

## Football God 351

Chapter 351 A crazy tale

A day after the ballon d'Or ceremony.

Spain, Barcelona...

Thud! Thud!

5 youths jogged through the streets of Barcelona, sweating profusely even as they managed to keep their breathing at an optimum level.

Like usual, Sam was at the head of the pack, leading his training buddies.

Just behind him was the rapid Alejandro Balde, followed by Gavi, and then Pedri and Lamine Yamal who jogged at their own pace.

Yesterday, they were in Paris, attending one of the biggest ceremonies in football as they were shoved on the spotlight. Not just that, Sam even managed to steal the show in the ballon d'Or ceremony.

But they did not let that cloud their brain after returning to Spain.

The ballon d'Or ceremony was the reward ceremony for their performances in the previous season. For the new season, the ballon d'Or race already started.

If they wanted to achieve more in their careers, they knew not to dwell too much on something like a ceremony. This was why returning to Spain, they didn't rest, continuing their training schedule.

Of course, Sam was the one who forced it on them.

Lamine Yamal complained at first since Hansi Flick, their coach gave them a day out after the ballon d'Or ceremony but to Sam, a day out did not take anything away from their personal training.

This was why this morning, the 5 of them hit the streets of Barcelona again.

"3..., 2..., 1, now!" Sam yelled as soon as they were 50 meters away from the Spotify Camp Nou, erupting into a sprint.

Like usual, Alejandro Balde dug into his reserves, pushing him to the end but once again, Sam arrived at the finishing line first.

After they both arrived, panting, they turned, waiting for the others.

Like usual, Gavi arrived next and then today, surprisingly, Pedri finally beat Lamine Yamal in a sprint race, arriving first.

Instead of focusing on Pedri's feat though, they didn't, rather focusing on Sam. "Bastardo!" Gavi came, punching him.

"How can you be so multitalented?" He joked in Spanish.

"To think you'd come 5th in the ballon d'or!" Alejandro Balde added as he was not able to hide the astonishment in his voice.

It was already a full day since the ballon d'Or ceremony in France, but his teammates still could not get over it.

From the final ballon d'Or ranking that was released yesterday by France Football, the ranking meant that Sam was recognized as the 5th best player in the world last season!

To his training buddies, this was shocking.

Afterall, last season, Sam didn't even play in the UEFA Champions League, meaning he played the season with a big handicap already.

Besides, his club, it was not the biggest in Spain.

Heck, Lamine Yamal only truly heard much about Fulham, Sam's former club after getting close to the Nigerian maverick.

To think that playing for such a small club in England, not playing in the UEFA champions league, Sam would still be recognized as the 5th best player in the world during the previous season was shocking to these players.

'This guy...!' Lamine Yamal simply couldn't get it out of his head.

Salah winning the ballon d'or trophy was not shocking after his performances and record-breaking heroics during the previous season for Liverpool.

Jamal Musiala coming second was not shocking either. Afterall, during the later stages of the previous season, the German midfielder truly exploded, producing scintillating performances to lead Bayern Munich all the way to the UEFA Champions League final.

Even on the final, he dazzled, only losing because his team was weaker.

Musiala's 2nd best ranking was not a shocker too.

Arnold and Mbappe making the top 4 was also not shocking, but Sam making the top 5? To people like Pedri and the others who didn't know much about him till their club signed him, it was beyond shocking.

Heck, Sam was rated higher than every single FC Barcelona player despite the crazy things that they achieved in the previous season.

"Sam, how do you do it?" Balde asked, genuinely baffled. "How can you be so good?"

"It's almost like you can play in any position on the field".

"How can you be so good in attacking midfield and still be so lethal as a striker? Heck, it's so unfair!" The Spaniard cried.

Sam chuckled. "Come on guys, it's nothing".

"Nothing?!" They almost strangled him.

In the end, entering the Spotify Camp Nou gym alongside them, Sam was forced to tell his story even as he also worked out with them.

After the ballon d'Or ceremony yesterday, his popularity grew again.

Millions of football fans around the world already knew him and his ability after his recent performances for FC Barcelona. But aside from football fans in England and Nigeria, few truly knew how good he was for Fulham.

This was why after the ballon d'Or ceremony, millions of football fans followed him on social media, digging out his story.

They were eager to know the pre-Barcelona Sam.

There were few things fans loved than a good weak to strong story, and Sam's story was a perfect one, an almost unbelievable one.

From the streets of Abraka all the way to West London in England, from Enyimba FC to Fulham FC, they were eager to know his history.

Due to all this, a certain youtuber who made his YouTube channel solely dedicated to Sam's career experienced a crazy surge in subscribers.

While fans were patient enough to go to YouTube videos to dig out his history, Sam's friends, Gavi, Pedri, Yamal, and Balde were not as patient.

Since they had such exclusive access to him, they wanted first-hand information and so right there in the gym, Sam was forced to tell his story.

He felt like crying but at the same time, he enjoyed it.

Telling them his story left him feeling proud of how far he had come.

From the streets of Abraka, his first Christmas game in the Delta State University field, he didn't hide anything.

And then to his heroics for Enyimba FC, forcing his way into the starting XI and leading the Nigerian club to glory on the continental stage.

He did not exclude any detail, telling them of Austin, his captain during his Enyimba days who he struck a great partnership with on the field.

He told them of the CAF champions league battles.

The scintillating battles against Al Ahly, Wydad AC, the penalty shootouts, the crazy comebacks that he orchestrated, Sam recalled it all, telling them.

At some point, even he was stunned.

'Damn! I really am good'.

And then his debut for Fulham FC.

When he got to this stage, Lamine Yamal perked up, eager to hear more.

He told them of his first half season for the English club. When he told them of how in just his first half season, he led Fulham to its first trophy in decades, the Carabao Cup, their jaws dropped open in shock.

"Bastardo!" Gavi cursed. "This guy..., you're a freak!" He said in Spanish, making the others burst out laughing.

When he told them of how his coach refused to play him at first, but finally decided to let go of his pride, a decision that paid off dividends, they reeled, Yamal in particular almost worshipping him as they laughed.

The manner in which he led Fulham to knock out Liverpool out of the Carabao Cup shocked them, leaving them hooked and engrossed in the story.

And then, his record-breaking 2nd season for Fulham.

The unforgettable, 5th ballon d'Or-ranking season.

The premier league winning season!

When Sam started his story and progressed, at some point, it became hard for even his friends to believe. This was simply because it was too good to be true.

His clutch moments in games, those unforgettable games against Chelsea, Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal, they all left an impression on his teammates.

His stint in England was crazy, truly crazy times.

When he got to his incredible hatrick displays against Manchester City, Lamine Yamal could not help but utter a 'damn!'

"Bastardo!" Gavi exclaimed again, not able to hold himself.

And eventually, when he got to the climax, they held their breaths.



This climax, it was too much!

To think that Fulham and Liverpool were tied on points on the final matchday of the season, and they needed to score a minimum of 6 goals against the reigning English champions to dethrone them to the premier league title!

This..., how on earth did Sam and Fulham do it?

When Sam told the story, they refused to believe it.

"The heck! You guys actually did that?!"

"That is how you got your premier league trophy?!" Balde exclaimed.

"Yes, what did you expect?" Sam laughed.

"No wonder you were ranked 5th in the ballon d'Or". Pedri muttered.

Then the next moment, Alejandro Balde went to the ground, doing push-ups out of respect for Sam, making the others laugh.

At the end of Sam's story, they were all flabbergasted.

They all laughed over it but after that story, they never saw him in the same way again. That story was crazy.

They no longer saw Sam as a normal footballer, they now saw him as a freak.

'That guy..., he's crazy!'

Chapter 352 Family's day out

After months of speculation, the 2025 Ballon d'Or award was finally given out, Mohamed Salah joining a host of illustrious footballing greats to have won the award in their career.

And with it, the 2026 Ballon d'Or award race began.

Theoretically, from the moment that the 2025/2026 football season started, the 2026 Ballon d'Or race already started.

But though this was the reality, psychologically, football fans and even football players themselves didn't truly see it so until the previous season's ballon d'Or award was finally given out.

With the award given, they finally felt all shackles of the previous football season leaving them, fully embracing the new season finally.

2024/2025 was gone...

...now all eyes were on the 2025/2026 football campaign.

Who would be Mohamed Salah's successor come October 2026?

Besides, 2026 was special because unlike the previous season, it was a World Cup year. And without doubt, the FIFA World Cup that was to be held in the U.S.A and Canada would become the biggest decider for the ballon d'Or award.

Which country was the favorite for the 2026 FIFA World Cup?

After the final string of FIFA World Cup qualifier matches were played this year, FIFA finally released their updated national team ranking.

[FIFA Men's World Ranking:]

[The FIFA Men's World Ranking is a ranking system for men's national teams in association football. The men's teams of the member nations of FIFA, football's world governing body are ranked based on their game results with the most successful teams being ranked highest.]

