

Football God 361

Chapter 361: The King of Craven Cottage

The first half came to an end 1-1.

It was a first half draw.

But the second half was another case entirely.

If the first half was like the prelude, the preparation to a nuclear disaster, well, in the second half, the nuclear bomb exploded in a crazy supernova.

Hansi Flick and Marco Silva didn't even need to say any words to their players during halftime. Seeing the look in their eyes was all the 2 coaches needed, they could tell that their players were locked into the game.

Both teams were determined to win.

This was a test of wit and will, which would prevail?

FWEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded again, continuing the duel in Craven Cottage.

A clash of international borders, a clash of Spanish culture and English football, a clash of Samuel Moses and Emile Smith Rowe.

It was intense, end to end, exciting, but the best always find a way.

The best this time was... Smith Rowe.

In the 57th minute of this game, the Englishman exploded to life again to devastating effect for Fulham FC.

After breaking another FC Barcelona attack, Calvin Bassey played the ball long to Adama Traore, a portion of the pitch where Pedri also stayed.

Pedri pursued after the ball, but this foot race was destined from the beginning to have only one conclusion.

Whoosh!

Adama Traore dashed past the Spaniard like Barry Allen, taking the ball in his strides, eating yards of space before cutting the ball back to Emile Smith Rowe close to the Barcelona 18-yard box.

As soon as Smith Rowe received the ball...

BZZZ!

His brain geared into overdrive, and then magic happened.

A sliding tackle from Frankie De Jong came but with a delicate flick of the ball, Smith Rowe smoothly evaded the challenge, coming up against Ronald Araujo next but he didn't dribble.

Bam!

He hit the ball once, passing to Alex Iwobi who was at the left.

As soon as the ball was hit...

Bam!

Alex Iwobi hit it back.

One-two..., tiki-taka against the Kings of tiki-taka.

"...!"

Craven Cottage came alive.

Emile Smith Rowe intended to give the Catalans a taste of their own medicine. It was crazy, but you know the craziest thing?

It worked!

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

4 swift passes did it.

The pass to Alex Iwobi, the return pass to Smith Rowe, the progressive pass to Raul Jimenez in the box, and the last pass, Jimenez laying the ball for Smith Rowe.

4 passes, but those 4 passes pried Barcelona's defense open, tearing it imperiously like a hot knife through butter.

"Block him!" Araujo screamed but it was too late.

It was not a shot, not any fancy technique, Smith Rowe simply passed the ball towards the bottom right corner, leaving Ter Stegen frozen in one spot.

The goalkeeper did not see that coming.

"GOALLLLLLL...!"

Craven Cottage transformed into a cauldron of noise.

Ecstatic Fulham fans went haywire, celebrating at the top of their lungs as Emile Smith Rowe charged towards the corner flag, sliding on his knees in celebration before the stadium.

"Smith!" "Smith!" "Smith!"

They chanted his name loudly.

"Well, well, they asked who the King of Craven Cottage was and I guess we have our answer".

"Emile Smith Rowe is the true King of Craven Cottage!"

Well, those words were said a few dozen minutes too soon.

This was because after all the celebrations, Fulham seemingly having completed their comeback in their home ground, a familiar face did them in, completing a masterclass performance in Craven Cottage.

'That goal...!' Sam's eyes glistened with excitement as Smith Rowe's goal replayed in his head. 'Damn! He's better than the last time I played here!'

Compared to last season, Smith Rowe was a better footballer now.

But Sam didn't feel bitter, he felt happy, ecstatic even, and that became the catalyst that pushed him into the flow state.

'How can I play bad when my friend is playing so good?'

'Hehe, I'd be a bad friend if it ends like this'.

'Afterall, what are friends for?'

Just like that, Sam was unleashed.

BOOM!

Like a hurricane, he struck.

Fulham only got to celebrate their lead for a measly 3 minutes, this was because in the 60th minute of this game, Sam unlocked another lever.

In Craven Cottage, they were not used to striker Sam.

Rather, they were used to an all-action midfielder Sam who could do everything, press, tackle, create, and shoot. They were used to the Sam that unleashed absolute piledrivers from beyond the 18-yard box.

Well, Fulham fans saw that Sam in Craven Cottage again.

In the 60th minute of this game, spotting Sam who embraced his false 9 role again, dropping deep outside the 18-yard box to derail the Fulham defenders, Pau Cubarsi took the gamble and played a swift ground pass to Sam.

Sam received and controlled the ball by using a Cruyff turn.

With that simple move, he evaded his marker, Berge, leaving the midfielder eating dust even as the Fulham defense responded to his movement.

Anytime that he had the ball, they retreated on tenterhooks.

This time though, Sam had no intention of running into the 18-yard box with the ball. He was ok right where he was.

He raised his head and looked at Bernd Leno's position, then the post.

Standing in between the posts, Bernd Leno's eyes widened.

"...!"

He recognized that look, he's seen it countless times in training when Sam still played for Fulham and trained with him daily in Craven Cottage.

"Close him down!" The goalkeeper roared but it was already too late.

Sam grinned. 'Just about right'.

And then...

POW!

His right leg swung, unleashing an absolute thunderbolt as he used his knuckle shot technique for the 2nd consecutive game.

The ball rose like a missile, going high into the sky before dipping down as if redirected by an auto-controller, dipping into the goalpost.

Despite the fact that it looked like the ball was going outside from the beginning, Bernd Leno did not take the risk of standing still.

This was because he knew the threat that Sam could pose with a ball at his feet. He jumped, which was the right decision.

Leno's hand touched the ball, then...

Bang!

Bernd Leno managed to push the ball against the post, making it rebound back into the net as a scramble started immediately.

After a scramble, Antonee Robinson managed to clear the ball awkwardly though it was still inside the 18-yard box.

The players scrambled..., who would get there first?

Thud! Thud!

Hearing those footsteps, the Fulham players felt their heartbeat accelerate; they raised their heads to look.

Sam who took the initial shot was already back!

"...!"

Craven Cottage froze still, watching Sam as he raised his right leg and swung it in mid-air at the ball, unleashing another volley, this time a scissor kick.

Bam!

This time, Bernd Leno did not see the ball.

It whooshed past him at a crazy speed, nestling into his net before he could react as the goalkeeper cursed.

GOAL!

FC Barcelona scored again!

It was 2-2.

And again, Sam did not celebrate.

After that equalizing goal, for over a dozen minutes, the game became tight and end-to-end again until he proved the decider once again.

This time, it was Lamine Yamal who threw in a cross for him from the right as Sam dug in, floating into the sky like superman.

He rose above every other player in the 18-yard box before powering a header towards the top right corner.

Leno could only watch it go in, gritting his teeth.

'This bastard!' He thought.

'Man..., what a pain to play against him!'

Sam got his hattrick, giving Barcelona the lead again in this exciting game and for the third time, he refused to celebrate.

"My God! I spoke too soon!" The commentator laughed.

"Guys, ignore my previous words, the King of Craven Cottage is still Sam!"

"What the hell am I seeing?"

"0-1 to 2-1, then to 2-3 now, what a game!"

"Smith Rowe is amazing this game, but Sam is freaking unplayable!"

And yet, that was not all.

Sam got his hattrick and gave his team the lead again in the 72nd minute of this game, and then in the 83rd, FC Barcelona added the final nail to complete Fulham's coffin in this game.

This time, it was an electric Alejandro Balde who did it.

