winger, while Mohamed as the striker.

For the home side, FC Barcelona's lineup was much more star-studded.

Starting in their regular 4-2-3-1 formation, the 4-man defense comprised of Jules Kounde, Ronald Araujo, Pau Cubarsi, and Alejandro Balde in defense protecting the German, Andre Ter Stegen in between the posts.

Last season, the German goalkeeper suffered an ACL injury that ruled him out of the season, pushing Inaki Pena to prominence and forcing the Catalan club to go for Wojciech Szczesny, convincing the Polish goalkeeper out of retirement.

But after being out for almost a whole season, Andre Ter Stegen made his return some time ago and finally, he was fully match fit.



He made his return to the pitch in this UEFA champions league game against Brest at the Spotify Camp Nou.

Ahead of the Barcelona defense lined up Marc Casado and Pedri, while further ahead of them lined up the formidable 4-man offense.

Robert Lewandowski started as the striker leading the line for the Blaugrana, while to his left and right were Raphinha and Lamine Yamal.

Directly behind the Polish striker lurked the Nigerian phenom, Samuel Moses, the attacking midfielder whose form was taking Europe by surprise despite having just concluded such a damaging scandal.

FWEEE!

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

For the first few minutes of this game, it was a tight and even game even as Brest played like a cohesive and well-gelled team.

They attacked and defended perfectly like a team.

The French side did more of defending this game but they didn't come to Barcelona with intentions to play a cowardly game.

They didn't play in a low block, they defended more but they came out of their shell often to attack the Catalan club, keeping their defense on tenterhooks and scaring them from becoming too adventurous in attack.

This dynamic set the stage for an exciting game at the Spotify Camp Nou.

Despite Brest's energy and cohesive teamplay though, in the end, they were playing against one of the strongest and most in-form clubs in Europe.

Under Hansi Flick, FC Barcelona was deadly, especially in the big games and this game was no different as the tides soon turned around.

The Catalan club amped the tempo!

They soon started dominating, forcing the French club to defend deep as they started running them ragged with crazy offensive plays.

And this energy excited the home supporters to no end.

They roared their team on excitedly.

During the match, every pass, every tackle, and every moment of brilliance was met with roars of approval or groans of frustration from the fans.

Sam, Lamine Yamal, Pedri, and Raphinha led the way in eliciting reactions from the fans as their electric plays turned the Brest players inside out.

The famous "Mes que un club" motto which translated to "more than a club" in English is not just a slogan, it's a feeling that pulses through the stands, especially when the home side pushed forward in attack.

"Barca!" "Barca!" "Barca!"

The rhythmic chant swelled to deafening levels.

The atmosphere in this stadium rose to a fever pitch, hitting stratospheric levels and the performance of the FC Barcelona players on the pitch rose with it; Brest was being tortured.

The stage was set, it would not take too long for FC Barcelona to open the deadlock in this game but when it seemed inevitable, something unexpected happened, stunning this stadium.

Having received a sweet defense-splitting pass from Sam that set him up one-on-one with the goalkeeper finally, Robert Lewandowski was poised to score the first goal of this game only for him to run into an incident.

Cozza, the Brest left back rushed back like a hurricane to defend, recklessly sliding in just as Lewandowski was about to shoot.

He seemingly aimed for the ball but due to placing his right leg down to angle himself for the shot, Cozza clattered into his right leg instead of the ball.

BAM!

His speed, momentum, everything turned it into a dangerous situation as Lewandowski was swept off his feet, somersaulting in mid-air.

When he landed, he collapsed awkwardly on his knee, and then...

Snap!

"ARGGHHHH...!!!!!!!" The Polish striker immediately clutched his knee, screaming in agony, the same knee that was fouled in the last game.

FWEEEE!

The referee blew the whistle immediately as he noticed the severity of the situation, calling the attention of the medical staff who rushed into the pitch.

"...!"

The FC Barcelona fans were mortified as they watched their striker being attended to, they were too stunned to react or speak.

Just about a minute later, a stretcher was brought to the pitch and Robert Lewandowski was carried out of the pitch in tears.

The Polish striker was injured and from his reaction, it was no minor injury either.

It was a disaster.

From the heavenly cloud 9 where they hovered and feasted before for 26 minutes of this game, FC Barcelona was brought crashing back down to earth.

"Wow..., this does not look good". The commentators echoed the sentiment.

"Robert Lewandowski in tears, that definitely does not look good for FC Barcelona. Now, how will Hansi Flick react to this situation?"

"The bigger question should be, what will the referee do?"

FWEEE!

Calming down and blowing his whistle again, the referee finally penalized the Brest player, giving him only a yellow card which the FC Barcelona players protested to no avail.

But to compensate Barcelona, they were awarded a penalty kick.

Raphinha took the ball, he was to play the penalty kick in Robert Lewandowski's absence.

Chapter 323 Formational change; can I play as a false 9?

Standing over the ball, the Brazilian oozed confidence.

FWEEE!

And immediately after the referee's whistle sounded, without any fancy feints or tricks, he ran directly to the ball and hit it with power, sending it on a trajectory towards the bottom right corner.

Thud!

Lopes, the Brest goalkeeper dived the right way, almost arriving on time to tip the ball away but Raphinha's shot contained speed and power and that became the facet that let it beat the goalkeeper.

The ball nestled into the bottom right corner, and the net rippled.

"GOALLLL...!"

The FC Barcelona fans roared, celebrating the goal even as they already temporarily removed the unfortunate situation of the Polish striker from their minds.

Charging towards the corner flag, Raphinha jumped high and pumped a fist in celebration, eliciting loud cheers from the home fans.

In the 26th minute of this game, FC Barcelona finally broke the deadlock, scoring the first goal of the game but at the moment, they were with just 10 men on the pitch with Lewandowski's enforced absence.

Hansi Flick already made a change at the byline by the time that Raphinha was done celebrating his goal.

The officials raised the substitution board, announcing the substitution.

(No. 9- Out)

(No. 6- In)

With Robert Lewandowski out of the game, Hansi Flick did not bring in a makeshift striker like most people expected in Ferran Torres, rather, he brought in a midfielder, Pablo Gavi instead.

Before Gavi entered the pitch, the German coach gave him instructions.

Entering the pitch, the first thing that Gavi did was to jog towards Sam's position before whispering a few words to him.

Quickly, he left, focusing on his other teammates and telling them the instructions from their coach.

Sam was stunned. 'Really?'