[The rankings were introduced in December 1992, and eight teams; Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain have held the top position, of which Brazil have spent the longest time ranked first.]

[Top rankings as of 28th October, 2025:]

[1. Argentina]

[2. Spain]

[3. France]

[4. England]

[5. Brazil]

[6. Portugal]

[7. Netherlands]

[8. Belgium]

[9. Italy]

[10. Germany]

[11. Uruguay]

[12. Colombia]

[13. Croatia]

[14. Morocco]

[15. Japan]

[16. United States]

[17. Senegal]

[18. Iran]

[19. Mexico]

[20. Switzerland]

This were the top 20 highest ranked FIFA nations.

A points system is used to determine the ranking, with points being awarded based on the results of all FIFA-recognized full international matches.

The ranking system has been revamped on several occasions, generally responding to criticism that the preceding calculation method did not effectively reflect the relative strengths of the national teams.

Since 16 August, 2018, the ranking system has adopted the Elo rating system used in chess and Go.

Among the top 20 recognized FIFA nations, there was no place for Nigeria, Senegal and Morocco being the highest ranked African national teams.

After their crazy run during the 2022 FIFA World Cup, going all the way to the semifinals, Morocco climbed into the top 20 of FIFA ranking, eclipsing Senegal as the best African footballing nation.

It was also after the 2022 FIFA World Cup that Argentina stole 1st position.

Not just due to the World Cup win, Argentina as a country was going through a purple patch in terms of international football.

Afterall, they were right at the center of an ongoing dynasty.

An imperious Argentine dynasty led by the King, Lionel Messi, who's now led Argentina to an impressive 3-peat of international trophies, winning the 2021 Copa America, the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and then the 2024 Copa America in succession.

It was a crazy period for Argentina and its fans, equaling Spain's purple reign during the early 2010s.

There were now even debates on social media about how high they would rank in a ranking of all-time best national football sides.

Argentina was not the out and out favorite though.

Last year, during Euro 2024, Spain showed to the rest of the footballing world that their country was back to dominate football internationally.

Led by the imperious Rodri at the middle of the pitch, and the dynamic duo of Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams running the flanks, Spain formed an imperious side that defeated all opposition to win the 2024 Euros.

After that performance, nobody dared underestimate them.

Just like Argentina, they were favorites for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Not just them. Countries like France and Brazil could not be underestimated either. With so many superstars in their squads, the sky was their limit.

Among all these favorites, Nigeria was nowhere to be seen.

This was why recently, a lot of fans urged Sam to leave his country and play for another country of his choice, either England or even Spain.

FC Barcelona were working his Spanish International Passport. If Sam really wanted, he could play for Spain, but is that what he wanted?

That morning, laying down on his bed after completing his daily system quest, Sam looked at his ceiling, thinking.

He shook his head though. 'Nah, I'll stay'.

He was too loyal to his home country to play for another country.

Call him foolish but the truth was that he was Nigerian true and true, bred and raised from the suburbs of the country.

He could not imagine himself donning the national team jersey of another country. He smiled. 'If Nigeria is not feared, I'll make them feared'.

'They think we're not favorites?' He grinned. 'Try me'.

On his bed, he grinned cheekily, envisioning a fantasy future of himself with the national team winning major trophies.



The FIFA World Cup being important did not mean it was the only criteria to winning the ballon d'Or award though.

Domestic club football performance was still important, so also was the overall performance and achievement in the UEFA Champions League.

'This time, it was Salah's turn'.

Sam's eyes gleamed. 'I'll make sure next year is my turn'.

'But for now, it's family day out time'.

"Babe, you're still on the bed?!" Kayla's raised voice snapped Sam out of his reverie as he chuckled.

"Coming babe," he laughed. "I'll be done in a minute".

After his Golden Boy award, Mrs. Moses was never the same.

Back in Nigeria, Sam's father called him, telling him about how his mother could not stop bragging about the achievement of her son.

"Have you heard?"

"They say my son won the balloon award!"

"He is the best young player in the world!"

Sam was used to his mom's shenanigans though, laughing it off.

And since he had today off, he decided to make his first major individual award memorable, inviting all of his family to meet him here in Spain for the first time in their lives.

And so, having paid for their flight tickets yesterday, this morning, Sam's family finally arrived in Barcelona.

As soon as they arrived, Mrs. Moses did not hold back as she hugged her son, drowning him in kisses, and repeatedly telling him how proud of him she was.

Tired of the kisses and feeling mischievous, Sam smirked at his mom. "Are you sure you're proud of me?"

"Is my memory failing me, or who forbade me from playing football?"

"That....," Mrs. Moses was stumped.

"That, you know....,"

In the end, to Sam's shock, his mom didn't try to wriggle out of it this time like she had always done for 100% of his life.

This time, smiling shamelessly, she accepted it. "I accept, I did forbid you from playing football. Forgive me son, I was foolish then".

"But you can't blame me". She added, making Sam roll his eyes.

"I was just trying to protect my son".

"I mean, come on, I carried you in my stomach for 9 months. Do you know the pains of pushing you out on the day you came out?"

"And you expect me to just accept you getting injured carelessly because you love playing football?"

"Come on, I was concerned for my first fruit, you can't blame me".

Kayla glared at Sam. "Stop it already, stop making mom feel guilty".

Sam chuckled, raising his arms in surrender. "Ok, ok, I surrender".

Mr. Moses laughed. "So, what's the destination this time?"

"Kayla's African Cuisine?"

"Huh?" Mr. Moses looked at Kayla who puffed, smiling proudly.

"After getting exposed to mom's dishes the first time, I become truly fascinated by African foods and so I decided to start up a restaurant here".

"Don't worry, I don't have the time to attend to it every time so I hired African food specialists who would be doing the job in my absence".

"And guess what?" She raised her head proudly. "I brought them all the way from Nigeria the last time I visited".

"When Sam was detained?"

"Yes". She nodded with pride.

"This..., wow!" Mr. Moses was flabbergasted. "To still think of that even in that tense situation, girl, I guess I may have underestimated your calm under pressure".

"I know I'm awesome!" Kayla accepted shamelessly, making the others laugh.

That morning, they went to Kayla's restaurant, enjoying different delicious African delicacies after which Sam took his family on a tour around Barcelona.

He ended the tour by taking them to the iconic Spotify Camp Nou stadium.

Despite coming here already when his son came to Barcelona the first time for his unveiling, Mr. Moses could not help but break down in tears.

"Dad?!" Sam was shocked.

Mr. Moses raised a hand to allay his worries. "It's ok son. It's just, coming here with my family, it's been the longest dream of mine".

"I never thought I'd get to fulfill it someday, but well, here I am".

Sam grinned. "I love you dad, and mom too, and Kayla, and Sophia".

"Why me last?" Sophia grumbled.

Sam laughed.

After a long day, their family's day out finally came to an end.

That night, Sam got a message notification from his coach.

Ding!

{NEW! Unread message from Hansi Flick...}

Hansi Flick dropped the next fixture of FC Barcelona.

Football... was back.

Chapter 353 After the ballon d'Or [1]

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Espanyol)

(Date: 3rd November, 2025)

These days, there was a popularized term among football communities, 'Football before the ballon d'Or' and 'Football after the ballon d'Or'.

It did not just circulate among fan circles, it also circulated among player circles, the FC Barcelona circle not excluded, Sam and his friend circle in particular.

After the 2025 ballon d'Or ceremony in Paris, France, Sam's very first ballon d'Or ceremony and his first taste of a big individual trophy, the Golden Boy award, Sam's heart was ignited with passion once again.

Not just him, his close football friends experienced the same thing.

Afterall, just like him and apart from Alejandro Balde, Pedri, Gavi, and Lamine Yamal were all winners of the Golden Boy award before him.

Now, they wanted to level up and broaden their horizons.

They didn't want to be just the best youth player anymore, rather, they wanted to become the best player in the world.

And their ballon d'Or bid already started.

This was why Sam and his friends trained for the Espanyol game differently.

In the build-up to the La Liga clash against Espanyol, the group of friends trained harder than usual and also worked harder than usual.

It was not just because of their ballon d'Or bid though, it was also because like usual, they decided to turn it into a close circle competition.

Gavi suddenly brought it up one morning while they jogged.

"Hehe".

Hearing that chuckle, they knew that the fiery and short Spaniard was up to no good and when Gavi opened his mouth, they confirmed it.

"Just competing against others for the ballon d'Or is too boring and fleeting. Let's make it our competition like usual. Just like our sprint competitions, and the late-coming competitions".

"Let's turn the ballon d'Or bid into a personal competition".

It was a crazy idea from Gavi, but why not?

This was why Sam put even more effort into prepping for the Espanyol game. Days before the game, Hansi Flick revealed his starting XI.

All 5 of them made it to the starting XI.

Just like that, a few days passed in a jiffy and it was D-day already.