After stopping another round of rampant Fulham attacks, Barcelona exploded, going on the counter and Alejandro Balde was at the heart of it.

Starting all the way from Barca's half of the field, he evaded a challenge, and then another before kicking the ball long and exploding after it with speed.

The Spaniard literally left afterimages behind as he ran!

No one could catch him and when he finally met Fulham's imperious last man in defense, Calvin Bassey, he took the easier route, passing to Sam who ran after him all the way from defense.

Sam took one touch to control the ball before slipping it past Calvin Bassey and back towards Balde.

Balde didn't hesitate, hitting the ball with the outside of his right boot as he sent it towards the bottom right corner.

Bernd Leno was beaten in his post for the 4th time this game.

GOAL!

2-4!

"What a goal!"

"What a game!"

"And that's a hattrick and an assist, Sam is unplayable!"

FC Barcelona won the game, and Sam won another man of the match award.

The King of Craven Cottage was back, and he was Samuel Moses.

Chapter 362: Unplayable Sam

90 minutes, 2-4...

FC Barcelona won the game, and Sam got another man of the match award.

The King of Craven Cottage was back, and he was Samuel Moses.

"What a goal!"

"What a game!" The commentators raved.

"And that's a hatrick and an assist, Sam is unplayable".

"And ladies and gentlemen, this is the forerunner of the 2026 Ballon d'Or, the leader of the pack!"

Across Craven Cottage, there were mixed feelings among the fans.

This was a player that they brought from Nigeria, and watched grow. From making his debut in the Carabao Cup, to singlehandedly winning games against Manchester City in the English premier league, to being clutch in the FA Cup.

They had so many memories of Sam that seeing him again induced so much nostalgia, but for him to go and score a hatrick against them.

'This bastard...!'

He was a bastard, but in the end, he was their bastard.

A bastard that they created.

And so, the Fulham fans let go of their mixed feelings, appreciating greatness. Afterall, this was a legend of their club.

Clap! Clap!

Around Craven Cottage, tens of thousands of fans in the white, black, and red rose to their feet as they gave Sam a standing ovation.

And for the final time, a familiar chant rang around Craven Cottage.

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

Hearing those chants, the commentators could not stay quiet. "Well, well, it's not every day that you get to see a player from the opposing side receive a standing ovation in away ground".

"Most especially when the stage is the UEFA Champions League".

"But well, this is Fulham, and this is Samuel Moses, both sides of the same coin. He may be Blaugrana now, but Sam and Fulham are inseparable".

"He now occupies a deep place in their history".

"That aside though, this standing ovation is well deserved".

"I mean, what a performance!"

Noticing the standing ovation and hearing those chants, as the adrenaline of the game slowly started fading away from him, Sam could not help his emotions as he started feeling nostalgia.

The 'Sam' chants in Craven Cottage, he missed it.

This was his home for over a year after leaving Nigeria for the first time, and it occupied a special place in his heart.

Sam could not stay still, and so he walked over to the fans.

Before doing anything, he first raised his hands over his head, rubbing them in a plea for forgiveness against what he did to their beloved club today, a gesture which elicited laughter from the commentators.

After which Sam pumped his fists high before bumping it against his chest.

The chants exploded, growing louder.

Thud! Thud!

Sam heard footsteps behind him and before he knew what was happening, a familiar figure ran into him, crashing against him from behind.

"You bastard! You really went and did it today, huh?"

With a big smile on his face, Sam turned round, hugging Smith Rowe, a signing that he endorsed for Fulham since day 1.

In the prelude to the game, both friends refrained from meeting each other and catching up on lost time.

This was because they were both focused on winning the game for their respective clubs.

Knowing Sam's competitive spirit, Emile Smith Rowe knew that he was determined to win even if this clash was against his beloved Fulham, this was why he trained harder and gave his best performance of the season so far.

And yet, that was still not enough against Sam's brilliance.

The unsufferable bastard!

Sam laughed, patting Smith Rowe by the shoulder. "You're the main man of the team now".

"That's because you left you bastard!" Smith Rowe laughed, eliciting more laughter from Sam.

And then right there on the pitch, under the canopy of tens of thousands of Fulham fans, they started doing catch-up, recovering lost time.

At the end of it all, Fulham glared at Sam. "You better lead your club all the way to win the UEFA Champions League after what you just did to us".

Sam chuckled. "Leave it to me".

"And you better win the ballon d'Or too, or else I won't forgive you".

Sam laughed again. "I'll try".

And with that, they finally walked out of the pitch.

Like expected, it didn't take long before Sam was summoned back to the pitch for the post-match interview.

The female reporter was all giddy with smiles. "Sam, you were unplayable today!" She gushed as soon as he arrived.

"How do you feel? Coming back to Craven Cottage after so many months, receiving such a wholesome welcome, and putting out such a performance before the fans, how do you feel?"

Sam sighed. "It's a bittersweet feeling honestly. On one hand, I don't want to inflict any pain on Fulham, but at the same time, I know that they want me to play at my best. That's what they came to see".

"And I'm obligated by a contract to play my best to help my team win, so yeah, I feel bittersweet". He laughed.

The reporter chuckled. "Well, by scoring a hatrick to help Barcelona to the win, you definitely inflicted pain and made them excited at the same time".

"They missed you Sam, you could tell from the reactions".

"I missed them too, for real".

"How was your preparation for the game? Did you train harder than usual? Did you know that you'll score a hatrick?"

Sam looked at the reporter incredulously. "Know that I'll score a hatrick? Come on, that's ludicrous!" He laughed. "I'm not some prophet or seer".

"I didn't change my training routine; I just did my best in training like usual and approached the game with the mindset to win".

"I won't lie though, Smith Rowe's electric form on the pitch also spurred me on to play at my best. I'm glad to see he's the new main man in Fulham". He grinned.

"Before leaving, Sam I'd like to know, did you know about the bronze statue that was made in your honor ahead of time?"

Sam scratched his head. "You really think I'm such a good actor? That I'll have such an emotional reaction if I knew ahead of time?" He chuckled.

"Of course, I didn't know, that's why this visit to Fulham is extra special for me". He looked towards the stadium stands. "This is a visit that I won't forget in a hurry, a memory that's forever engraved in my mind".

Thinking of something, he grinned. "If I live long enough for it, I'll definitely tell my grandkids stories of yesterday and today".

The reporter laughed. "Now, that'll be something to write about".

She smiled brightly at him. "Sam, thanks for having me, do have a nice day".

"You too". Sam smiled back and left.

He waved one last time at the fans before walking into the tunnel.

It was not yet over for Sam though. When it was Barcelona's turn to leave the stadium, they met a traffic, excited Fulham fans who wanted Sam's autograph.

And then, the whole FC Barcelona squad was forced to wait for him as he signed a few autographs and took a few pictures, making today the best day of their lives for a lot of fans.

After which he joined his teammates and then, zoom, the Barca bus was gone. They returned to their hotel in Fulham.

Since they already played the game though, Sam didn't stay at the hotel.

After telling Lamine Yamal and the others where he intended to go, an invitation that he wanted to honor, he drove out of the hotel on a car he rented.

Marco Silva, Fulham's head coach organized a party to commemorate Sam's bronze statue with the team and all the Fulham players would be present. Sam also got an invitation and that was where he was headed to.

That night, they met up in a club in Fulham.

There, Sam was able to catch up with a lot of topics with his old teammates, learning about a lot of things that he didn't know before since he was literally a hermit whose only cares in the world was family and football.