Incredulously, Hansi Flick made the decision of playing Sam in the false 9 position again for the second time this season!

Yes, during his first 2 games this season, he struggled to impact the team positively in attack as he failed to register a goal or an assist.

Yes, his first attacking masterpiece in an FC Barcelona jersey came from when Sam was suddenly instructed to play as a false 9 by his coach, resulting in his 2-goal plundering display that robbed Real Sociedad of 2 important points.

But despite that, Sam was still an attacking midfielder by profession.

FC Barcelona bought him because of his crazy performances for Fulham from the attacking midfield position.

Sam struggled at first to make an impact in Barcelona, but he already deduced that it was because he needed to adapt to playing for his new team. And he believed that with time, he would adapt.

To think that his coach had other ideas for him.

'This...,' Sam did not know what to think but in the end, trust his mentality, he ignored the negatives of this situation and decided to focus on the positives.

'If the coach says I should play as the striker, why now?'



'Afterall, that way, I'm closer to the goal'.

Hansi Flick didn't just make a single positional change in this game, the Catalan coach literally switched things up, changing the formation of his team.

From the 4-2-3-1 formation where FC Barcelona started in, Hansi Flick changed his team's shape into a 4-3-3 formation to accommodate a proper false 9, a formation that was extremely familiar to FC Barcelona fans.

Afterall, this was the same formation that a prime Pep Guardiola-led Barcelona used predominantly in the season where the great Lionel Messi went on to smash all goalscoring records, scoring 91 goals in a single calendar year!

In Pep Guardiola's magic wand, it was effective but could the same be said about the German coach in Hansi Flick?

Was Hansi Flick as tactically good as Pep Guardiola?

Could Sam even hope to replicate half of what Lionel Messi did?

No one knew the answer to these questions, the answers would slowly reveal themselves first as this game progressed.

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded to continue the game and that was when like a Dragon that finally woke up from its slumber, Brest arose.

It was no news that since the inception of Hansi Flick's reign at FC Barcelona, his teams predominately played in a 4-2-3-1 formation utilizing their offside traps to catch opponents off-guard.

Hansi Flick experimenting in the Spanish La Liga would have been a different case, but this was the UEFA Champions League.

A tournament filled with Crouching Tigers and Hidden Dragons.

As soon as Hansi Flick made the formational change, the Brest coach sensed weakness. The FC Barcelona players were all talented and would adapt after some time but before that, they would struggle to play fluid football in the changed formation.

Pouncing on this deduction, the Brest coach gave his players only a single order; attack!

Bam!

After just conceding a goal, Brest restarted the game from the half-way line and immediately, hordes of their players poured outward, attacking the Barcelona half as the Catalans were briefly caught off-guard.

But alert, they all reacted, trying to track back and defend valiantly but Brest was like a Great White Shark who already set eyes on its prey.

Nothing in this world could stop them from sinking their teeth on their prey.

1 pass, 2 pass, 3 pass...

After the initial pass to kickstart the game again, from the right to the left, 3 additional passes were all it took to cut FC Barcelona open like a hot knife through butter, setting the Nigerian International, Moses Simon up.

He only had Jules Kounde to beat.

A rapid stepover, a body feint and an explosion of speed and Jules Kounde was left chasing shadows as Moses Simon blitzed past him.

Going past Kounde, he came one-on-one with the Barcelona goalkeeper and just as Ronaldo Araujo charged out, about to intercept him, he shot the ball.

Bam!

Hitting it perfectly with his right foot, he sent it across the face of goal, curling it towards the top right corner.

FC Barcelona's Polish goalkeeper dived but the ball just about curled past his grasp, nestling into the top right corner of the net.

"GOALLLLLLL!!!" The away stands erupted immediately as the Brest supporters jumped, screaming, and cheering at the top of their lungs.

Moses Simon charged towards the corner flag, sliding on his knees in celebration even as FC Barcelona remained stunned.

"My God! What a lightning-fast goal!"

"26 minutes, Barcelona scores; 27 minutes, Brest equalizes!"

"This Sam-striker strategy leaves Barcelona open after all, I doubt this formation is going to work".

"Hansi Flick is playing with fire".

Chapter 324 Yes I can!

'Can I play as a false 9?' This was the only question ringing in Sam's head as his national team compatriot energetically celebrated his goal.

As soon as Sam asked that question though, he felt weird. 'No, that was phrased wrongly'. He shook his head. 'Is that even a question that I should be asking?'

'Instead of can I, I must!'

His eyes started gleaming with fire again.

Sometimes, it takes very little to set Sam's competitive spirit ablaze and this time was no different.

Heck, this was the UEFA Champions League!

He was not about to smear the history of his first UEFA champions league game by putting a drab performance; this was the stage where he was supposed to shine brightest!

'F\*ck false 9!' His eyes gleamed. 'Even if I have to play as a center back, I'll still shine in the UEFA Champions League!'

FWEEE!

As soon as the game restarted, it was clear that something changed.

The way that Sam carried his body, the way that he moved, all of it changed as soon as the game started again.

He was no longer just an attacking midfielder, neither was he just a striker, playing as a false 9 gave him the leverage of playing as both.

That was another positive that Sam embraced.

He consoled himself by believing that he was too good to just play as an attacking midfielder, maybe adding the work of a striker into the equation was the catalyst he needed to truly hit his peak.

It took some time, a few minutes, but Sam grew into this game again.

Brest were back to more of defending but Sam was their nemesis this time.

Playing in a false 9 position, he constantly dropped back, taking the ball from deep and utilizing his dribbling attributes to torture the Brest defense, opening them up and creating space for his other teammates.

His passing attributes was also another cause of pain for the Brest defenders.

Doing it once was maybe a coincidence, but Sam did not just do it once, he did it twice, thrice, more than thrice; he did it consistently.

"Damn! What a dribbling performance this is from Sam!"

"I take my words back," The commentator laughed. "Just with this trait alone, I think he has what it takes to become a unique false 9".

By the end of the first half, Sam ended up creating the most chances of the game even as he took 2 shots on target that the Brest goalkeeper caught.

By half-time, FC Barcelona was still losing but there was a feeling that something already changed in this Barca attack.

During halftime, Hansi Flick said very few words to his players.

"We have the tools to win this game. To win, we just have to maximize the potential of what we have with us".

"Do that and let's win this game".

FWEEE!

The second half started.

The 1st minute of second half passed...

The 2nd minute passed...