30 minutes before the game, the starting XI for both teams was released officially. Like expected, they both started with strong lineups.



For Espanyol, starting in their regular 4-2-3-1 formation, the visitors started with a defensive quadruple of Romero, Cabrera, Kumbulla, and El Hilali, with Garcia protecting them in between the posts.

The midfield duo comprised of Gonzalez de Zarate and Lozano.

As for the 4-man attack, Puado started in left wing, Kral in attacking midfield, Carreras in right wing, and Fernandez as the striker.

On the opposite side, the home side started in the same formation.

Marc Andre Ter Stegen started in between the posts with a defensive quadruple of Alejandro Balde, Pau Cubarsi, Ronaldo Araujo, and Jules Kounde sitting ahead of him. The defensive duo comprised of Pedri and Gavi.

And then up ahead, Dani Olmo started in attacking midfield, flanked by Lamine Yamal on the right and Raphinha on the left.

And then like usual, Sam started as the striker, Barca's false 9.

FWEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, from the first minute of kickoff, led by Sam at the tip of the attack, FC Barcelona went about dissecting their opponents.

Visiting their opponent's imperious backyard, nobody expected Espanyol to play attacking football and like expected, they played defensive.

What nobody expected was just how thorough their defensive set-up would be ruthlessly torn apart by a rampant FC Barcelona attack.

At first, it was tough to break down, solid defensive play shutting out a rampant Raphinha and Lamine Yamal through the wings.

Playing in his false 9 position, the 2 center backs pushed up, not giving Sam any space to work his magic.

For 10 minutes, this worked until Sam decided to fall deeper to create.

Just 3 minutes after he did this, he erupted.

BZZZ!

A receive, one delicate touch, a flick to evade a tackle, an ankle-breaker body feint, a delicious elastico to open up space, and then a penetrating through pass.

In one moment of individual brilliance, Dani Olmo and Sam swap positions, Sam playing the ball in for the Spaniard who didn't miss his mark.

With a silky smooth la croqueta, Dani Olmo rounded the Espanyol goalkeeper, Garcia before poking into an empty net to make it 1 nil.

The Spotify Camp Nou erupted.

13 minutes, 1-0...

That..., opened the floodgates.

Just a few minutes later, in the 18th minute, it was Lamine Yamal's turn to provide the assist, playing Dani Olmo on again to score after a moment of the Spaniard showing his mastery in the tight spaces.

18 minutes, 2-0, Dani Olmo 2 goals.

After that, Sam, Raphinha, Dani Olmo, and Lamine Yamal went haywire, cutting Espanyol open repeatedly like a hot knife through butter.

Espanyol defended with their lives, for a time, but it was not enough.

In the 29th minute, Raphinha did it, getting on the end of another Sam pass before playing a thunderous volley past the Espanyol goalkeeper.

In the 35th minute, Pau Cubarsi got on the end of a Raphinha cross, putting it past the Espanyol goalkeeper to make it 4 nil.

It was a drubbing already, but they were not done, not yet.

In the 45th minute, piling on Espanyol's misery, Sam went on an incredible solo run after a pass from Lamine Yamal, going through 5 players before burying the ball into the net in a display of skill and sheer brilliance.

FWEEE!

The ref finally blew for halftime after that.

45 minutes, 5-0...

Espanyol were being humiliated by the champions.

When 2nd half started, FC Barcelona removed their foot off the gas even as it gave Espanyol some ideas.

In the 68th minute, they scored from a corner.

Was that the catalyst for a comeback?

No.

It only gave them a false hope, false hope that was dashed in just 2 minutes.

In the 70th minute, Sam got his brace, stealing the ball with his aggressive pressing up the field and catching Espanyol off-guard before scoring an easy goal.

6 nil to FC Barcelona.

And then just 7 minutes later, in the 77th minute, it happened again.

Alejandro Balde started an overlapping run from deep after winning the ball, starting an FC Barcelona counterattack.

He passed to Raphinha who poked to Sam who flicked the ball back to Balde for the young Barcelona fullback to smash past the Espanyol goalkeeper.

GOAL..., 7 nil.

Sam was substituted after 80 minutes, Pau Victor coming on in his place but he already did the damage with his 2 goals and 3 assists.

In additional time, Pau Victor got a goal for his troubles to end the rout.

8-0 to FC Barcelona, an imperious victory.

Sam got another man of the match award.

Chapter 354 After the ballon d'Or [2]

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Matchday 4 of 8:)

(Dynamo Kyiv – FC Barcelona)

(Date: 6th November, 2025)

After the 8-0 drubbing of Espanyol at the Spotify Camp Nou, just 3 days later, Barca got a UEFA champions league date with Dynamo Kyiv in Ukraine.

Like expected, Sam made the FC Barcelona squad for the game.

There was no change to Hansi Flick's starting XI for this game.

As for the home side though, the Ukraine club started with their most formidable lineup against the visiting Catalan giants.

Starting in their customary 4-3-3 formation, Neshcheret started in between the posts for the Ukrainian club. Starting ahead of him was a quadruple defense of Tymchyk, Popov, Mykhavko, and Vivcharenko.

In midfield was a trio of Buyalskyi, Mykhaylenko, and Pikhalyonok.

And then in attack was the attacking trio of Yarmolenko, Vanat, and Kabayev, forming a dangerous Dynamo Kyiv side.

Against the Catalans in their home stadium, the Ukrainian club bared their fangs first, getting an early lead in just the 3rd minute of the game from an absolute thunderbolt of a shot.

From outside the box, Mykhaylenko set himself up before unleashing an absolute piledriver that tore its way into the bottom left corner of the net, leaving Marc Andre Ter Stegen with no chance.

That goal woke Barca up but before they could bite, the home side struck again from a lightning-quick counterattack.

The ball moved from defense to attack in nothing but a second.

Before the Catalans knew it, Yarmolenko, the Dynamo Kyiv right winger already poked the ball past Marc Andre Ter Stegen into the net.

2-0 in 20 minutes...

Well, that did make the Catalans finally bare their fangs.

Raphinha started a famous comeback night in the UEFA Champions league for the Catalans, buoyed by an absolute Pedri masterclass in midfield.

Pedri was silky this game, silky and smooth like a prime Andres Iniesta.

After helping the Catalans dictate the game, settling his team into the game and dictating the tempo, he amped it, suddenly playing a defense-splitting pass in the 34th minute, setting Raphinha up.

The Brazilian did not miss his mark, shooting from a tight angle to score.

34 minutes, 2-1...

Raphinha's celebration was short but passionate, the comeback was on.

After that goal, Dynamo Kyiv tried to rally but in midfield, Pedri ran circles around their midfielders, setting the tempo for the game.

Pedri was having an absolute midfield masterclass.

In the 43rd minute, he played a lobbed pass over the Dynamo Kyiv defense, setting Raphinha up to score his brace from an all too familiar volley.



The first half ended fiery but it was a draw.

In the 2nd half, Pedri continued his masterclass, passing to Dani Olmo who set up Lamine Yamal to get the 3rd FC Barcelona goal of this game.

That was when the away fans erupted.

"GOALLLLLLL...!!!" They celebrated madly, the comeback was done, for a time.

Unwilling to give up, the Ukrainian club rallied, pouring a mountain of attacking resources at the Catalans and in the 80th minute, it bore fruit.

Vanat, Dynamo Kyiv's striker finally shot.

Again, it was a counter-attack.

2 touches, that was all it took.

One touch to skip past Pau Cubarsi, overpowering the young defender with his physicality and his next touch was the shot, beating Ter Stegen easily.

3-3!

What a game!

The atmosphere in this stadium was now extremely frightening.

3-3, the score was level, a fitting way to end such a fiery and exciting game but the Catalans had no intentions of going home with just 1 point and Pedri made sure of it, combining with the King in one moment of genius in the last minute of the game in the 90th minute.

Bam!

Another silky lobbed pass from Pedri.

Bzzz!

Finally, after 90 minutes of a pretty subdued performance compared to his normal standards, Sam finally erupted, coming up clutch.

He jumped for the aerial ball, fighting, and he won the aerial battle.

With his head, he pushed the ball from the physical center backs who wrestled with him all game and then with his chest, he protected it, then...

...he struck!

They thought they had Sam marked, blocked, but he improvised.

Yes, they blocked all normal shooting options and so leaping up into the air and twisting his body in mid-air, Sam swung his left leg, executing an incredible scissor kick in the last minute of this game with his left leg.

Bam!

Neshcheret, the Dynamo Kyiv goalkeeper dived but the ball already went past him, nestling into the net.

"GOALLLLLLL...!!!" The away fans roared.

"ZINEDINE SAM...!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAM...!!!"

"He's struck again, clutch! Assassin!"

"When Barca needed him the most, he struck!"

"They kept him quiet for 89 minutes, but not for a full game!"

"He's the King, and he's arrived in Ukraine!"

Charging towards the corner flag, Sam slid on his knees in celebration even as he pointed at his head, highlighting his mentality.