Despite the fact that he followed Fulham games, he didn't truly understand how much of a terrific season Smith Rowe was having till they told him.

Smith Rowe was currently having the best season of his life statistically.

And not just that, they told him of Manchester City's resurgence in the English premier league under Pep Guardiola.

The Citizens were back, and not with good intentions.

They were taking the premier league by storm this season after stumbling last season, and Erling Haaland was having an imperious campaign, topping every single goalscoring chart.

Kevin De Bruyne was also having a resurgent campaign after a lot of people wrote him off last season, accusing him of being old and washed.

All in all, Manchester City was back.

And then they showed him the recent updated 2026 ballon d'Or top 10 early rankings.

[2026 Ballon d'Or top 10 rankings:]

[1. Samuel Moses]

[2. Erling Haaland]

[3. Pedri]

[4. Kylian Mbappe]

[5. Rodri]

[6. Harry Kane]

[7. Kevin De Bruyne]

[8. Vinicius Jnr.]

[9. Lamine Yamal]

[10. Ousmane Dembele]

Sam was at the forefront once again.

His old teammates teased him about it, telling him he must win the damn ballon d'Or or he was gay.

Sam was stunned. "W-what? I'm not gay!"

"Then prove it!"

"...!"

Sam was flabbergasted. 'F*ck! They got me!'

He had a nice time with his old teammates before returning late to his hotel room. The next day, the FC Barcelona squad left England.

Chapter 363: Life of Sam

Spain, Barcelona...

It was the morning after the grueling UEFA Champions League match in Fulham, England, a match that had a lot of significance to Sam.

The city of Barcelona stirred gently under a soft Mediterranean sunrise.

The sky was painted in warm hues of orange and pink, and a light sea breeze filtered in through the open balcony doors of a luxurious high-rise mansion overlooking the cityscape, Sam's mansion.

The distant hum of life in the streets below, of early risers heading to work, the faint melody of a street musician, all blending into the quiet elegance of the morning.

"Ahh!" Sam sighed, taking a deep breath as he looked down through the open balcony doors. 'What a sight'. He thought.

And then, he started easing into his day with a slow stretch, his body still feeling the aftereffects of the previous night's battle on the pitch.

The adrenaline had long since faded, leaving behind the familiar dull ache in his muscles, a badge of effort and victory.

He moved with the deliberate sluggishness of someone who gave everything the night before on the pitch.

Yes, Sam was suffering from fatigue from the grueling match yesterday.

Even with his physical conditioning elixirs that the system rewarded him with, to return to optimum state as soon as possible for the next game, Sam still had to recover normally like other professional football players.

It was just that he had an advantage over other players in terms of recovery speed, an advantage that could not be bridged with just talent alone.

The game in Fulham may have seemed like a workover for FC Barcelona if you look at the 2-4 scoreline, but Fulham gave them hell.

Led by Emile Smith Rowe, they fought a great battle against the Catalan giants, pushing them to the edge.

This was why after the game, Hansi Flick gave his players the day out to rest and recover for their next game which was a league game.

And this was why for the first time since they started their daily work-out as training buddies, Pedri, Lamine Yamal and the others decided to skip today, telling Sam that they were too exhausted to go today.

Sam couldn't blame them, after all, none of them had a system like him.

And so, dressed in training gear, he settled into his post-match recovery routine in the mansion's sleek recovery room.

A state-of-the-art compression machine wrapped around his legs, methodically working to flush out lactic acid and reduce inflammation.

At the side, an ice bath waited nearby, the thought of it unappealing but necessary.

Sitting, Sam sipped on a nutrient-packed smoothie, the taste of banana, oats, and protein powder blending together as he scrolled through his phone.

He went through messages from his teammates, notifications from the club and its fan pages, and then highlights from last night's game flooding his feed.

But then, all of it was interrupted by a sudden video call notification.

{Incoming video call from Mi Corazon...}

Seeing that pop-up notification, Sam smiled involuntarily.

It was his girlfriend, Kayla.

His Spanish lessons already reached an advanced level. And with his growing knowledge of Spanish, Sam changed the name he saved his girlfriend's contact with on his phone to Mi Corazon, translating to My Heart.

He answered the video call with a smirk, leaning back in his chair as Kayla's face appeared on the screen.

She was still in bed, wrapped in a blanket, her hair slightly messy.

"You look exhausted," she teased, her voice laced with warmth.

"And you look like you just woke up". He fired back with a chuckle.

They talked effortlessly, slipping into the comfortable rhythm of two people who knew each other inside out.

It was just a week or so since Kayla left, but Sam was missing her already.

She congratulated him on the match, playfully scolding him for scoring a hattrick after all that he went through with Fulham in England.

Hearing that, Sam was caught off-guard, laughing before defending himself, though they both knew he'd do it again if it meant winning.

As they talked, he moved to the ice bath, grimacing as he lowered himself in. "Alright," Sam groaned. "Here comes the suffering". He muttered, causing Kayla to laugh at his exaggerated misery.

And just like that, minutes passed in easy conversation; discussing weekend plans, her work, his upcoming training schedule.

It was a rare moment of normalcy in a life that rarely slows down.

Outside the city continued to wake but in this quiet pocket of the morning, everything felt balanced.

Football, recovery, love, a harmonious blend of the things that mattered most.

"I feel blessed". Sam suddenly said, smiling lovingly.

Kayla smiled. "I know, I love you too".

Sam chuckled.

After ending the call minutes later, Sam finally stood up, going about his day as he decided to cook and yet that was when another phone call came in.

{Incoming call from Coach Eric Chelle...}

Sam answered the call immediately. "Hey Coach, good morning".

"Good morning Sam, how are you doing?"

"I'm good, what of you?"

Well, that was the prelude to another lengthy conversation.

Eric Chelle, the head coach of the Nigerian national team contacted Sam personally because something important to Nigerian football was coming up.

The coach called because in less than 2 weeks, the AFCON tournament would start. On 21st December, Morocco, the host country will welcome Comoros at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat for the first clash of the tournament.

For Africans, the AFCON tournament had the same significance as the Euros and the Copa America. It was a big major trophy in any player's cabinet.

Besides, Nigerians suffered an AFCON heartbreak recently.

They made it all the way to the 2023 AFCON tournament final only to lose to the hosts, Ivory Coast in a slightly controversial and agonizing manner.

Nigerians were desperate to win a major trophy after having last won the AFCON title back in 2013, when it was held in South Africa.

Eric Chelle wanted to create history with his Nigerian squad, and hence why he personally contacted his best player.

He wanted Sam to report to the squad as soon as possible.

Sam's answer?

"Don't worry coach, I'll try my best".

Chapter 364 364: Just another day at the office

That morning, after making his food and eating, Sam relaxed in his room, idly playing a game of FIFA in career mode on his PS5 console.

After which he slept, fully enjoying the rare day of rest.

Sam woke up when it was already late afternoon.

He woke up to the grumbling of his stomach, and so the first thing that Sam did was to order a take-out online from his girlfriend's restaurant right here in the City of Barcelona.

Kayla may be back to Netherlands already, attending to her academic activities but even in her absence, her restaurant thrived.

Afterall, she was Samuel Moses' girlfriend.

Sam's fame in the city of Barcelona was not small, he was a celebrity.

After devouring the take-out, Sam idly went about his day, doing anything that entered his mind till it was evening.

Around 5:00pm in the evening, putting on new training clothes, he finally jogged out of his mansion, entering the streets of Barcelona.