The 3rd minute passed...

It was not until the 6th minute of the 2nd half, in the 51st minute that Sam touched the ball for the first time but immediately after his leg touched the ball, electricity seemed to course through his body.

Bam!

Hitting the ball once to Lamine Yamal, he evaded an off-ball challenge, charging into the Brest 18-yard box.

As he ran, he heard the ball being kicked by Lamine Yamal and from the peripheral of his vision, he saw the ball float towards him.

Tiki! Taka!

One-two football!

For some reason, this sudden run unnerved the Brest defense, making them alert to the 2 young FC Barcelona players.

As soon as Sam got the ball again, they pressed.

Calmly, Sam controlled the ball with his first touch and with his second touch, he flicked it towards Lamine Yamal who got the ball again.

As soon as Sam passed the ball again, he exploded forward with speed, flicking a Brest defender's arm off who tried to hold him back.

And then, Lamine Yamal hit the ball back to him.



4 passes within the space of just a few seconds!

And this time, Yamal's pass poised the ball perfectly for Sam to hit.

And not hesitating, his right leg swung with venom, hitting the ball and striking it towards the bottom right corner.

POW!

The Brest goalkeeper dived but he stood no chance.

The ball literally tore its way into the net!

"GOALLLLL...!!!"

The home side exploded, roaring in ecstasy as their team scored to regain the lead in this UEFA Champions League game.

And with that, Sam got his first UEFA Champions League goal.

While the Spotify Camp Nou erupted, Lamine Yamal jumping on Sam's back, he didn't scream or jump to celebrate.

Rather, trudging towards the FC Barcelona fans, he nodded at them, puffing his muscles even as they roared his name.

"Sam!" "Sam!" "Sam"

Well, they did well to chant his name because that was the prelude to a Sam masterpiece in the Spotify Camp Nou in his first UEFA champions league game.

After that goal in the 51st minute, Sam and Lamine Yamal's chemistry improved in this game, almost turning telepathic as with their combination plays, they tore Brest apart.

But in the end, it was a Pedri pass that set him up again.

The Spanish midfielder raised the ball above the defense, setting Sam up as he overtook the 2 center backs marking him, pouncing to poke the ball into the net.

Just like that, he got his 2nd goal of this game as the home supporters roared.

63rd minute, 3-1...

When it seemed like it was all over, Sam struck again, this time in the 80th minute of this game as the Brest momentum already died.

Receiving a diagonal pass from Gavi, Sam showed his composure, shifting and nudging the ball away from challenges till the angle opened up and then from there outside the 18-yard box, he did it.

BAM!

Power shot!

Sam unleashed an absolutely thunderous shot from outside the box that left the Brest goalkeeper chasing ghosts.

The goalkeeper dived but he never stood a chance.

The ball rose, tearing its way imperiously into the top left corner of the Brest net, nailing the outcome of this game.

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

The Sam chants echoed in the Spotify Camp Nou.

This time, Sam celebrated as charging towards the corner flag, suddenly thinking of a mischievous idea, he jumped, executing an acrobatic backflip.

He did it in celebration, eliciting even more cheers from the fans.

4 minutes later, in the 84th minute of this game, Sam was substituted as Hansi Flick finally introduced Ferran Torres.

In Sam's first UEFA champions league game, he scored a hatrick.

He not only claimed the match ball; he also won the man of the match award.

To the FC Barcelona fans who were in attendance today, watching him in action, this was an unforgettable debut to the European stage for their young midfielder turned false 9.

Chapter 325 An unforgettable debut

(Name: Samuel Moses)

(No. 40)

(Venue: Spotify Camp Nou)

(Opponent: Brest)

(Competition: UEFA Champions League)

(Date: October 1st, 2025)

(Game in numbers:)

90% passing accuracy

3 fouls won

4 goal-scoring chances created

3 of 4 aerial balls won successfully.

3 goals

(Rating: 9.4)

(MOTM)

Originally, FC Barcelona fans were supposed to be mourning the unfortunate injury that befell their starting striker in Robert Lewandowski, but the frenzy caused by Sam's performance overshadowed Lewandowski's injury.

The game was simply that good, it was an unforgettable UEFA champions league debut for the young Nigerian.

It was an almost perfect display.

During the 26 minutes that Lewandowski was on the pitch, as an attacking midfielder, Sam had a good game but from just a good game, his game transformed into an unbelievable one after taking on the false 9 role.

Today, as a false 9, he was FC Barcelona's best player on the pitch and it was not even close as he put in an all-action display.

He was not a goal poacher. Rather, he was a striker whose playmaking was at an elite level and could dribble efficiently.

These traits alone already made him an envy of big clubs around Europe, but factor in his clinical goalscoring into the equation and Sam was even better than famous striker talents around the world.

In FC Barcelona, Sam's number was the no. 40, this was because bigger and more famous numbers of the Catalan club were already occupied by others.

For the attacking and midfield players of the Catalan club, the no. 8 jersey was now occupied by Pedri while the no. 6 was occupied by Gavi, following in the footsteps of their idols, Xavi and Iniesta.

Other iconic numbers of the club that were held by teammates included the no. 11 that was now held by Raphinha, the no. 19 that Lamine Yamal wore, Ferran Torres' no. 7, and then Robert Lewandowski's no. 9.

Of course, none of those numbers was the biggest of the Catalan club.

The biggest and most iconic jersey number of FC Barcelona that was donned by legendary players like Messi, Ronaldinho, Maradona and the likes was the iconic no. 10 jersey.

With Ansu Fati gone from FC Barcelona, the no. 10 jersey became vacant again but Sam did not lay claim to the legendary number yet.

Of course he coveted it, who wouldn't? But he was patient.

Sam didn't just want to wear the mantle that once belonged to the great Lionel Messi with which he led FC Barcelona to such a glorious dynasty without deserving it. He wanted to earn the no. 10 jersey.

That way, wearing it wouldn't feel like a burden but rather like the final crowning moment to a new King in Barcelona.

To every football fan who had the privilege of watching Sam in motion against Brest as a false 9, they gave the game a nickname, the unforgettable debut.

This was Sam's first footprints in the elite tier of club competition, the UEFA champions league and from what the fans saw, boy was he ready for more.

With it, his UEFA champions league stats finally started counting.

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Games: 1)

(Goals: 3)

(Assists: 0)

In just one game, Sam took his goalscoring tally in the UEFA champions league to 3 goals!