"Vamos!!!" He roared at the camera.

His teammates arrived, swarming him.

That goal, Dynamo Kyiv was not recovering from it anytime soon.

A few minutes later, the referee blew the whistle, finally bringing this incredible UEFA champions league game to an end.

Sam may have grabbed the front papers with that clutch game-winning goal but in this game, Pedri was the star.

The midfielder got rewarded for his masterclass display with a deserving man of the match award.

Afterall, he got 3 assists in this game plus a pre-assist.

Pedri had his prints over all 4 goals that FC Barcelona scored.

Apart from Pedri's masterclass, with this performance, Sam took his tally to 17 goals in just 12 games for this campaign, also making it 6 goals now in 3 games in his debut UEFA champions league campaign.

The 2026 ballon d'Or race was on.

As for FC Barcelona, off to their next challenge, a domestic one.

They would be taking on Real Sociedad next in the league.

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(La Liga:)

(Real Sociedad – Barcelona)

(Date: 10th November, 2025)

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For FC Barcelona, it was another game to extend their lead over Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid at the forefront of La Liga.

## Chapter 355 The best striker on the planet [1]

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(La Liga:)

(Real Sociedad – Barcelona)

(Date: 10th November, 2025)

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On 10th November, a rampant FC Barcelona side visited Reale Arena.

They went up against a Real Sociedad side that was in form and had just thrashed Athletic Bilbao 1-3 in their last league game.

It didn't matter though, Barca visited that stadium with only one intention, to win and run away with all 3 points.

For his lineup this time, Hansi Flick made changes.

Starting in the familiar 4-2-3-1 formation, the attack remained the same with Raphinha, Sam, and Lamine Yamal all starting, while Dani Olmo started slightly behind them in attacking midfield.

Deeper in midfield though, a change was made, Gavi being rested for this game as Frankie De Jong took his spot on the team.

In defense, Alejandro Balde and Ronald Araujo were also rested, giving opportunities to Gerard Martin who started in left back. Apart from Martin, the rest of the defense comprised of Pau Cubarsi, Inigo Martinez, and Jules Kounde.

Like expected, Marc Andre Ter Stegen started in between the posts for the Catalan giants.

As for the home side, lining up in a familiar 4-1-4-1 formation, Alex Remiro covered the posts for them while ahead of him was a quadruple defense comprised of Aramburu, Elustondo, Aguerd, and Lopez.

In midfield was the imposing figure of Martin Zubimendi, while ahead of him was the playmaking quadruple of Tite Kubo, Zakharyan, Marin, and Gomez.

Oskarsson started as Real Sociedad's striker today.

Having scored 2 goals in the Athletic Bilbao game, Oskarsson was in top form. This game was dubbed the game of strikers.

And when the referee's whistle sounded, it indeed seemed so.

FWEEE!

The first 10 minutes of this game was tight and even as both sides probed each other, Real Sociedad's defense staying solid against the Catalan attack.

But then, in the 12th minute of this game, the in-form striker struck.

Just one chance, one opportunity, one counter-attack was all he needed to sink FC Barcelona into the pit of trailing behind in this game.

After a series of attacking plays by the Catalan giants, the ball got to Dani Olmo in the box who twisted and turned, finding the right angle to unleash a shot or play that killer pass that would cut Real Sociedad open.

But the opportunity never came because Martin Zubimendi clattered into him, winning the ball fairly after a heavy tackle.

As soon as the Spanish midfielder won the ball, he spotted a run..., Oskarsson's run and he did not hesitate.

Bam!

Hitting the ball long, the striker exploded into a foot race with Inigo Martinez.



Oskarsson managed to keep his composure under pressure from the Barcelona center back as after taking one touch to control the ball, a slightly heavy touch, he stretched his left leg, poking the ball past the onrushing Ter Stegen.

BOOM!

The Reale Arena exploded with noise immediately as ecstatic fans roared at the top of their lungs, celebrating the goal and their corresponding lead.

That goal..., derailed Barcelona's energy a bit, but it didn't last.

This was because after that, the King struck.

They say the Lion is the King of the Jungle, well, today, Sam showed to football fans across the world that he was the King of the Spanish La Liga.

Barcelona went behind in the 12th minute, and for 20 minutes, they suffered, their attack coming stuck against a tight Real Sociedad defense until Sam struck with his fangs and deadly claws.

4 minutes, that was all it took to turn the game on its head.

3 touches of the ball..., that was all it took to sink Real Sociedad.

Bam!

The first came in the 32nd minute as Sam lashed on the end of an incredible Lamine Yamal trivela pass, directing the ball past the goalkeeper and into the net.

Just one touch.

1-1...

A minute later, just after Real Sociedad kicked off again in the 33rd minute, Frankie De Jong won back the ball and quickly played a lobbed pass to Sam.

Alex Remiro, the Real Sociedad goalkeeper charged out but keeping his composure, Sam chipped the goalkeeper, scoring a cheeky goal.

1-2...

From losing, Barcelona began winning in the blink of an eye, but that was not all as he struck again.

Once again, just one touch.

2 minutes after his second goal, in the 36th minute of this game, Sam got a diagonal pass from Pedri. Receiving the ball just outside the Real Sociedad 18-yard box, with his quick feet, he evaded challenges, setting himself up, then...

POW!

He completed the set with an absolute thunderbolt shot!

Alex Remiro was rooted to one spot, not moving till the ball nestled into his net. He looked at the rustling net, stunned.

"GOALLLLLL...!!!" FC Barcelona fans roared in ecstasy, and then the Sam chants burst out in the Reale Arena.

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

"What the heck! The heck! The heck!"

"My GOD!!!" The commentators raved.

"3 touches, 3 goals, and Reale Arena is stunned!"

"Real Sociedad can't believe their eyes, they're seeing ghosts!"

"And ladies and gentlemen, this is Him, Samuel Moses, the best striker on the planet!"

"4 minutes was all he needed to singlehandedly win the game!"

Sam charged to the corner flag, spreading his arms, doing the Jude Bellingham celebration as a stunned fanbase stared at him.

What..., did they just witness?

The first half ended 1-3 in Barca's favor.

In the 2nd half, Pedri scored a goal to round off an amazing performance as the game eventually came to an end 1-4 in Barca's favor.

With another hatrick added to his collection, Sam comfortably won the man of the match award.

And now, he was on a goalscoring streak.

With today's hatrick, Sam now had 20 goals in just 13 games this season, forming a completely crazy goalscoring ratio.

Barcelona extended their lead at the top of the La Liga table.

Their next fixture was another away Spanish La Liga game against Celta Vigo.

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(La Liga:)

(Celta Vigo – Barcelona)

(Date: 23rd November, 2025)

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But before that, there was an international break from 10th to 18th November, meaning it was time for international duty again.

Chapter 356 The best striker on the planet [2]

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(International Friendlies:)

(Nigeria – Togo)

(Date: 13th November, 2025)

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(Ghana – Nigeria)

(Date: 16th November, 2025)

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For Nigerians, time was moving so fast.

One moment, they were stuck worrying about FIFA World Cup qualifying as they were just one step from missing another FIFA World Cup.

And yet, somehow, a miracle came in the form of Sam.

But that was not the end. Just after securing qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, another worry came in the form of the AFCON, the African Cup of Nations tournament, Africa's version of the Euros and Copa America tournament.

The last AFCON was played in 2023, a time of heartbreak for many Nigerians as they made it all the way to the final only to lose to the host nation, Ivory Coast.

After that final, the heartbreak lingered for a long time and after 2 years of healing from it, the AFCON was here again, starting this December.

Before the AFCON tournament though, Nigerian organized 2 international friendly games during the international break so the Nigerian coach could get in tune with his team and get them up to speed as fast as possible.

This was why Sam left Barcelona to join the Nigerian camp for the International friendly games.

Another reason why he did it was because International friendly games are unlike club friendly games.

Unlike in club friendlies where goals and assists are not recorded in the official stats record of a player, goals and assists provided in International friendly matches are recorded in a player's career stats, highlighting their importance.

This was why Sam was eager to don the green of the Nigerian national team again after his heroics the last time.

And oh boy, did his decision pay off.

It didn't take a long time. Like a blink, it was already D-Day.

The Togolese national football team visited Nigeria, only to be placed to the chopping block by a rampant Nigerian squad led by Sam.

For this international friendly, certain big names of the Nigerian squad were nowhere to be seen. Big names like Victor Osimhen, Victor Boniface, and Ademola Lookman didn't make the squad, leaving Sam as the biggest name there.

And for this reason, the Nigerian coach decided to take a gamble.

He decided to play Sam as a striker for the national team.

Afterall, Hansi Flick was doing it successfully in Barcelona and besides, this was just a friendly game which meant he could experiment.

And boy was the experiment a success.

In the game against Togo, Sam dominated from the first minute of the game.