Like the others, he was tired and wanted nothing more than a day off to recover not just physically but mentally.

But unlike the others, Sam didn't have that luxury.

Afterall, if he went a day without completing his daily system quest, his system had a penalty waiting for him.

And so, that evening, alone, Sam jogged through the streets of Barcelona.

Thud! Thud!

Alone jogging again after a long time of jogging with his training buddies, Sam realized how much he missed it. There was a nice ring to it.

And the experience was made even better by the sound spreading from his JBL headset into his ears as he jogged.

It was a popular song in Nigeria.

[Spotify:]

[Playing from your Library: Liked Songs]

[Joy Is Coming- Fido]

With that song on repeat blasting into his being through his ears, jogging didn't feel like a chore at all, rather Sam was having a blast and enjoying himself.

Before he knew it, he already arrived at the Spotify Camp Nou.

He already met his daily jogging target.

After that, he entered the Spotify Camp Nou, quickly accessing the gym where he went about completing the remaining task targets in his daily system quest. His arrival was met by surprise by the stadium workers.

"Good morning, Sam".

But they greeted him enthusiastically nonetheless.

Since he was alone, a few of the Spotify Camp Nou stadium staff who never had the privilege to ask him for autographs before now took advantage of the opportunity, asking him for autographs.

Sam obliged all of them, signing and making their day with that little gesture as he entered the gym.

In less than an hour, he was done.

Jogging back home, Sam opened his iPhone, focusing on something, FC Barcelona's fixtures to determine the next game.

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Leganes)

(Date: 15th December, 2025)

...

(Barcelona – Atletico Madrid)

(Date: 21st December, 2025)

Sam focused on the last of the 2 fixtures.

'I guess the Leganes game will be my last club game for the year'. He thought as he continued on his way home.

On the spot, he made the decision.

Like every other Nigerian who was a football fan, Sam wanted to win the AFCON tournament with his country. Doing it would make him an automatic legend of the Nigerian professional football team.

And of course, the glory that comes with it.

Thinking of all the benefits that comes with it, the joy, Sam wanted to do it and he was determined to sacrifice club football for it.

This was why before getting home, Sam put a call to Hansi Flick, informing the coach of his decision.

Hansi Flick already expected this ahead of time, so he didn't object.

He only had one request.

"Make sure we win the next game before you go".

Sam chuckled. "Of course, we will".

"Good".

...

The next day, Sam went back to default settings.

He and his training buddies were back to their normal training schedule, all in preparations for the next game which was a league game against Leganes.

When Hansi Flick released his starting XI, all 5 of them made the line-up.

Using that as motivation, every training session, every day in the prelude to the game, they kept on giving their all, pushing themselves to the ultimate level.

Like this, in a short period of time, D-day was here.

On 15th December, Barcelona welcomed Leganes to Barcelona.

Like expected, against an FC Barcelona side that was in imperious form, Leganes was like an egg that was smashed against a wall after making the trip to the Spotify Camp Nou in Barcelona.

Raphinha opened the scoring early, lashing into a Frankie De Jong pass, exploding towards goal with speed before putting 1 past the goalkeeper.

In just the 6th minute of this game, Barca went ahead.

And that goal set the motion for the rest of the game.

In the 22nd minute of the game, FC Barcelona did it again, this time the Sam and Yamal partnership shining again as Sam set up the Spanish teenager to evade his man before rifling it into the roof of the net.

2 nil!

Yamal celebrated his goal excitedly with Sam.

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

During half-time, Hansi Flick didn't tell his players much, simply telling them to go out there and enjoy themselves on the pitch.

When 2nd half started, that was exactly what the Barca players did.

The attack simply turned on, leading to incredible samba football as the FC Barcelona players ran circles around the Leganes defense, torturing them.

In terms of dribbling, the Leganes players suffered as their Barcelona opponents humiliated them.

At the late stages of the game after a stalwart Leganes second half defensive performance against Barca's attack, when it seemed like Sam was finally going to break his goalscoring streak, he just went on and did it again.

Sam was able to score the simplest of goals in the 88th minute, tapping home at point-blank range from a Raphinha cross that flashed across the face of goal.

Sam celebrated his goal excitedly.

And with that, the game came to end with a convincing 3-0 scoreline.

FC Barcelona and Sam in particular were simply in imperious form.

To Sam, it was just another day at the office.

Chapter 365 365: Joining the squad

With another impressive performance against Leganes though Raphinha won the man of the match award, Sam was able to further add to his incredible goals and assists tally for the season.

His stats now looked like this halfway into the season.

[Samuel Moses=]

[No. 40]

*Goals: 31

*Assists: 17

*Games: 21

In just 21 games this season, Sam already racked up an incredible 31 goals and 17 assists, forming an astonishing combined total of 48 goal contributions.

In the 2025/2026 season, he seemed to finally realize his full potential; he was putting out all-time great numbers this campaign.

But personally, for Sam, after another impressive game against Leganes for FC Barcelona, that was the end of his club football for the year 2025.

A tough game against Atletico Madrid was coming up, a game that FC Barcelona fans attached a lot of importance though but unfortunately, Sam would be unavailable for that game.

In his absence, FC Barcelona did not have a reliable striker, Ferran Torres and Pau Victor being makeshift options.

Hansi Flick would have to find a way around it though.

One thing the fans didn't like was the prospect of breaking their unbeaten streak so far, but Sam didn't think about it much.

This was because even if FC Barcelona's unbeaten streak was broken by Diego Simeone's Atletico Madrid, FC Barcelona's lead at the top of the La Liga table would still be firm and imperious, hence no dangers for the club.

This was why after the game against Leganes, during the post-match interview, Hansi Flick finally told the fans of Sam's decision. He took his time to explain how much the AFCON tournament was to Africans.

Despite the fact that Hansi Flick's argument was convincing, the fans still had mixed reactions, some selfish ones not wanting Sam to leave at all.

None of their opinions mattered though.

This was because just 2 days after the Leganes game, on 17th December, Sam left Spain, connecting with the Nigerian squad which was already gathered in Nigeria preparing for the trip for the 2025 AFCON tournament.

Sam joined the squad.

...

Rabat, Morocco...

In the capital city of Morocco, the days leading up to the AFCON tournament in the host country was electric with anticipation.

Streets were adorned with colorful banners, massive billboards displaying the faces of African football legends, and fans flooded airports, hotels, and training ground just to catch a glimpse of their national heroes.

This was because this period, the national teams participating in the tournament were beginning to report to Morocco one after the other.

Across the streets, vendors sell jerseys, scarves, and vuvuzelas, while radio stations and television broadcasts were filled with tactical debates, squad analysis, and game predictions of the group stage tournament.

Which countries would progress from the group stage?

Which would be eliminated?

And which country would go all the way to win the AFCON tournament?

As Nigeria's squad arrives, excitement reaches a fever pitch. Then comes the moment everyone has been waiting for, the arrival of the Nigerian superstar.

Right there at the airport, hundreds of fans in the white and green of Nigeria were gathered, waving banners of a certain Nigerian football star, Samuel Moses.

The rising star and new leader of the Nigerian national football team.

The plan touched down to a sea of fans, chanting his name, waving flags, and setting off fireworks.

Security struggled to control the euphoric crowd as Sam stepped out clad in designer tracksuits, sunglasses, and headphones, exuding confidence.

Not just fans; at this moment, journalists also scrambled for quotes.