And not just that, from the initial figure of 002, it was now 525, 5 goals and 2 assists in 5 games since signing for FC Barcelona.

At some point this season, it seemed that FC Barcelona had made a mistake splurging 80m+ Euros to get his signing but Sam was finally proving his worth.

He was shutting his critics up.

At the end of the game, Sam fully set a storm online on social media.

There were so many topics to discuss about the game; Hansi Flick's tactical brilliance and willingness to take risk to experiment in such a big game, and then Sam's sheer footballing brilliance.



Lots of highlights were made about the game, mostly the first goal where his telepathic chemistry between Lamine Yamal truly shone.

All of a sudden, everyone seemed to have forgotten that Sam was involved in such a damaging scandal, focusing on his football again.

But then, later in the evening after getting home, meeting his girlfriend, and celebrating his performance today, news finally came from the FC Barcelona medical team concerning the Polish striker, Robert Lewandowski.

It was serious.

After scans by the medical team, they confirmed that Robert Lewandowski suffered from an ACL injury, also called an anterior cruciate ligament injury.

The ACL is the tissue that connects the thighbone to the shinbone at the knee. The injury occurs when the anterior cruciate ligament is torn.

Robert Lewandowski was ruled out for the rest of the season.

"...!"

And just like that, FC Barcelona fans were thrown into the deep end again, panicking about their fate.

The striking position was one of those spots that FC Barcelona was lacking, not having depth for in their squad.

Robert Lewandowski was the only tried and proven striker of the squad; to be ruled out for the rest of the season, it was definitely a crisis for the club.

Sam may have played amazing today but it was just 1 game, and he had played in that position only 2 times, who knows if it was not just a 1-time thing?

Concern and worry befell the FC Barcelona fanbase even as the fans showed their solidarity for the Polish striker, supporting him on social media.

Amid it all, they still celebrated their win as it kept their UEFA champions league run this season perfect.

While all that happened, Sam had a nice time with his girlfriend at home. To celebrate his performance today, Kayla made a sumptuous meal for him which Sam enjoyed with his all before consolidating it by getting intimate with his girlfriend.

There were few feelings in the world like getting intimate with the girl you loved after making a big career achievement.

Very late at night, before sleeping, Sam got a message from a familiar but unexpected contact.

(NEW! Unread message from Eric Chelle...)

Chapter 326 A nation in need of a hero

(NEW! Unread message from Eric Chelle...)

'Eric Chelle...', Sam deliberated over the name for some time.

It was not a name that he was unfamiliar with.

Eric Chelle was the newly appointed head coach of the Nigerian national football team, the Super Eagles, whose appointment was announced months ago.

The former Mali boss already led the Super Eagles through a few games, including World Cup qualifier games back in September against Rwanda and South Africa that ended horribly despite them playing one of them at home.

Against Rwanda, the Super Eagles could only settle for a draw at home while agonizingly, they lost against South Africa in away ground.

In recent years, the Super Eagles were struggling to make an impact in the world stage as they rotated through several coaches.

Despite making the final of the 2023 AFCON tournament (Africa Cup of Nations), the Nigerian national football team has been in a period of decline since then. This was despite the plethora of talent available to them.

Their World Cup qualifying bid has been going contrary to expectations, compounded by the disappointing results against Rwanda and South Africa.

Eric Chelle just got his job a few months ago and yet, it was already under threat simply because he would not keep it if Nigeria failed to qualify for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The nation was in a state of unrest simply due to their national team failing to qualify for the World Cup yet by this time.

Upcoming World Cup qualifier games against Lesotho and Benin Republic in October were Nigeria's last chances to sneak into the FIFA World Cup.

And to secure that spot, they had to win against both countries.

Both were must-win games!

Sam made his national team debut months ago but since his red card, the coach refused to call him up again for the national team.

But since then, his status had changed significantly.

He was no longer just a rising star of the English premier league. By actually doing it, dragging Fulham to the premier league title and FA Cup double, Sam entrenched his name in premier league folklore.

He was a legend of the premier league and his skill was undeniable.

His move to FC Barcelona was the perfect acknowledgement of his ability, and after his display in the UEFA champions league, his fame was back.

Since his red card, Sam didn't pay too much attention to the Nigerian national football team but he still knew the outcome of their games and also knew that they were in a qualification crisis for the FIFA World Cup.

This was why on seeing the name that was on the message title, he already guessed what this was about.

He was right.

The message from Eric Chelle was simple and straight to the point.

After introducing himself, he didn't beat around the bush, revealing his intentions for Sam to play in his team.

The coach didn't pull any punches, revealing how much he valued him and his ability. In the coach's words, Nigeria was a nation in need of a hero.

And he believed that Sam could be this hero.

Well..., it had been a long time since Sam felt so flattered.

'This bastard!' He rubbed his nose awkwardly. 'He must have been really good at rizzing up the girls in his teenage years!'

He chuckled. "But this....," he thought.

"I can't refuse it".

No matter his condition and the economic situation of his country, Sam was Nigerian through and through.

As a young boy, he knew how much football meant to the country.

Football was a way for netizens to forget the numerous problems plaguing the country. Taking football away from Nigerians in a way could be equated to taking away their source of joy.

This was why Sam made his decision immediately.

(World Cup Qualifiers- Group Stage:)

(Matchday 9 of 10:)

(Lesotho – Nigeria)

(Date: 6th October, 2025)

...

(Matchday 10 of 10:)

(Nigeria – Benin)

(Date: 13th October, 2025)

Both games were scheduled for 6th and 13th of October respectively, dates that clashed with Sam's own club commitments.

After their UEFA champions league clash against Brest, FC Barcelona had Spanish La Liga clashes against Alaves and Sevilla respectively on the 6th and 20th of October.

If Sam was to respond to the national call, he was going to miss at least 1 of the 2 games. Was the risk worth it?

Most especially in a time when the Catalan club just lost their starting striker and were in need of his expertise.

Despite what was at stake, Sam willingly took the risk.

The next morning, Sam called Hansi Flick and spoke extensively with the German coach, explaining his reasoning for deciding to respond to the national call.

In the end, though he was reluctant, Hansi Flick begrudgingly agreed to let him go but he was only allowed to miss 1 game, the game against Alaves on the 6th.

The German coach didn't care how Sam was going to do it but he gave his player an ultimatum, Sam was to be ready and prepped for the Sevilla game before 20th of October and Sam agreed to it.