In the 8th minute of the game, after some tight space dribbling in the box, he set up Alex Iwobi who scored from a precision shot towards the top right corner.

That goal sent the Nigerian national football stadium into a frenzy.

Togo tried to rally after going behind but not when Sam was on the pitch. The Togolese defenders struggled against him on the pitch, their struggle was clear as day, highlighting just how good he was.

In the 23rd minute of the game, he rattled the bar with a shot before doing the same again in the 38th minute.



"F\*ck!" Sam cursed, grabbing his head in disbelief.

'Damn! My luck is crap this game!'

Before the 1st half came to an end though, after an incredible solo run with the ball, he gave the pre-assist to another Nigerian goal, this time buried into the net by Frank Onyeka.

After that, the first half came to an end.

In the 2nd half, the game was more even as Togo threatened more but they got nothing to show for their efforts.

In the 77th minute of this game, tripped in the box, Sam won a penalty for Nigeria and taking the ball confidently, he waited for the ref's whistle.

FWEEE!

Once it sounded, he took a short run before hitting the ball, sending the goalkeeper one way and scoring the other way.

He jogged towards the corner flag with a big smile on his face, and then he did his Black Panther celebration.

The game came to an end with Nigeria winning 3-0 comfortably.

Trust Nigerians, after the game, they worshipped Sam like a God, raving about his performance all across social media.

But then came the big test against their archrivals, Ghana.

Joining the rest of the Nigerian squad, Sam made the trip to Accra, the capital city of Ghana where they clashed against the Black Stars.

This time, it was not as straightforward as the game against Togo.

The clash against the Black Stars of Ghana was tight and incredibly intense, but in the end, led by Sam, the Super Eagles of Nigeria got the edge over their rivals with a single goal difference.

Both countries played a goalless first half.

All the action came in the 2nd half though as they came with energy and fire.

Ghana struck first, stunning the visitors as their striker buried the ball into the net after an incredible sequence of passes, flaunting their seamless teamwork.

In the 61st minute, Nigeria trailed by 1 goal.

Today, it seemed that the Black Stars would be running away with the bragging rights but there was a defiant player on the Nigerian side.

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

He played with an obsessive desire to win.

Yet, the opponents didn't make it easy, till he forced their hand.

It happened in the 79th minute.

Trailing behind, the Super Eagles amped their attacking tempo, launching raid after raid of attacks against Ghana's defense, a move which finally bore fruit as Sam leaped highest, lashing into a slightly mishit cross.

Bending his body in mid-air, his head managed to hit the ball, directing it towards the top left corner of the post.

The Ghana goalkeeper dived, but not enough.

"GOALLLLLLLLL...!!!" The Super Eagles fans screamed at the top of their lungs.

Sam charged towards the corner flag, sliding in celebration even as they started chanting his name at the away stands.

Clearly, after that, the end of this game was a draw but again, Sam was not willing and so, he came up clutch from his country.

Leading the press from the front, he pressed the Ghana defense relentlessly till they made a mistake, the goalkeeper fumbling due to his pressure.

The goalkeeper panicked, mishitting the ball.

Stretching his leg, Sam managed to intercept the ball and just as the panicked goalkeeper rushed him, keeping his composure, Sam nutmegged the goalkeeper, the most humiliating move ever as the ball rolled into the net.

Cold..., just cold.

"SAM!" "SAM!" "SAM!"

The Sam chants broke out again in Ghana.

Sam equalized for his country in the 79th minute, then won it in the 88th.

The game came to an end with a Nigerian victory.

That game was later called the game of the King.

The Nigerian fans chanted. "Best striker in the f\*cking planet!"

With his brace, Sam took his goalscoring tally for the season to an incredible 23 goals in just 15 games!

Chapter 357 The best striker in the planet [3]

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(La Liga:)

(Celta Vigo – Barcelona)

(Date: 23rd November, 2025)

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Sam spent approximately a week in Nigeria, after which he took a flight back to Spain, Barcelona.

Kayla didn't follow him this time though.

Afterall, she was a university student, she had her life to attend to.

And so, after over a month since helping her boyfriend solve the scandal case that she was involved in, she finally felt comfortable enough to leave him in Barcelona.

With Kayla gone, Sam's full attention returned to football.

He had 7 days after the game against Ghana to prepare for his next club football, another Barcelona away game, this time against Celta Vigo.

Sam returned to his normal monotonic schedule. Alongside his training buddies, jog in the morning, work out in the gym, go for team training, engage in personal training, go home, sleep, wake up the next day, then reset.

It was monotonic, it was boring, but Sam was used to it.

His new friends were not exactly used to it though.

Alejandro Balde was the one who suggested it first. Training for 7 straight days in preparation for their next game and not doing anything else was just too boring, and so the Spaniard invited his friends for a birthday party.

It was the first big birthday party that Sam had attended in a long time.

As heroes of Spanish football, superstars of FC Barcelona, they got a big welcome on arriving at the birthday party venue.

Unlike what he expected, Sam had a nice time with his friends there.

And when he returned home, he felt even more refreshed to keep up with his schedule. 'Wow..., I never knew going out once in a while could be so refreshing'.

That was the only break in his schedule.

In no time, D-day was here and the FC Barcelona squad traveled to Celta Vigo, taking on their opponents in their home stadium.

FC Barcelona's hot winning streak continued, and so did Sam's goalscoring streak, highlighting the truth that he was the most in-form striker in the world again.

The game ended 2-5 in FC Barcelona's favor.

The first half was a bit tight, Celta Vigo playing a low block that frustrated the visitors, ending the first half in a 1-1 draw.

But in the second half, FC Barcelona exploded.

Sam scored the 2nd goal, giving FC Barcelona the lead and Pedri put out another masterclass from the middle of the pitch, Lamine Yamal being electric as usual as they took the game from the grasp of the home side.

Pedri scored the 3rd goal, courtesy of a Raphinha assist.

Lamine Yamal scored the 4th goal, while Raphinha scored the 5th goal, courtesy of an assist from Sam. Celta Vigo got a consolation goal, but it had no consequence to the overall disposition of the game.

Pedri won the man of the match award.

...

3 days later, Barcelona took on Sporting Lisbon in matchday 5th of the UEFA champions league group phase.

It was a tight game for the Catalans despite the fact that they played in their home stadium, the visitors from Portugal pushing them all the way.

Sporting Lisbon got the first goal in the 17th minute but a moment of individual brilliance from Lamine Yamal in the 28th minute leveled the game, as he scored a brilliant curler after a dazzling solo run.

In the 34th minute, Lamine Yamal did it again, setting up Gavi to score the 2nd FC Barcelona goal to give them the lead.

The first half came to an end 1-2 in Barca's favor.



But just 1 minute after the 2nd half restart, Sporting Lisbon did it, their star striker, Viktor Gyokeres scoring an absolute banger to level the proceedings again.

46th minute, 2-2...

The game continued like this till the 90th minute.

After maintaining their winning streak for so many games, Sporting Lisbon was on the verge of breaking it but a defiant striker refused to give up.

After being tightly man-marked out of this game for the majority of the game, Sam came clutch for FC Barcelona again, something Fulham fans were very used to.

These days, Barca fans were also getting used to it.

Sam scored from a header in additional time to steal all 3 points for FC Barcelona, dooming their Portuguese visitors to go back home with 0 points.

Lamine Yamal won the man of the match award of this game.

...

4 days later, on 30th November, Barcelona took on Elche at home.

On this game, Sam put out an attacking masterclass at the Spotify Camp Nou, registering a hatrick of assists and a goal to doom Elche to an absolute thrashing.

He was in terrific form.

The first goal came late in the first half, in the 43rd minute as the visitors managed to tame Barca's rampant attack for over 40 minutes with their low block.

But the energetic Gavi broke the momentum.

Like a relentless shark, he burst into the Elche 18-yard box, putting his energy to good use to be at the right place at the right time to receive Sam's pass, quickly poking it past the goalkeeper to get the first goal.

In the 45th plus 2 minutes, Sam did it again, spraying a pass to the left which Raphinha took in his strides, beating his man before cutting in and rifling a shot into the roof of the net with absolute venom, leaving the Elche goalkeeper no chance.

In the blink of an eye, from a goalless draw, Barcelona now had a 2-goal cushion, comfortably winning the game already.

This was how FC Barcelona was this season.

Just when you thought they've been tamed, they strike.

This season, they seemed inviolable.

It just felt like they had the ability to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and a draw no matter how tight the game was. And the difference maker, that X factor carrier, it was Samuel Moses.

Sam was not done though.

After 2nd half started, he continued his impressive play, smoothly combining with his fellow forwards and midfielders to devastating effect.

In the 56th minute of the game, he finally got his goal.

Receiving a pass from Lamine Yamal in the box, he twisted and turned, using his elastico dribble to cut past 2 defenders that marked him before coolly slotting into the bottom right corner, leaving the goalkeeper standing, stunned.

56 minutes, 3-nil to FC Barcelona.