But Sam simply smiled and waved, focused on the task ahead as he moved with his teammates. Soon, they join the others at their high-end training facility, where new teammates embraced him like a long-lost brother.

During the last Nigerian game, Victor Osimhen and Victor Boniface, the star Nigerian strikers were absent, giving Sam the opportunity to play as the striker.

And now, with their return, they laughed and socialized with Sam.

Sam may just be 20 but they didn't look down on him, they've watch his game enough to know exactly what he could do and they respected him for it.

It didn't take long, Eric Chelle quickly taking over control of his team.

The coach gave his players time to rest, recover from the jet lag and immediately after, he plunged them straight into training.

The players responded with gusto.

Winning the AFCON tournament was a life dream of every single one of them, as they wanted to replicate the legend of old Nigerian stars like Austin JJ Okocha, Kanu Nwankwo and the likes who all won the tournament as their predecessors.

The last time, back in 2023, they made it all the way to the final only to stumble at the final step, losing to the hosts, Ivory Coast.

That heartbreak taught them a lesson, making them stronger, more resilient.

And now, they were back stronger and determined to get what they deserved.

This time, nothing would stop them from going all the way.

This time, they wanted to create history.

Under Eric Chelle's leadership, training intensified with cameras focused, capturing every move of the stars, especially focusing on Sam in training.

They captured everything; his crisp passes, thunderous shots, and commanding presence. The team, now complete looked sharper, hungrier.

And most importantly, they were led by an equally hungry coach.

Unlike the previous Nigerian coach who prepared a highly talented Nigerian squad to play defensive football, Eric Chelle was far bolder, taking an approach that the Nigerian predecessors who won the AFCON title used..., offensive football.

With the likes of Samuel Moses, Victor Osimhen, Moses Simon, Ademola Lookman, and others all available for him in attack, he would not make the same mistake as his predecessor to favor a defensive football style.

Eric Chelle preached offensive football to his players.

The host nation's air buzzed with tension and excitement as all the national teams arrived, training, locking in for the ultimate tournament.

Rival teams took notice of each other, especially Nigeria.

Afterall, they were tipped as one of the favorites this time.

And they were right. This time, Nigeria wasn't just here to participate, they've come to conquer.

And Samuel Moses was the head leading this Tiger.

Chapter 366 366: AFCON 2025 [1]

(AFCON 2025:)

(Group Stage- Matchday 1 of 3:)

(Morocco – Comoros)

(Date: 21st December, 2025)

...

(Mali – Zambia)

(Date: 22nd December, 2025)

...

(South Africa – Angola)

(Date: 22nd December, 2025)

...

(Egypt – Zimbabwe)

(Date: 22nd December, 2025)

...

(Senegal – Botswana)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

...

(Tunisia – Uganda)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

...

(DR Congo – Benin)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

...

(Nigeria – Tanzania)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

...

(Algeria – Sudan)

(Date: 24th December, 2025)

...

(Ivory Coast – Mozambique)

(Date: 24th December, 2025)

...

(Cameroon – Gabon)

(Date: 24th December, 2025)

...

(Burkina Faso – Equatorial Guinea)

(Date: 24th December, 2025)

These were the 24 national teams competing in the 2025 AFCON tournament.

On the first day of the tournament, 21st December, one of the favorites, Morocco, the host nation took on Comoros at the Complexe Sportif Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat.

On that evening, the 69,000+ capacity stadium was filled to the brim with tens of thousands of passionate African football fans.

Both countries came out to meet this game with the best they could offer, their very best starting XI.

For the Moroccans, starting in a 4-2-3-1 formation, Bono manned the goal as their protector while ahead of the goalkeeper was an imperious defensive quadruple of Attiyat Allah, Riad, Aguerd, and the PSG star Achraf Hakimi.

In defense was the duo of Ounahi and Sofyat Amrabat, while ahead of them was the trio of Hakim Ziyech in attacking midfield, Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz in right wing, and Ben Seghir in left wing.

El Kaabi started as the striker for the host nation.

As for Comoros, starting in a similar 4-2-3-1 formation, Anzimati-Aboudou started as their goalkeeper while ahead of him was the defensive quadruple of Zamir, Mohamed, Abdoul Anziz, and Djambae.

Ahead of them was the midfield duo of Massulaha and Ali Mze.

In attack comprised Assane in right wing, Hadji in attacking midfield, Tarek as the left winger, and Djoudja as the striker.

Both teams may be starting from the same starting point in this game, and they may have started in the same formation, but those were the only similarities between them as the game started and progressed.

In this game, Morocco was by far the superior side.

FWEEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, under the gaze and supporting roars of tens of thousands of Moroccan fans, Morocco went on a rout in Rabat.

From the beginning, there was no question about who would win this game.

People always knew the winner was going to be Morocco, the question was by how many goals were they going to win?

Well, Moroccans got their answer soon.

As early as the 7th minute of this game, Morocco scored its first goal against Comoros, courtesy of an incredible combo between 2 of Morocco's brightest stars, Achraf Hakimi and Brahim Diaz.

Both Real Madrid academy graduates combined to devastating effect in the beginning stages of this game, cutting Comoros open time and again.

And then, after another overlapping run from Hakimi, he played the ball to Brahim Diaz, setting the electric Real Madrid player up.

Receiving the ball, Brahim Diaz burst into the 18-yard box like an unstoppable hurricane, weaving through challenges with his quick feet and staying upright with his incredible physicality and center of gravity.

He managed to keep the ball long enough to shoot it into the bottom right corner of the net, beating the Comoros goalkeeper.

"GOALLL...!!!" The stadium roared to life as Moroccan fans celebrated.

Charging towards the corner flag, Brahim Diaz slid on his knees in celebration, pumping his fists excitedly as the fans celebrated with him.

Just like that, Morocco secured its lead and it was just the start.

In the 16th minute of the game, Morocco doubled its lead, this time Riad, the Moroccan center back scoring from a corner kick.

He rose highest in the Comoros 18-yard box, powering a header into the net and leaving the Comoros goalkeeper little chance.

16 minutes, 2-0...

Morocco continued without lowering the intensity.

Just 4 minutes later, in the 20th minute of this game, El Kaabi, the Moroccan striker got in on the fun as he tapped into an empty net from a Brahim Diaz pass after another electric dribble from the winger.

And then almost 2 dozen minutes later in the 39th minute of the game, Brahim Diaz made it 4-0, getting his name on the scoresheet again.

This time, he unleashed an absolute rocket from outside the box that beat the Comoros goalkeeper, nestling into the roof of the net right down the middle.

The power behind the shot was too much, leaving the goalkeeper little chance to save it.

It was already a rout, 4-0 in 39 minutes.

The first half came to an end 4-0; Comoros was being outran, outplayed, and outmaneuvered at every part of this game.

When second half started after 10 minutes of halftime to catch their breath, the Moroccan intensity lessened a bit on the pitch but it didn't do much to change anything as Comoros could not create anything of note to break down Morocco's defense.

And well, they were just inviting more goals by not scoring themselves, an opportunity that an imperious Morocco side didn't let slide.

Achraf Hakimi did it again after another overlapping run, playing the second ball that led to the 5th goal in this game as the Moroccan striker, El Kaabi got his 2nd goal of the game from a header, making it 5-0 to Morocco.

It was an absolute drubbing.

53 minutes, 5-0...

After that, Comoros was just defending, holding on to dear life but even that was not enough as in the 62nd minute, Hakimi himself got in on the goalscoring act.