With his physical conditioning elixirs, in terms of dealing with fatigue and post-match stress, Sam could beat his chest that no other footballer in the world had it better than him.

And with that, he rescheduled.

That same day, he put a call to Eric Chelle, informing the coach of his decision to respond to his summons.

Eric Chelle was ecstatic.

Later in the evening, alongside his girlfriend, Sam finally embarked on a trip back to Nigeria.

The news that Sam was to miss the FC Barcelona game against Alaves and instead responded to national team duty soon took the internet by storm.



There were mixed responses to his decision but among the Nigerian fans, all of them were ecstatic, feeling that their coach finally made a sensible decision.

In Europe, Sam was no longer a figure of obscurity.

He was a big figure in the footballing world now, and the reaction of the Nigerian fans to his arrival was normal.

Sam arrived in Nigeria with his girlfriend to big fanfare.

Skipping most of the activities, he quickly found a way home to his mansion in Abuja. The next day, he met up with Eric Chelle as they spoke extensively, enabling Sam to know about his plans for the national team.

Sam was more than satisfied with what he heard, he bought into Eric Chelle's ideology for the Nigerian national team.

With that, they got something to work with.

From the 3rd of October, intense training for the game against Lesotho started as Sam once again integrated with the rest of the Nigerian squad.

Unlike during his debut though, he was no longer a small figure.

Standing shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Victor Osimhen and Ademola Lookman, Sam no longer looked inferior, he was now on their level despite being just 19 years of age.

It was actually crazy but it was reality.

His national teammates also didn't care about his age. They've watched his game, they knew what he could do with a ball at his feet and they respected him for it and so they took him like he was some veteran.

Besides, Alex Iwobi was his advocate in the Nigerian team.

Watching the Nigerian team train for the epic World Cup qualifying clash, one thing became clear. Eric Chelle took a bold decision, deciding to make Samuel Moses, a 19-year-old the core of his Nigerian team.

It was an incredibly bold and risky decision; would it pay off?

Nobody could tell.

On the 5th of October though, alongside his national teammates, Sam took a flight to Lesotho for the game that could change Nigerian football history.

Chapter 327 A must-win game; against Lesotho

On the 5th of October, Sam arrived in Lesotho alongside his teammates and their coach.

Staying disciplined, none of the players went outing as they stayed indoors in their hotel, meditating and placing themselves in the right state of mind in preparation for the decisive game against Lesotho.

It was a must-win game.

Lose and Nigeria would miss the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

That was not a reality that any of them was willing to bear witness to, and so, they were going to do their all to make the opposite a reality.

They must win the game!

By all means.

...

6th October, 2025...

Time was a mirage; in no time, D-day was here.

(World Cup Qualifiers- Group Stage:)

(Matchday 9 of 10:)

(Lesotho – Nigeria)

(Date: 6th October, 2025)

The game was to be played at the Setsoto Stadium, a multipurpose stadium in Maseru, Lesotho that is currently the home ground of the Lesotho national football team.

The evening at Setsoto Stadium in Lesotho was electric, charged with anticipation and the high stakes of a must-win World Cup qualifier for Nigeria.

For Lesotho, they were nowhere close to making it to the World Cup but still, it was a World Cup qualifier and they wanted to win.

But to the Nigerians, it was go hard or go home.

Win and keep the qualification hopes alive, lose and lose it all.

The stadium, nestled in the heart of Maseru was a cauldron of sound and color with fans draped in the blue of Likuena and the green of the Super Eagles, their voices merging into a chaotic symphony of chants, vuvezelas, and drumbeats.

Above, the African night sky stretched wide, a deep indigo canvas speckled with stars as the floodlights bathed the pitch in harsh white brilliance.

The crisp mountain air carried the scent of wet grass and dust, tinged with the faint aroma of grilled meat from vendors outside the stadium.

The altitude, over 1,500 meters above sea level added a thinness to the air, a factor that could test even the fittest athletes.

Standing on the pitch alongside his teammates on the pitch, Sam frowned, already telling that this was going to be an incredibly grueling affair.

On the field, Nigeria's players stood in a tight huddle, their faces set with the grim determination of a team that had no room for failure.

The Super Eagles had traveled south knowing that anything less than victory would be disastrous for their World Cup hopes.

Lesotho, underdog yet fearless on home soil, fed off the deafening roars of their supporters, their players moving with confidence, eager to defy the odds.

Both teams started with their best lineup.

For Nigeria, with the introduction of Sam in the lineup, Eric Chelle tweaked his team from a 3-4-3 formation to a 4-2-3-1 formation like the one employed in FC Barcelona to accommodate him in his favored attacking midfield position.

In between the posts for the Super Eagles stood the imposing figure of Stanley Nwabalai, the Nigerian-born goalkeeper. While ahead of him stood a quadruple defensive set-up comprising Samuel Ajayi, William Troost-Ekong, Calvin Bassey, and the electric Ola Aina.

Ahead of them in midfield was the duo of Frank Onyeka and Alex Iwobi, then further ahead was the power-offence quadruple.

Victor Osimhen led the attack as the striker.

To his right and left flanks respectively were Moses Simon and Ademola Lookman, the Brest and Atalanta wingers while behind him was the core of the new Nigerian team, Samuel Moses, the young FC Barcelona star.

It was a formidable lineup up against those of Lesotho.

For Lesotho who lined up in a typical 4-3-3 formation, Moerane started in between the posts as the goalkeeper while ahead of him was the quadruple of Malane, Makhele, Mokokoane, and Matlabe in defense.

Ahead of the defense was the midfield trio of Lebokollane, Fothoane, and Toloane, and the attacking trio was formed by Mokhachane in right wing, Khutlang in left wing, and Makateng as the starting striker.

Compared to the Nigerian team, this was an inferior side but in international football, mostly African football, quality alone didn't cut it at times.

Besides, this was Lesotho's home grown.

The Likuena were hell-bent on making things tough for the Super Eagles.

And then...

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle sliced through the noise and in that instant, Setsoto Stadium came alive, becoming an arena of fate.

Every touch of the ball, every tackle, every surge forward carried the weight of Nigerian expectations and Lesotho's defiance.

The match had begun, and the night in Maseru was set to be unforgettable.

In the 13th minute of this game...

POW!

Sam unleashed his first long-range piledriver after an absolutely dominating performance so far as he stung the palms of the Lesotho goalkeeper.

This was a game where he dominated.