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

The Sam chants broke out again in the Spotify Camp Nou stadium.

FC Barcelona fans across the world were having the time of their lives. When the club purchased Sam, they had high expectations for him, but not this high.

Sam already far exceeded all their expectations.

To cap off his incredible performance, Sam set up Ferran Torres next who replaced Raphinha in this game, scoring the 4th goal of the game.

Marc Andre Ter Stegen kept a clean sheet as Barcelona got another 3 points.

They were running away with the La Liga title.

Sam got another man of the match award and with that performance, he took his statistics for the season to 26 goals and 15 assists in just 18 games!

Incredible!

Sam was now leading the football world in the European golden boot race, having scored more goals than any other forward across the top 5 European leagues.

This season, he was in a level of his own.

FC Barcelona truly struck gold by getting his signature.

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(Barcelona fixtures:)

(La Liga:)

(Mallorca – Barcelona)

(Date: 3rd December, 2025)

...

(Real Betis – Barcelona)

(Date: 7th December, 2025)

...

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Fulham – Barcelona)

(Date: 11th December, 2025)

...

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Leganes)

(Date: 15th December, 2025)

...

(Barcelona – Atletico Madrid)

(Date: 21st December, 2025)

The season was ramping up, the games were coming thick and fast.

The FC Barcelona players were not overwhelmed though as Hansi Flick cleverly managed his team, rotating them across the games as they came.

The game against Mallorca was not as straightforward as expected.

Going to their opponent's home stadium, again having to face a low block, FC Barcelona was frustrated for almost 90 minutes of this game.

But once again, their star striker struck.

By now, it felt like a lifetime ago when Sam was known as a world-class attacking midfielder, his identity was now full-blown striker.

Most young fans only knew him as a striker, not his days as an attacking midfielder. It was crazy.

It was almost as if Sam was guaranteed to score every game.

After Mallorca managed to hold the Catalans for 88 minutes, in the 89th minute, Sam broke the voodoo, scoring an incredible volley goal from an Alejandro Balde assist.

In the 2nd minute of additional time after Mallorca finally left their low block, aggressively chasing the equalizer, Sam added salt to injury, winning the ball back and kickstarting a Barca counterattack.

He played the ball high, to the left where Raphinha charged.

Taking the ball in his strides, the Brazilian ate yards of space like they were not there before cutting in and roofing the ball into the top right corner.

2-0 to FC Barcelona..., another game with a Sam goal and assist.

The 20-year-old was in unplayable form.

The best striker in the planet!

Chapter 358: The best striker in the planet [4]

After the victory against Mallorca away from home where Sam got another goal and assist, FC Barcelona's next game was against an in-form Real Betis led by an imperious Anthony.

Last season, when Anthony, the Manchester United winger made a loan switch to La Liga, fans jokingly called his transfer the arrival of the G.O.A.T.

Well, that joke aged well.

This was because a season on from then, Real Betis managed to go all in to get Anthony's signature, pricing him from Manchester United's grasp due to Anthony pushing for it, thereby heralding the rise of the Brazilian G.O.A.T.

In recent months, Anthony was one of the most in-form players in Spain.

For Real Betis, he finally seemed to play at his full potential, dazzling in almost every game as he took Real Betis to the top 4 of La Liga.



Currently, the top 4 of the Spanish La Liga table was like this.

(Updated Spanish La Liga table:)

(1. FC Barcelona)

(2. Real Madrid)

(3. Atletico Madrid)

(4. Real Betis)

And there was only 1 point separating Real Betis from Atletico Madrid!

Having beaten Real Madrid earlier in the campaign already, this was why the game against Real Betis was predicted to be a big challenge for FC Barcelona.

Sam did not care about all of that though, he trained, prepared, and approached the game like every other game.

Alongside his training buddies, they continued their daily training.

Like this, in no time, it was already D-day.

On the 7th of December, alongside his teammates, Sam went to the Estadio Benito Villamarin in Seville, Real Betis' home stadium.

For this game, Hansi Flick rotated his team, clearly in preparation for the tough champions league showdown that would take place in England next week, a game that was especially important to Sam.

Today, at the Estadio Benito Villamarin, Hansi Flick started with a starting XI that was led by Sam in attack as usual, but this time, he was flanked by Raphinha and Gavi from the left and right respectively.

Lamine Yamal was rested for this game.

Behind the attack, Dani Olmo started as the attacking midfielder while further behind him was the duo of Frankie De Jong and Marc Casado.

For this game, Hansi Flick decided to rest Pedri also, a decision that did not sit well with the FC Barcelona fanbase.

Behind the midfield in defense was an unchanged quadruple of Alejandro Balde, Pau Cubarsi, Ronald Araujo, and Jules Kounde in defense. Marc Andre Ter Stegen naturally started in between the posts for the visitors.

As for Real Betis, they started with their strongest XI in a 4-2-3-1 formation just like FC Barcelona's for this game.

The no. 1 goalkeeper, Adrian started in between the posts for the home side, while ahead of the goalkeeper was a quadruple defense comprising Sabaly, Bartra, Diego Llorente, and Rodriguez.

Ahead of the defense was the midfield duo of Cardoso and Altimira.

In attack, led by Anthony, the G.O.A.T who started in the right-wing position, his supporters in attack were Isco in attacking midfield, Rodriguez in the left-wing position, and Hernandez starting as the striker.

From the atmosphere in this stadium created by the fans, to the look in the eyes of the Real Betis players, it was clear that they lined up today for an upset.

In recent months in La Liga, FC Barcelona was the team to beat.

Led by a rampant Samuel Moses, they were imperious, unbeatable and now, led by their very own Anthony, Real Betis wanted to beat the unbeatable.

With Anthony on their side, nothing was impossible!

FWEEEE!

From the first whistle, the Real Betis players showed their intentions.

They would not cower before FC Barcelona!

Unlike other sides in the Spanish La Liga this season who almost always played a low block against the rampant Catalan side, Real Betis decided not to cower, taking the game to the visitors, and that was what they did.

Bam! Bam!

Real Betis played their football with confidence.

On the right wing especially, a driven Anthony played like a man possessed, determined to prove his doubters wrong.

The ex-Manchester United winger was electric this game, repeatedly burning Alejandro Balde with his dribbles as he turned the Spaniard inside out.

The first half was a tight affair.

Real Betis caught Barcelona off-guard with their intensity and aggressive attacking play this game, but this did not mean the Catalans cowered either.

Afterall, they were the predators here.

Real Betis were just challengers hoping to topple and injure the predator.

Well, when Real Betis pushed, FC Barcelona bared its fangs, unleashing their incredible weaponry in attack.

With Sam and Raphinha leading the attack, they dazzled up front.

Despite their old-school dogged defending, Sam especially tortured Bartra and Diego Llorente, Real Betis' center backs with his dribbling and playmaking attributes as he combined to devastating effect with Raphinha and Gavi.

Playing as a winger was not Gavi's natural position, but the Spaniard showed his versatility this game as he combined well with Sam.

Dani Olmo was also a constant menace behind Sam, his shot in the 23rd minute being the closest sight of goal that the ball had seen in this game.

The only weak point for Barcelona this game was the midfield.

With Pedri out of the lineup, the midfield struggled to dominate possession like usual. After all, nobody could do what Pedri did, no other midfielder could quite dictate the tempo of games like Pedri did.

Despite it, Frankie De Jong and Marc Casado did their best, putting in a solid shift to keep a rampant and motivated Real Betis at bay.

The first half was an end-to-end affair, extremely intense as the fans bore witness to incredible attacking football.

It was crazy that somehow, despite all the attacks packed into the half, the first half still ended goalless.

During halftime, Hansi Flick had a little team talk with his players and whatever he told them definitely worked as after they came out for 2nd half, they played like an entirely different team.

Real Betis was just as defiant in the first half, but then, the FC Barcelona attack finally clicked, entering that unstoppable state that they could break anything.

It happened... suddenly.

Real Betis never saw it coming.

Sam was the anchor, receiving a cross from Jules Kounde with his chest, evading the aggressive center backs as with his chest, he pushed the ball to Gavi who was close to him in the 18-yard box.

It was perfect for Gavi to take a shot but just as he did, multiple Real Betis players put their bodies on the line, jumping in front of him, blocking his shot pathway and so Gavi improvised.

"Gavi!" A certain Barcelona attacker called in the box.

By the time the Real Betis players realized the danger, Gavi already hit the ball towards a suddenly free Raphinha.

Under 0 pressure, the Brazilian did not miss his mark, poking the ball into an empty net to secure the lead for the Catalans, leaving the Real Betis goalkeeper no chance.

"GOALLLLL...!!!" The away fans celebrated excitedly.

Charging towards the corner flag, Raphinha jumped and pumped a fist in celebration as all the tension finally disappeared with that goal.

But, not so fast..., Real Betis said.