After a series of one-twos with Brahim Diaz, he cut into the 18-yard box before unleashing an unreal curler, sending it into the top left corner of the net, leaving the Comoros goalkeeper no chance.

It was an absolute golazo, a goal straight out of the top drawer.

6-0 to Morocco.

An ecstatic Achraf Hakimi all smiles jogged to the corner flag before celebrating by dancing with his teammates.

The game eventually came to an end 6-0 to Morocco.

The hosts put down a marker on their backs straight from the first game of the tournament; they were one of the teams to beat.

Morocco got 3 points and Comoros? 0 points.

Chapter 367 367: AFCON 2025 [2]

(AFCON 2025:)

(Group Stage- Matchday 1 of 3:)

(Morocco 6-0 Comoros)

(Date: 21st December, 2025)

...

(Mali – Zambia)

(Date: 22nd December, 2025)

...

(South Africa – Angola)

(Date: 22nd December, 2025)

...

(Egypt – Zimbabwe)

(Date: 22nd December, 2025)

...

(Senegal – Botswana)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

...

(Tunisia – Uganda)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

...

(DR Congo – Benin)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

...

(Nigeria – Tanzania)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

...

(Algeria – Sudan)

(Date: 24th December, 2025)

...

(Ivory Coast – Mozambique)

(Date: 24th December, 2025)

...

(Cameroon – Gabon)

(Date: 24th December, 2025)

...

(Burkina Faso – Equatorial Guinea)

(Date: 24th December, 2025)

Morocco opened the AFCON 2025 with a performance that captured the heart of every football fan who watched the game.

They set an early marker as one of the proven favorites of the tournament.

On the evening of the 21st, they opened the tournament and then the next day, on 22nd, the intensity of the AFCON tournament truly started.

3 games were played on the 22nd.

First was the clash between Mali and Zambia, then the clash between South Africa and Angola, and then the clash between Egypt and Zimbabwe.

By the end of the day, one day dominated the headlines, Mohamed Salah.

After a tight game of incredible football, Zambia narrowly won 1-0 over Mali, while South Africa and Angola played a 2-2 draw. As for Egypt though, the Egyptians went on a rout, running circles around their opponents all game.

Zimbabwe suffered under the assault of the Pharaohs.

Led by the electric Egyptian Mohamed Salah, and a stalwart Omar Marmoush, Egypt was solid enough to steamroll through their opponents.

The first goal came in the 33rd minute, Omar Marmoush setting Salah up. 3 touches, the first to control the ball, the second to skip past his marker and into the 18-yard box, and the third to slot it into the bottom right corner.

Mohamed Salah celebrated by doing his customary praying celebration.

That goal killed the Zimbabwe momentum, and Egypt ran rampant.

Just 5 minutes later after the first goal, in the 38th minute of the game, Mohamed Salah got his brace, courtesy of another Omar Marmoush assist as he rifled the ball into the roof of the net, leaving the Zimbabwe goalkeeper no chance.

And then, in the 45th minute, the 3rd goal entered, courtesy of an own goal from one of the Zimbabwe players.

The first half came to an end 3-0 in Egypt's favor.

That scoreline demoralized the Zimbabweans.

When second half started, they embraced defense, protecting their goal so the scoreline would not turn more embarrassing. And since they were already winning, the Egyptian coach did not push too hard.

In the 60th minute of the game, he took out his star player, Mohamed Salah, giving opportunities to younger players to show their talent.

45 minutes of bullying later, the game finally came to an end.

No goal entered in the 2nd half, leaving the game to end 3-0.

Mohamed Salah won the man of the match award with his brace.

At the end of the 2nd day of the tournament, alongside Morocco, Egypt proved their credentials as one of the favorites of the 2025 AFCON tournament.

And then came 23rd.

Unlike the previous 2 days, 4 games were played on the 23rd; clashes between Senegal and Botswana, Tunisia and Uganda, DR Congo and Benin, and then the clash between Nigeria and Tanzania.

It was finally the D-day for the Nigerians.

But before them, Senegal lined up on the pitch in one of the stadiums against Botswana first. Senegal were one of the favorites this time too.

Led by a core of Ismaila Sarr and Diallo in attack, a core of Idrissa Gueye and Sarr in midfield, a core led by Kalidou Koulibaly in defense, and Edouard Mendy in between the posts, the ex-Chelsea goalkeeper, Senegal was a formidable side.

They also had a legend on the bench in Sadio Mane.

As soon as the game started, Senegal ran rampant, running rings around the Botswana defense as they played in a familiar 3-4-3 formation.

With Edouard Mendy starting the build-up from the back, Senegal played a perfect game, blowing Botswana aside with a convincing 5-1 display.

Ismaila Sarr got a brace and assist, Idrissa Gueye got a goal and assist, Camara got a goal, and then the last goal was scored by the legend who was introduced later in the game, Sadio Mane.

Botswana scored a consolation goal later on but it didn't matter, Senegal already won the game convincingly.

The game between Tunisia and Uganda was much more serious and intense. After a grueling battle on the pitch, Tunisia narrowly won with a 2-1 scoreline.

DR Congo vs Benin Republic ended in a 0-0 stalemate.

And then came Nigerian's turn when it was already dark in Morocco.

Eric Chelle's troops finally lined up for their first battle of the 2025 AFCON, under the bright spotlights in Morocco.

Eric Chelle started with his strongest starting XI.

Nigeria's starting XI was arranged in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Stanley Nwabali in between the posts as the goalkeeper, and a defensive quadruple of Osayi-Samuel, Calvin bassey, Ajayi, and Ola Aina ahead of him.

Further ahead of him was the duo of Onyedika and Wilfried Ndidi in midfield, and then the trio of Ademola Lookman in left wing, Alex Iwobi in right wing, and Sam playing as the attacking midfielder.

Sam was back in attacking midfield to accommodate another player up front, Victor Osimhen who started as the striker.

Afterall, attacking midfield was still his preferred position on the pitch.

As for their opponents, Tanzania started in the same 4-2-3-1 formation with Salim in between the posts and the quadruple of Mohamed, Hamad, Nondo, and Mwaikenda ahead of him in defense.

Further ahead was the midfield duo of Mkami and Yahya, while further ahead was the trio of Msuva, Salum, and Mzize.

Shentembo started as their striker.

Contrasted against the Nigerian team of big names, it was clear that this Tanzanian team was full of unknowns.

But it didn't matter because as soon as the referee's whistle sounded, they were equals on the field of play.

FWEEE!

Chapter 368 368: AFCON 2025 [3]

Tanzania may have lined up in a 4-2-3-1 formation, but don't let it deceive you. Against the all-conquering Nigerian team, their coach had no intention of playing open football.

Rather, his philosophy against the Nigerians was defend till death.

In actuality, on the field of play, his formation looked more like a 5-4-1 formation as they defended against the offensive firepower of the Nigerians.

FWEEEE!

From the first minute of the game, Nigeria showed that they were not here to play as they took the game to their opponents.

With Sam once again in the middle of the pitch as the orchestrator, the creator, and with a dangerous striker like Victor Osimhen ahead of him, he was free, liberated; he felt like a fish in water.

Bam! Bam!

Sam played his heart out, enjoying himself on the pitch.

His position was attacking midfield but he did everything. From attacking, shooting, dribbling to defending, tackling, even going on sliding tackles and then to playmaking, setting his teammates up.