Starting his career from the streets of Abraka to the Enyimba International Stadium, Sam was used to the physical nature of African football.

This was why unlike other overseas superstars who came to play for their home country, he was not overwhelmed by the physicality of the Lesotho players who clearly targeted him, rather he thrived.

Sam was used to being the core of a Fulham team for 1 and half seasons in the English premier league, now he brought the same vibes to his national team.

As the core of the Nigerian national team, Sam thrived.

Everything went through him and he was not overwhelmed by it.

Every touch of the ball, every dribble, every single body feint, every tackle, and every shove, Sam was playing at an elite level this game as he led by example.

His elite level in this game buoyed on his teammates and with time, they aligned with him, playing an amazing game in the Setsoto Stadium.

Nigeria dominated against their opponents.

But despite their dominance, a common theme that was prevalent in Nigerian squads of recent years reared its head again, the lack of goalscoring.



They dominated, they had more of the ball, dribbled and dazzled, but they struggled to score against a stalwart Lesotho defense.

The first half game to an end with a goalless draw.

Chapter 328 A game of sweat and blood

During half-time, facing his players, Eric Chelle paced up and down, rubbing his sweaty palms together as the pressure already got to him.

Afterall, his job was on the line here.

"Come on guys!" He clapped his hands. "We have to win!"

"And to win, we have to score a goal". It was clear from the look on his face that he was desperate for his team to win today.

"Come on guys, we can do it!"

He said a few more words to motivate his players and after 10 minutes, they had no choice but to come out into the pitch and meet the Lesotho resistance again.

This game was grueling, not just physically but mentally.

Playing in away ground was not easy, and it was even more crazy when playing internationally as the will of a nation was packed into it.

But then again, the Nigerian players were resilient, motivated by a singular purpose. 'We can't afford to lose!'

'We can't afford to lose oh!'

In this second half, Sam did not just take on the identity of the core of this team, he took on the identity of a makeshift captain.

"Come on guys!" He clapped his arms on the pitch, gesticulating at his teammates to do more. "We can do this!"

"Just a little bit more and we'll score!" Sam was desperate.

That voice already started chanting in his head.

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

Sam's approach to this game was slowly morphing, changing.

From just we must win, it became we must die to win!

On this pitch, in the 2nd half, he was everywhere as he flexed his incredible stamina in this big game for his country again.

Whoosh!

He went on sliding tackles, winning back balls when Lesotho went on their dangerous counter-attacking breaks.

And in possession, he was a menace.

BZZZ!

Like a prime Kaka, Sam weaved through the midfield with silky dribbling skills, cutting through players like they were not there, penetrating tight spaces with his incredible mastery and use of the la croqueta.

He nutmegged players, leaving them on their butts and scrambling in the wake of his passage like some God of martial art.

With his elastico dribble, he sent whoever dared face him head-on on a pilgrimage to the shadow realm.

Anytime that he got the ball close to the 18-yard box, the whole Lesotho defense was left scrambling backward in panic as they defended against him with desperation, intent on keeping the scoreline like this.

Sam tried everything in his repertoire.

Every few intervals, he made use of his Power Shot legendary inheritance, unleashing absolute piledriver shots that sent trepidations through this stadium.

He was unlucky, he hit the bar 2 times already.

As for those that didn't hit the bar, the goalkeeper suffered as he already received medical attention after being stung by 2 of such Sam's piledriver shots.

As for the 3rd and most dangerous one, one of the Lesotho defenders sensing the danger bravely put his body on the line, diving and blocking the ball with his head. It was a brave but reckless act.

**BAM!**

The ball hit the defender's head, and instantly, he was concussed!

The players and fans almost panicked till when a few seconds later, the player came to, panting heavily.

The Lesotho defenders viewed Sam with more wariness and fear after that crazy encounter. The defender didn't leave the pitch though as with a bandage tied around his head, he bravely continued.

They would do everything in their power to keep Nigeria and Sam quiet today.

By now, it was clear that Sam was the out and out best player on this pitch but he was not the only one who was performing.

Other Nigerian stars also rose up to the occasion.

From the left and right, Ademola Lookman and Moses Simon dazzled with their silky dribbling skills, repeatedly penetrating into the Lesotho defense and causing chaos only to stumble at the last moment.

The Lesotho defense was just too tight-knit.

The Super Eagles striker, Victor Osimhen also had a solid game as with his physicality, he worried the Lesotho defense while also letting a few powerful shots loose as Sam sprayed through passes for him here and there.

Yes, Sam did not just dominate with his dribbling and shooting this game. Afterall, he was a great passer of the ball too.

With his elegant passing skills, he sent through passes that cut the Lesotho defense open like a hot knife through butter, setting up his teammates but yet, the Lesotho goalkeeper and his defense held firm.

It was a wonder how the Nigerian team was yet to score a goal.

BAM!

Another Victor Osimhen shot, and the 3rd shot on target that hit the bar.

"F\*ck!" Victor Osimhen screamed and grabbed his head in frustration.

"Damn!" Sam cursed behind him, biting his lips even as sweat dripped down his body, his jersey already drenched with sweat.

'These bastards...!'

The more this game wore on, the more riled up he got as his competitive spirit to win this game by all means continued acting up.

Lesotho frustrated Nigerians worldwide.

70 minutes, no goal...

75 minutes, no goal...

80 minutes, no goal...

85 minutes, no goal...

90 minutes, no goal...

5 minutes of additional time was added by the referee.

90 plus 1 minute, no goal...

90 plus 2 minutes, no goal...

90 plus 3 minutes, no goal...

90 plus 4 minutes, no goal...

And then, in the 90 plus 5 minutes, a miracle happened at the Setsoto Stadium in Lesotho.

Whoosh!

Sliding to break another Lesotho counterattack in the last minute even as tension rose high and nerves were stretched taut, before the loose ball could be intercepted by another Lesotho player, Sam rose back on his feet and pounced.

Thud!

He was like a Tiger going on a hunt.

He arrived at the ball first, protecting it with his tall frame as he bashed shoulders against his opponent, shoving him aside.

And then, Sam pushed forward.

Lesotho sensed his threat even in the last minute and reacted.

Whoosh!

A Lesotho player slid in aggressively but flicking the ball up, Sam jumped after it, above the sliding player.

After evading the first player, with a body feint, he sent the next Lesotho player to no man's land, and then with a rainbow flick, he sent another Lesotho player to the shadow realm.

BZZZ!