Because just 3 minutes after Barcelona's goal in the 56th minute, Real Betis struck in the 59th minute, courtesy of an assist from the G.O.A.T.

In the 58th minute, Anthony suddenly burst to life after receiving the ball.

With a silky touch, he controlled the long pass and then with a body feint and an explosion of speed, he left Alejandro Balde eating dust.

Entering the Barcelona 18-yard box, he twisted and turned, causing chaos, enough to open up space for his attacking midfielder, Isco who was making a late run into the box.

Anthony pushed the ball into Isco's path and the ex-Real Madrid midfielder did not miss his mark, hitting the ball with absolute venom.

POW!

Ter Stegen was rooted to one spot, he didn't even see it coming, the shot.

And with that, this stadium roared to life, Real Betis fans roaring at the top of their lungs as Isco celebrated with Anthony.

"Vamos!!!" The G.O.A.T, Anthony roared excitedly.

8 minutes after that goal, in the 67th minute of the game, the G.O.A.T did it again, dooming Barcelona to defeat.

After beating Alejandro Balde again with his flawless dribbling this game, Anthony cut in before curling a perfect shot in from outside the box.

Ter Stegen dived after the ball but it was not quite enough. The ball went past his grasp, nestling into the net.

"GOALLLL...!!!" Anthony screamed at the top of his lungs like a mad man, charging towards the corner flag and screaming in celebration.

What a game, what a performance from the Brazilian.



A win against Barcelona, orchestrated by him, what a story it was meant to be if only a certain Nigerian didn't bare his ugly fangs.

When it seemed like Real Betis already ran away with the lead, in the 90th plus 2 minutes, Sam struck.

From outside the box, he unleashed an unreal knuckle ball shot that went high and dipped, confusing the Real Betis goalkeeper.

Before the goalkeeper could understand what happened, his net already shook as the ball nestled into its embrace.

2-2!

The traveling FC Barcelona fans wildly celebrated.

The game came to an end 2-2, and Anthony won the man of the match award.

What a game it was.

Chapter 359: An honored legend

(ESPN News:)

(FC Barcelona's winning streak is finally broken, but they maintain their unbeaten streak as they drew 2-2 against Real Betis at the Estadio Benito Villamarin. Most importantly though, Sam maintains his goalscoring streak, it's now 27 goals in just 19 games. He's on another level!)

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(Supersport News:)

(FC Barcelona escapes the Estadio Benito Villamarin with a point despite Hansi Flick heavily rotating his team for the champions league game in mid-week, a 2-2 draw. Now, all eyes are on Fulham vs :)

(FC Barcelona player ratings against Real Betis:)

(Goalkeeper & Defense:)

(Marc Andre Ter Stegen: 7.5/10)

(Jules Kounde: 7/10)

(Ronald Araujo: 7.5/10)

(Pau Cubarsi: 8/10)

(Alejandro Balde: 5/10)

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(Midfield:)

(Frankie De Jong: 6.5/10)

(Marc Casado: 7/10)

(Dani Olmo: 6.5/10)

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(Attack:)

(Gavi: 7/10)

(Sam: 8.5/10)

(Raphinha: 8/10)

...

(Champions League Football:)

(Fulham – Barcelona)

(A game of nostalgia for Sam! After months since his move from England, he's finally returning to his roots in Craven Cottage before tens of thousands of Fulham supporters. Will Sam perform?)

FC Barcelona's next game was a UEFA Champions League game and it was between Barcelona and Fulham, Sam's previous club.

Yes, it was a game of nostalgia for him.

He spent just 1 and half seasons in the West London club, but to Sam, it was a significant and unforgettable period of his life.

Afterall, he created memories with the Fulham supporters.

He created history with them.

Winning the EFL Cup, and then the FA Cup and the English premier league, winning all that in just 1 and half seasons, damn, if that was not memorable Sam did not know what else was.

Sam may be away from England now but in his free time, he still followed Fulham, keeping tabs on their performances in the English premier league.

With his heroics with the West London club last season, he and his teammates booked a first UEFA champions league spot for Fulham in years.

This season, Fulham played in the UEFA Champions League.

After last season's heroics, certain important players left Fulham like Sam, going to greener pastures but the situation of the club was not as tragic as Sam feared after their departures this season.

With a core now led by Emile Smith Rowe, Fulham was still a force to be reckoned with in the English premier league.

At the moment, they were in 5th position in the premier league table but only 4 points separated them from the top 3 position.

So yes, Fulham was doing well in Sam's absence.

Sam was happy for his old club, but he was an FC Barcelona player now, this was why he put even more effort in training preparing for the big game.

Afterall, football was what he knew how to do best.

Football was the catalyst for the memories and history that he created with Fulham. This was why, returning back to Craven Cottage, Sam wanted to show them that he still got it, that he didn't regress.

He wanted to show the fans that adored him in Fulham what they transformed him into.

And so, Sam trained for the game.

Day after day, training after training, he put in 100% and in no time, it was D-day.

3 days later after the away game against Real Betis, on 10th of December, the FC Barcelona squad traveled to England, Fulham.

Right there at the airport, Sam received a hero's welcome in Fulham.

Fulham fans flooded the stadium awaiting his arrival with banners depicting him in a Fulham jersey, banners of him lifting the premier league trophy, lifting his golden boy award, and banners of him balling out for Fulham FC.

Right there at the airport, the nostalgia hit Sam.

This was a city where he was adored.

That was not all though, Sam was singled out of the FC Barcelona squad and honored on his arrival to Fulham.

Councilor Patricia Quigley, the Mayor of the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham invited Sam to a meal on his arrival in Fulham.

This was a great honor.

And not just that, leaving the Mayor's office, Councilor Patricia Quigley personally led a contingent that escorted Sam to Craven Cottage, Fulham's home stadium where the greatest honor was revealed.

"...!"

Sam was shocked as the secret was finally unveiled.

Unknown to him and the rest of the world, Fulham secretly worked on a bronze statue outside their stadium.

And today, they finally unveiled it to the rest of the world.

It was a bronze statue of Samuel Moses.

Sam was immortalized in Fulham.

"..."

Staring at the bronze statue, Sam was speechless and emotional, driven to tears all of a sudden as he was caught off-guard.

In the end, he gave a speech with a big smile on his face. "This..., I won't lie, I don't even know how to react".

The audience laughed.

He looked at the Mayor. "First, I want to express my gratitude to the Mayor, Councilor Patricia Quigley for approving this and making it possible".

"I'm grateful ma".

The Mayor smiled back at him.

Then, Sam grinned. "And I want to thank the city of Fulham especially, fans of the white, black, and red".

"I love you guys and you know it".



"When I was unknown and obscure, you had faith in me, prying me from the jaws of the NPFL to prove myself in the English premier league".

He looked at his old coach, Marco Silva. "Coach," he smiled. "Thank you for believing in me".

He grinned mischievously. "Thank you for playing me in that Liverpool game".

Marco Silva chuckled among the audience.

He remembered that day, he was glad he dropped his pride to take the decision. He lost nothing and gained everything after that day.

Sam smiled as he faced the camera. "Fulham made me, and tomorrow," he grinned. "I'll show you all the monster that you created!"

"Pity us Sam!" Some of the fans bellowed, making him to laugh.

In the end, after more speeches from the Mayor herself, highlighting the importance of Sam's incredible achievements for the City of Fulham during the previous season, Coach Marco Silva also had a speech.

After that, the little ceremony finally came to an end.

When Sam returned to his hotel to meet up with his teammates, his training buddies teased him.

Yamal laughed. "Are you some kind of honored legend now?"

"Get lost!" Sam said, eliciting more laughter.

That night, the group of 5 teammates and friends played a few rounds of FIFA on a PS5 console before finally retreating to bed on time for the night.

Tomorrow was going to be a big day.

In a blink, it was morning already.

No training was scheduled for morning, just Hansi Flick going over the game strategy with his players all over again as he warned them not to do anything stupid to make sure that they were in optimum state for the game.

The FC Barcelona players were obedient, all staying docile in preparations for the big UEFA champions league clash.

And then, later at night, they finally arrived at Craven Cottage.

In big UEFA champions league nights like this, opposition fans tend to be extremely hostile, trying to get into the head of their opposition players and rattle them before the game but simply due to the presence of a specific player in the Barcelona squad, the Fulham fans were tamed for this game.

Both squads started with their strongest starting XI.

For the visiting side, FC Barcelona, Hansi Flick finally reverted to his strongest lineup with the attacking trio of Raphinha, Sam, and Lamine Yamal anchoring the attack and Gavi playing just behind them in attacking midfield.

Behind them was a midfield duo of Pedri and Frankie De Jong.

Manning the defense was the imperious quadruple of Alejandro Balde, Inigo Martinez, Ronald Araujo, and Jules Kounde in right back. Barca's no. 1, Marc Andre Ter Stegen started in between the posts.

As for the home side, they lined up in a familiar 4-2-3-1 formation.