Sam was all-action in Nigeria's first show in the 2025 AFCON.

He was not the only one though, he had a lot of supporting cast today.

On the right, electric dribbling was not Alex Iwobi's forte which meant that just like Sam, he was the additional technical playmaker for Nigeria, continuing from where Sam stopped to create for his team.

And he was doing a good job at it.

While on the left, Ademola Lookman was as electric as ever from the onset, bravely charging at the Tanzania defense again and again, turning them inside out with his electric dribbling and pace.

Upfront, Victor Osimhen was a menace, probing with his incredible pressing, physicality, and ruthless eye for goal.

The few times that Tanzania won the ball back and tried to counterattack, the fullback duo of Osayi-Samuel and Ola Aina shut out any dangers before they could fully materialize, Calvin Bassey perfectly sweeping up after them any time they stumbled with mechanical precision.

Like this, Nigeria played a perfect game and yet the goal failed to materialize.

Throughout the first half, Nigeria dominated on every perceivable statistic, pressing Tanzania to death and yet, the Tanzanian defense held strong for 45 minutes.

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

During half-time, Eric Chelle smiled at his players. "Good job," he grinned. "They're barely holding on; they won't be able to sustain it".

"Just keep doing what you're doing and the goals will come".

FWEEE!

When 2nd half started, remaining patient, Nigeria did it, playing their game and pressuring Tanzania but the more the minutes passed without a goal, the more the Nigerian fans in white and red on the stands became reckless.

They clamored for a goal.

50 minutes, no goal...

60 minutes, no goal...

70 minutes, no goal...

75 minutes, no goal...

And then in the 78th minute, Sam burst to life.

By then, he already entered the flow state, running with a single-minded focus of putting the ball inside the net.

Bam!

He received a pass from Wilfried Ndidi and after beating his man with a silky smooth la croqueta, he fed the ball to Alex Iwobi with the outside of his right boot who hit it one-time to Victor Osimhen in the box.

Sam ran after the ball, into the box.

Osimhen took one touch of the ball and feeling defenders around him, he looked, found Sam's run and simply left the ball on his front for him to shoot.

Thud! Thud!

"...!"

Seeing him run closer, the Tanzanian defense panicked but it was already too late, Sam already arrived at the right place at the right time.

Whoosh!

A Tanzanian player slid in but not even hesitating, with narrow-minded focus, Sam swung his right leg back and then...

WHOP!

Like a missile, the ball rose up, honing towards the net.

The Tanzanian goalkeeper was rooted to one spot, only seeing afterimages that were left by the ball. Before he knew it, the ball already nestled in his net and the young Nigerian already charged off to celebrate.

Sam slid on his knees in celebration as a familiar chant made its way to Morocco.

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

The passionate Nigerian fans sang at the top of their lungs.

"Well, well, well, who else but Samuel Moses?!"

"Once again, he's come up clutch for his country, scoring when they needed it the most!"

"The maverick, the boy wonder is here in Morocco!"

A lot of Nigerian fans heaved a sigh of relief after that goal.

To the Tanzanian national team though, all hell broke loose after that goal. To hell with it! They had nothing else to lose, or so they thought.

After that goal, their coach gave the order as they finally left their turtle shell to attack aggressively and get the equalizing goal after defending all game.

That... was a foolish decision against Eric Chelle's Nigeria.

The floodgates opened.

Sam scored in the 78th minute, in the 81st, he raised the ball over the defense for Victor Osimhen to run into, volleying a shot into the net with a perfect shooting technique as the Tanzanian defense was now more open to exploit.

75 minutes, 0-0...

81 minutes, 2-0...

In the 85th minute, Alex Iwobi set up Sam, playing a diagonal pass into the box for Sam that Sam made the most off in a moment of individual brilliance.

The ball was hit fast and with power but Sam was still able to tame it perfectly with his wand of a right foot.

Stopping the ball with one touch, with his second touch, he rainbow-flicked the defender pressing him and with his third, he volleyed it into the net.

A thunderbolt!

BAM!

"Ladies and gentlemen, Zinedine Sam is here in Morocco!"

"Be scared, be afraid, show respect!"

"The Nigerian King is here!"

From 0-0, Tanzania were now being killed 3-0.

But still not done, in the 89th minute, Ademola Lookman went on a crazy solo run, cutting through Tanzanian players like they were not there before cutting in and beating the Tanzanian goalkeeper at his near post, scoring Nigeria's 4th goal.

The game eventually game to an end 4-0 in Nigeria's favor.

With a brace and 1 assist, Sam made his AFCON debut in grand style, winning the man of the match award in his very first game.

Chapter 369 369: AFCON 2025 [4]

(AFCON 2025:)

(Group Stage- Matchday 1 of 3:)

(Nigeria 4-0 Tanzania)

(Date: 23rd December, 2025)

The next day, on 24th December, the remaining teams in the group stage duked it out on the pitch.

Algeria won convincingly over Sudan 2-0, securing 3 points while the reigning champions of the AFCON Ivory Coast won 3-1 over Mozambique. Cameroon vs Gabon was a 1-1 draw, while Burkina Faso won 1-0 over Equatorial Guinea.

With these results, Matchday 1 of the AFCON 2025 group stage finally came to an end.

Matchday 1 did not lack exciting games, there was a bunch of it.

In the build-up to the AFCON tournament, there were 5 African countries that were billed as the favorites; namely Morocco, Senegal, Egypt, Nigeria, and Ivory Coast, the reigning champions.

At the end of matchday 1, none of the favorites fumbled, all 5 countries managing to win their games, amassing the maximum 3 points each.

The last game of matchday 1 was played on the 24th, after which there was a 2-day break before matchday 2 commenced.

(AFCON 2025:)

(Group Stage- Matchday 2 of 3:)

(Morocco – Mali)

(Date: 26th December, 2025)

...

(Zambia – Comoros)

(Date: 26th December, 2025)

...

(Egypt – South Africa)

(Date: 26th December, 2025)

...

(Angola – Zimbabwe)

(Date: 26th December, 2025)

...

(Uganda – Tanzania)

(Date: 27th December, 2025)

...

(Nigeria – Tunisia)

(Date: 27th December, 2025)

...

(Benin – Botswana)

(Date: 27th December, 2025)

...

(Senegal – DR Congo)

(Date: 27th December, 2025)

...

(Gabon – Mozambique)

(Date: 28th December, 2025)

...

(Ivory Coast – Cameroon)

(Date: 28th December, 2025)

...

(Equatorial Guinea – Sudan)

(Date: 28th December, 2025)

...

(Algeria – Burkina Faso)

(Date: 28th December, 2025)

After paying attention to all the games in matchday 1 of the tournament even as they played their own game too, the focus of the Nigerians finally narrowed because following up was going to be a chore.

Instead of paying attention to all the competing nations, they focused their attention on only the favorites, their biggest rivals in the tournament.

Even as they focused on their rivals, they didn't lose sight of themselves.

The Nigerian squad under Eric Chelle focused on their own football, learning it, mastering it, and perfecting it.

And this time around, Calvin Bassey, the Nigerian mainstay was the captain of the Nigerian national football team.

Leading by example at the back of the squad, the core, the rest of the Nigerian squad prepared for their next game like their life depended on it.

They literally shut themselves away from the outside world, from the negative world of social media, all to focus their full attention on playing football.

Day in, day out, they gave their all in training.

And as they trained, 2 days quickly passed, the first day of matchday 2 of the AFCON rolling into town as the first games were played.