One touch with his lap to control the descending ball, and another touch to flawlessly execute the elastico as Sam sent another Lesotho player to dreamland.



And then as he entered the 18-yard box, as 2 Lesotho players charged towards him with obvious malicious intent, Sam flicked the ball to the right where a certain Moses Simon lurked.

The Nigerian winger raised his leg to shoot and as Lesotho defenders desperately jumped in front of him to block, he cut the ball instead.

It was a feint!

"...!" Fans rose up around this stadium.

With that cut, Moses Simon left 2 Lesotho defenders for dead and just as he got set to shoot again, he hit the ball.

Bam!

It was not a shot, rather, it was a pass.

The ball floated high in the air, above defenders, above Victor Osimhen, to an empty space but as the ball floated past, a figure ghosted in.

"Sam...!" The commentator roared. "How did he get there? So fast?!"

With veins popping all over his neck and body, exerting 110% of his body's potential, Sam went on a diving header.

BAM!

His head struck the ball perfectly just before it could sneak away, hitting it with all the power that he could generate as it homed towards the net.

The Lesotho goalkeeper reacted, flailing his arms towards the ball but the ball did it, squirming past his grasp and into the net.

"..."

Silence, for a few seconds, and then...

BOOM!

Setsoto Stadium was set ablaze!

"ZINEDINE SAM!"

"ZINEDINE SAM...!"

"ZINEDINE SAM...!!!" The commentators screamed.

"The Nigerian Prince has done it, he has taken them from their ruins, keeping them in the running for a World Cup spot!"

"Singlehandedly, he has saved a nation!"

"They asked for a hero, he gave them a miracle!"

"What a game!"

"What a goal!"

"What a boy!"

"This is a game of sweat and blood!"

"Love it, enjoy it, admire it!"

Chapter 329 The Boy becomes a Man

(Nigerian Daily:)

(Samuel Moses- The boy becomes a Man:)

(From the streets of Abraka, to the stadium in Abba, the little 17-year-old boy with a frame too tall and imposing for his age has matured, now carrying a nation on his shoulders at just 19. Have Nigeria produced a generational talent, finally?)

...

(Daily Sun:)

(A Sam header in the 90 plus 5-minute seals a narrow win for Nigeria!)

(Click to watch the best moments of the game here=)

...

(ESPN News:)

(Samuel Moses, a ballon d'or contender?)

(He's been doing it for Fulham, now he does it for FC Barcelona, and today he's done it for his country! Where has he not done it?)

(Let's break it down and analyze the numbers. With the goal today against Lesotho, Samuel Moses takes his tally for the season to 6 goals and 2 assists in 6 games, despite the interruption to his season due to the scandal.)

(Forget the numbers, put him through the eye test and make your verdict. Is Samuel Moses an early contender for the Ballon d'or award?)

Even as the ballon d'or award ceremony for the last season ramped up, the official date drawing closer every day, the race for the new ballon d'or award already started and Sam was among the early favorites already.

Doing it for your club attracts a lot of attention and admiration, but doing it for your country? It attracts more than just attention, it attracts respect.

Afterall, donning the colors of your national jersey and performing with it, to most professional football players, there was nothing more valiant than that.

This was why Sam caused another online storm just after the one he caused in the champions league after his hattrick for FC Barcelona against Brest when he put out a masterpiece playing as a false 9.

Of course, by the end of the Lesotho game, Sam was awarded with the man of the match award, warranting another post-match interview.

"Good evening Sam, thanks for having me," the reporter smiled. "You're clearly in terrific form. We've seen that in FC Barcelona but bringing that to the national team, you truly are one of a kind".

"You may not know it yet but you're now carrying the weight of a whole nation on your shoulders".

"If you didn't score that last minute goal, Nigeria would have been sent packing from the FIFA World Cup 2026 early".

"But with that goal, Nigeria took a big first step towards qualification".

"After your performance today, a lot of people online believe that you've finally matured from a boy to become a man, what do you think?"

Sam chuckled. "I don't know, I really don't like giving opinions about myself". He smiled. "I leave that to the fans; I believe their judgement more".

"About the game though," he sighed, wiping away his sweat. "I expected it to be tough but not this tough," he chuckled again. "Lesotho played an amazing game; they've earned the respect of all Nigerians across the world".

"If not for a bit of luck on our part, we would have never won".

Sam looked straight at the camera. "I want to use this avenue to tell all Nigerians that we will not give up!"

"We've taken the first step; we'll definitely take the last one!"

"Next week, against Benin Republic, we're going to win a second time to book a spot in the FIFA World Cup!"

With that, the interview came to an end.

...

When the Nigerian squad got back home to Nigeria, they got a triumphant welcome back but they did not let it get to their heads.

Afterall, they still had one last hurdle to cross, the hurdle of Benin.

They dared not be complacent as for the next few days, together in the Moshood Abiola Stadium in Abuja, the Nigerian squad trained intensely, preparing for their final FIFA World Cup qualifier game against Benin Republic.

After Sam's heroics against Lesotho, the respect he commanded in the Nigerian dressing room increased even more.

His teammates and his coach respected him.

And where Sam was respected, his genius shows.

In training, his level continued increasing in every single training session, growing to a truly terrifying level as Sam showed how prepared he was for Nigeria's last game of the World Cup qualifiers.

Mentally, he was a monster and now, physically, he was also at his peak.

Train, train, and more training...

This was Sam's schedule for the next few days after the Lesotho game, he conditioned his body and mind to its possible peak state.

Like this, time moved fast and in a short while, D-day was here.

(Matchday 10 of 10:)

(Nigeria – Benin)

(Date: 13th October, 2025)

Unlike the Lesotho game, this time, it was a home game for the Nigerians.

On the 12th of October, Nigeria welcomed the Benin Republic national team and the next day, on the 13th, they lined up in the Moshood Abiola national stadium for the final clash of World Cup qualifying.

It was international football..., and it was matchday.



The Moshood Abiola national stadium in Abuja became a cauldron of passion on this decisive matchday, the last of FIFA World Cup qualifying.

Over 60,000 fans, draped in Nigeria's iconic green and white flood the stands, their voices merging into a thunderous roar that shook the very foundations of this old stadium.

"Owe owe owe owe..., owe..., owe...!" They sang with exuberant energy, eager to ride this last journey alongside their country.

The reception for this game was bigger than expected.