Raul Jimenez led the attack, while behind him was the attacking trio of Alex Iwobi in left wing, Emile Smith Rowe in attacking midfield who was now the core of this team, and the rapid Adama Traore down the right wing.

Behind them was the duo of Berge and Lukic in midfield.

As for the defense, the quadruple of Antonee Robinson, Calvin Bassey, Andersen, and Castagne started. Further behind them was Bernd Leno in between the posts.

Craven Cottage was electric.

The home fans sang at the top of their lungs, excited for a lot of different reasons. The homecoming of their hero, their eagerness to show him what the team was now capable of in his absence, and the eagerness to see what he could do.

Heck, their emotions were complicated and going haywire this game.

They wanted to win but they didn't want Sam to look bad. They wanted Sam to play well but not enough to help FC Barcelona win.

Their emotions were heightened and complicated.

And then, all of it came to a halt, focusing on the game as soon as the referee's whistle cut through the noise like a knife.

FWEEEE!

The game started.

Chapter 360: The King is back!

Fulham fans were not used to seeing Sam play as a striker.

Heck, they've never seen him play for their club as a striker.

When Sam still plied his trade in the English premier league for Fulham FC, he was renowned as an all-action attacking midfielder.

The player who made Marco Silva's team tick.

The link between attack and defense, the driving force of Fulham's attack, the most lethal weapon in Marco Silva's arsenal.

And yet, here he was, lining up against them.

Not as an attacking midfielder, but as a striker.

Weird, but by the end of this game, the Fulham fans would learn to see Sam in a new light and accept just how versatile he was.

FWEEE!

The whistle imperiously cut through the noise around the stadium like a knife.

And then, the game started.

Instantly, Sam took the wheel.

FC Barcelona started kick-off and directly from the first kick of the ball, Sam showed that he didn't return to Craven Cottage to play as bombing straight down the field, Pedri expertly threw a lobbed pass towards him.

"...!"

The fans across the stadium froze in shock.

In just the first minute of this game, the chemistry between the FC Barcelona players reared its head as Pedri and Sam caught the Fulham defense napping.

Pedri played the lobbed pass, and Sam ran into it.

Calvin Bassey reacted, trying to shove Sam aside with his physicality but the Nigerian International quickly got a reality check when Sam stood his ground.

'Damn! He's this powerful...?'

Calvin Bassey realized too late.

Sam didn't just stand his ground against his International teammate, spreading his arms and changing his running stance, he was able to force Calvin Bassey out of balance, making the center back stagger.

That little stagger, removing the pressure from him for a split second, that split second was all the time that Sam needed.

Whoosh!

Pedri's pass flew through the air, the ball drawing a parabolic through the air as it dipped in a perfect arc towards his position.

This exact same pass, Pedri had played it for Sam countless times in their personal training sessions.

Pedri knew his speed like the back of his hand, and he had the technique to add just the right weight on the pass.

The ball perfectly floated into Sam's front.

Thud!

Reading the danger and knowing just what kind of threat Sam posed in front of goal, Bernd Leno kicked the ground, erupting in a sprint as he rapidly closed the striker down but Sam kept his cool.

Leno's charge sent adrenaline through his body, urging him to act fast but it did not make him lose his cool, he still had 100% presence of mind.

And so..., Sam didn't try to take a first touch to calm the ball.

Instead, he jumped directly and swung his right leg.

It was a volley!

POW!

Sam's right leg hit the ball with venom, roofing it towards the top left corner of the net with incredible power.

Bernd Leno reacted, sprawling his arms but not quite fast enough.

The power behind Sam's shot was just too much, it snuck past him, and into the net, silencing Craven Cottage.

"GOALLLLL...!!!"

The away fans and the other FC Barcelona players celebrated.

Sam didn't let it get to his head though, raising his arms up instead of celebrating his goal. He refused to celebrate his goal against Fulham even as Lamine Yamal jumped on his back, celebrating.

That goal was the fastest of Sam's whole career.



It was not even a full minute yet before the ball found its way into the net, it was his first goal scored in the 1st minute of a game.

"Well, we wondered what version of Sam will come to Craven Cottage today after what happened yesterday".

"Heck, the boy got honored with his own trophy in this same stadium".

"But I guess even that is not enough to stop Sam".

"Clearly, he came with his scoring boots today".

"The boy is unstoppable!"

"The Fulham legend scores in Craven Cottage, what a game this is turning out to be already!"

"A lightning-fast goal!"

FWEEE!

Sam's goal came in just the first minute, there was still 89 minutes to play, and boy did that goal wake Fulham up!

"Come on!" Emile Smith Rowe roared, doing the work that Sam usually did when he still played for the West London club.

"It's just Sam".

"It's just FC Barcelona".

"Are we scared of them? NO!"

"Come on! Let's play our game, we can win!"

And well, with Smith Rowe's urging, Fulham did just that.

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded again to continue the game, the UEFA champions league clash truly started in Craven Cottage.

It didn't go all FC Barcelona's way.

Under Marco Silva's tactical drilling, this iteration of the Fulham squad played with cohesion and grit, defending doggedly as a team.

And when they did get the ball back, the new core of Fulham dazzled.

Emile Smith Rowe had a playmaking masterclass in the middle of the pitch for the West London club.

Up against the likes of Pedri, Gavi, and Frankie De Jong, world-renowned football stars, Emile Smith Rowe did not fade into obscurity as he showed what he could do at the highest level against the best of the best.

He dictated the game for Fulham, spraying passes left and right, setting his teammates up, a technique which he already practiced to near perfection.

Yes, he didn't have Sam's physicality.

Yes, he didn't have Sam's versatility or his power header, nor even his power shot, but Emile Smith Rowe could create.

Besides, before Sam left Fulham, he managed to inherit something from the Nigerian maverick..., the mamba mentality.

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

Smith Rowe lacked Sam's style of play, and so he channeled his mamba mentality through his intelligence and elite passing ability.

And after repeatedly knocking at the door, he did it.

Berge won the ball back in midfield before quickly passing it diagonally to Emile Smith Rowe, even as Frankie De Jong quickly pressed him for the ball.

Standing his ground, Smith Rowe evaded a physical duel, rather using a body feint before quickly spinning round with the ball, smoothly evading De Jong's tackle.

The Dutch International didn't give up though, coming again for the ball.

Smith Rowe expected it, and was why he didn't hold on to the ball.

He spotted Adama Traore's unstoppable burst of speed immediately after he was done spinning past De Jong, and then...

Bam!

With the outside of his boot, Emile Smith Rowe hit the ball on a perfect trivela, sending it spinning through the air like a shot put.

Far higher up the field, having left Cubarsi in the dust with his pace since Alejandro Balde was caught out of position, Adama Traore took the long pass in his strides, pushing it forward as he charged towards goal.

Ronald Araujo approached...

Whoosh!

Just as Adama Traore was to shoot, the Uruguayan went on a sliding tackle but that was where Adama Traore did it, cutting the ball instead of shooting.

That bought him enough time for Araujo to slide to no man's land and then keeping his cool in front of goal, he hit the ball with power.

Bam!

Straight to the bottom right corner.

Marc Andre Ter Stegen stood no chance.

"GOALLLLLL...!!!"

Craven Cottage erupted to life.

Charging towards Adama Traore, Emile Smith Rowe jumped on his back even as they celebrated the goal wildly.

Before the game continued, Smith Rowe looked at Sam, winking at him as he grinned. "Game on!"

Sam grinned back. "Game on!"

He could feel his blood boiling hot. 'Hehe, this..., I'm going to love this!'

Today, who was going to be the King of Craven Cottage?

With Smith Rowe's performance so far, was there a new King in Craven Cottage and did the real King just went on a vacation, and was back?

Was the King back?

Time would tell.

FWEEE!

The game continued, and Sam played his heart out.

Dropping deep and fully embracing his false 9 role this game, he balled for FC Barcelona, connecting with Gavi, Pedri, and Lamine Yamal to devastating effect as they probed Fulham's defense again and again.

Fulham may have equalized in the 22nd minute through a moment of individual brilliance from Smith Rowe, but they were not deterred by it.

Rather, they only played better.

Not willing to roll over in defeat, Fulham matched FC Barcelona's intensity aura for aura, it was an end-to-end game.

Barca attacked, Fulham defended...

Fulham attacked, Barca defended...

It was crazy, intense, exciting, the star players embracing the moment as they showed just what they could do in the biggest stages and biggest moments.

Yamal dazzled with his dribbling, Gavi dazzled with his intensity, Pedri dazzled with his calm composure and playmaking, Alejandro Balde dazzled with his overlapping runs, Raphinha dazzled in attack, Smith Rowe dazzled in playmaking, while Sam did everything.

He was all-action, 10 in 1.

But then, despite all the excitement, despite all the chances created, the first half came to an end with the ball failing to enter the net a 3rd time.

The first half came to an end 1-1.

It was a first half draw.