Afterall, a lot of football fans already gave up on Nigeria's qualification chances but after the masterstroke that Eric Chelle pulled in convincing Sam to abandon his club duties and play for Nigeria, resulting in the Lesotho display, millions of football fans across the country were suddenly interested again.

It was a nation reinfused with hope again.

The air was thick with anticipation, a mix of nervous tension and unwavering belief. Drums pound rhythmically, trumpets blared, and vuvuzelas screamed into the night, creating a wall of sound that drowned out even the announcer's voice.

Waves of chanting and singing swept through the crowd, a relentless tide of national pride.

On the pitch, the Super Eagles stood tall, soaking all the energy in, their eyes burning with determination.

As for the Beninese players, though talented, they felt the weight of the atmosphere created by the Nigerians; the intimidation was real.

And then...

FWEEE!

The game started.

Chapter 330 Leading a Nation to qualification

Nigeria started with exactly the same formation that they played Lesotho with. As for Benin Republic, they also played with their best lineup.

Just like Lesotho, Benin Republic played in a 4-3-3 formation.

Saturnin Allagbe was their goalkeeper for the evening, while ahead of the goalkeeper stood the quadruple defense of Ryan Adigo in left back, Olivier Verdon and Cedric Hountondji in center defense, and Tamimou Ouorou in right back.

Ahead of the defensive quadruple was a midfield trio of Sessi D'Almeida, Mariano Ahouangbo who were both defensive midfielders, and Junior Olaitan.

Further ahead of the midfield was the attacking trio comprised of Jodel Dossou as the right winger, Steve Mounie playing as the left winger, and Andreas Hountondji playing as the center forward.

From Benin Republic's deployment of 2 defensive midfielders for this game, it was clear that their strategy today was a defensive one.

They wanted to soak the pressure and suffocate the Nigerians, just like Lesotho almost did a week ago.

Just like Lesotho, they had nothing to play for.

While to the Nigerians it was a must-win game, to them, it was just a game of bragging rights. Winning a World Cup qualifier game against Nigeria was a feat to brag about, and this was what they aimed for.

It was a clash of survival vs ambition.

FWEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, all hell broke loose as the 2 different convictions pushing the 2 national teams clashed.

Survival vs ambition, qualification vs bragging rights, which would prevail?

As soon as the game started, the roar of the Nigerian fans hit a crescendo, rising through the roof of this stadium as they cheered their team on.

And on the pitch, the players in green responded.

Nigeria quickly showed their dominance in this game, running the Benin Republic players ragged as they were forced to defend against the onslaught of their opponents.

It quickly became evident that compared to the Lesotho game, this Nigerian team was even more cohesive and had much closer chemistry.

Their passes were more seamless than ever before, their combinations effective and lethal as they repeatedly pried the Benin low block open.

Benin Republic defended with their lives but against the attacking onslaught of their opponents, they were proving flimsy.

In this game, one of the Benin Republic players was tasked to mark Sam but such a task..., it was only torture to the player in question.

Sam could not be contained in this game. He was like an unstoppable hurricane, steering the engine called Nigeria with his tyrannical will.

It didn't take too long for the floodgates to open.

As early as the 13th minute of this game, Sam laid his first imprint in this game with tyrannical skill and elegant bearing.

Receiving a pass from Ola Aina all the way from the left, Sam controlled the ball with his chest and as his marker rushed in, calmly, Sam used his momentum against him, flicking the ball above him.

As the ball floated above the player's head, Sam evaded his run, leaving him to collapse to the ground as he charged forward with the ball.

Before more Benin players could close him down, he spotted a run, and then...

Bam!

Hitting the ball with the outside of his weaker left boot, Sam unleashed an unreal trivela pass that rose up and curled beyond the reach of the Benin defenders, arriving just ahead of a certain player in green.

Alex Iwobi's late run was timed perfectly, and the pass, perfectly timed and weighted arrived just before he could cross the offside line.

Staying onside, Alex Iwobi took one touch to control the ball and as the Benin goalkeeper charged out, he poked the ball past him and into the net.

"GOALLLL...!!!" The Moshood Abiola stadium turned into a cauldron of noise.

The ecstatic Nigerian fans celebrated the goal exuberantly, numerous fans tearing their clothes in the stands as they celebrated with mad passion.

That goal..., was just the first in a totally convincing onslaught.

In the 23rd minute, Ademola Lookman went haywire, finally bringing his Atalanta form to the national team.

After receiving a pass from Alex Iwobi, the winger went on a mazy run, cutting through multiple players like they were not there as he flexed his silky dribbling skills, arriving inside the box before playing a clever cross.

Bam!

As soon as the ball was played, Victor Osimhen escaped from his marker and rose high into the air, aiming for the ball.

He got to it!

Bam!

Inclining his head, he directed the ball with his head towards the top right corner, away from the Benin goalkeeper's range.

The ball was hit and floated with pin-point accuracy, nestling in the top corner even as this stadium erupted again.

In barely 25 minutes, Nigeria was already cleanly ahead in this game.

This Nigerian squad was a shadow of its former self, unlike the Nigerian squad that struggled in every other game, unable to score goals.

All that changed was the introduction of a 19-year-old.

Not just any 19-year-old, but Samuel Moses.

A 19-year-old with a nation on his shoulders, a 19-year-old leading a nation to qualification!

For the rest of the first half, Benin defended valiantly, maintaining the scoreline as the first half ended with Nigeria winning 2-0.

When second half started though, the onslaught continued.

In the 58th minute of the game, Sam finally received the ball in a prime position, just outside the 18-yard box as Alex Iwobi set him up.

"...!"

That ball caught the Benin defense off-guard.

"Close him down! Fast!"

They roared but it was already too late as Sam closed the distance to the ball with urgency in his legs, and clarity in his eyes and thoughts.

He knew exactly what he was doing, he knew exactly where he was aiming at, and then...

Sam hit the ball with a Federico Valverdeish power and accuracy.

It was an absolute rocket.

POW!

The Benin goalkeeper dived on instinct but he didn't even see the ball.

Like a phantom ghost, it rushed towards the goal unhindered before tearing its way into the net in the 45th plus 1 minute of this game.

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

Ecstatic Nigerian fans broke out the Sam chant in this international game.

Spreading his arms to acknowledge the adoration of the fans, Sam charged towards the corner flag before crossing his arms, doing his Black Panther celebration even as the fans roared excitedly.



It was a terrific game, and it was not over yet.

In the 74th minute, Nigeria won a freekick in a dangerous position.