On 26th, the Nigerian squad focused on 2 games, the Morocco game and the blockbuster encounter between Egypt and South Africa.

Morocco played their game against Mali first.

In African football, Mali may not necessarily be one of the heavy hitters but they were no pushovers either.

On 26th, facing the hosts and one of the favorites, Mali played their hearts out on the pitch, giving out a performance for the ages.

They may not have Morocco's big names, but they had a solid and cohesive team and against the hosts, they caused a lot of trouble.

The first half of the game was an exciting one of end-to-end football, Mali holding the hosts to a 1-1 draw.

When second half started, it was the same thing till late in the game when Morocco finally rose up from their slumber courtesy of an angry Achraf Hakimi.

In the 80th minute of the game, the PSG fullback took the game by the scruff of the neck, singlehandedly winning it for Morocco.

In the 81st minute, after an electric overlapping run down the right-hand side of the pitch, Hakimi threw in an accurate cross for Morocco's striker to power into the net with a powerful header.

And then just 2 minutes later, in the 83rd minute, after a series of one-twos with Brahim Diaz, he burst into the 18-yard box with speed.

He attracted all the attention to himself, freeing up space before cutting back a pass for Brahim Diaz to poke into a suddenly empty net as the goalkeeper was also focused on Hakimi since.

2 moments of individual brilliance in the space of just 3 minutes, that was all it took for Achraf Hakimi to turn the game around for the hosts.

Hakimi won a 2nd consecutive man of the match award.

With Morocco's game won, all eyes turned towards the blockbuster encounter between Egypt and South Africa and this time, things didn't go exactly as planned for the favorites.

South Africa orchestrated the first major upset of the AFCON 2025 in imperious fashion, snatching victory from the Pharaohs of Egypt.

With Ronwen Williams leading the South Africans as their captain and talisman, the goalkeeper managed to put out a man of the match display in the 2nd group stage game, shutting Egypt out and leading his country to a famous victory.

Egypt outplayed South Africa, winning on every single parameter, outshooting them, out-possessing them but yet, it didn't matter.

In the first half alone, Egypt got 11 shots to South Africa's 3, 9 on target.

But Williams was a wall in between the posts.

He denied Salah 6 times by the end of the game!

The first half ended in a goalless draw but in the second, Omar Marmoush seemed to have provided the breakthrough when he scored in the 72nd minute of the game, sending Egyptians around the world into a realm of euphoria.

Ecstasy, joy..., they celebrated the goal exuberantly.

But 10 minutes later, the South African defiance started, orchestrated by a team that played team football like a well-oiled machine.

The equalizer came on the end of a sudden 18 pass sequence, South Africa's striker, Rayners literally passing the ball into the net at the end in the 82nd minute to bring the game level and stunning Egyptians around the world.

That goal... spurned Egypt on!

'We must get the winner!'

They pushed men forward in attack, desperate to get the winner but that risky gamble left them open at the back.

All it took was one counterattack, just one.

Mokwana, the South African winger got the pass and without hesitation, he started the counterattack, led it, and ended it.

With his speed, he charged down the field, bursting past multiple Egyptian players, including the goalkeeper as he rounded him before slotting into the net, sending the internet into a frenzy.

It was a big upset, an unexpected one.

South Africa won!

Egypt lost.

Chapter 370 370: AFCON 2025 [5]

With their 2nd win of the group stage, amassing 6 points in total, Morocco secured a favorable position for themselves in their bid to make it to the knockout stage of the AFCON tournament.

But with Egypt's loss, a nation was suddenly put under pressure.

With 3 points in 2 games, Egypt's position was not secure, they had to do more to secure a spot in the knock out stage.

All eyes quickly left 26th's games though, focusing on the 27th games.

This time, all eyes were on Nigeria and Senegal.

Nigeria went first, taking on Tunisia in their 2nd group stage game.

There's a saying, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Eric Chelle went with a certain formation for his first game and the result went swimmingly, he didn't make any stupid changes.

The same starting XI started for this game.

As for Tunisia, they started in a regular 4-3-3 formation with Ben Said being their protector in between the posts.

Ahead of the goalkeeper was a defensive quadruple of Abdi, Talbi, Meriah, and Mathlouthi. While in midfield was the trio of Ghandri, Rafia, and Skhiri.

Further ahead in attack was the attacking trio of Saad, Jouini, and Achouri.

Against Nigeria though, this attacking trio ran against an unstoppable defensive block as soon as the referee's whistle sounded.

Nigeria's defense was as rock solid as steel, while their attack was dynamic.

In this game, Victor Osimhem played at his very best.

The striker took the game by the scruff of the neck, scoring 2 early goals in the 9th and 13th minute to sink Tunisia to a certain defeat.

Tunisia got one back in the 22nd minute, making it 2-1 but what that did was only anger the Nigerians more, making them more rampant.

Sam combined with Alex Iwobi and Ademola Lookman to devastating effect, dictating the tempo of the game long enough for the 3rd goal to materialize.

Who else but Samuel Moses?

Sam latched into a loose ball inside the 18-yard box in the 38th minute of the game, unleashing a powerful volley that beat the goalkeeper, entering the net to make it 3-1 in Nigeria's favor.

In the 44th minute, Victor Osimhen got his hattrick, powering a header into the net from an Alex Iwobi cross.

The first half came to an end with Nigeria winning 4-1.

The Super Eagles were imperious this tournament.

2nd half didn't go much different from expectations. Nigeria did most of the attacking, while Tunisia did more of the defending.

Against the run of play though, in the 2nd half, Tunisia scored first, Rafia, the center midfielder unleashing an absolute rocket from outside the box that beat Stanley Nwabali, powering its way into the net.

It happened in the 50th minute, stunning this stadium.

In response, just 5 minutes later, Sam did almost exactly the same thing at the other side, powering a rocket shot from 30 yards out into the net.

The accuracy on his shot was devastating, ricocheting off the bar before diving into the embrace of the net.

5-2..., it was an exciting game!

In the end, that was all there was to the game.

Sam was substituted in the 75th minute, including Victor Osimhen, giving way for Viktor Boniface who did the most of the minutes he got, lashing into an Ademola Lookman pass to score the 6th goal of the game.

The game came to an end 6-2 in Nigeria's favor.

Nigeria was in imperious goalscoring form, and the fans of the Super Eagles were absolutely loving it.

After Nigeria's game, the other focus point of 27th December soon started, Senegal's clash against DR Congo.

In this game, Senegal may not have scored as much goals as Nigeria, but they once again proved their credentials as one of the favorites of the AFCON tournament with a totally imperious performance.

The first half came to an end 1-0, the electric Ismaila Sarr getting the only goal but in the 2nd half, the boy truly exploded.

He scored 2 more goals to emulate Victor Osimhen's efforts, becoming only the 2nd player to score a hatrick in the AFCON tournament this time.

The golden boot race was already heating up.

When it came to Ivory Coast's turn, they managed to secure a narrow 2-1 win over Cameroon, securing 6 points too.

At the end of matchday 2 of the group stage, the golden boot race was already shaping up as the main contenders were now known.

With 1 assist and 4 goals, Victor Osimhen was among the leading candidates for the golden boot award. But the true leader was Ismaila Sarr.

With his brace and assist in the first game, and then today's hatrick, Ismaila Sarr now led the golden boot and golden ball race with 5 goals in 2 games!

Sam also now had 4 goals and 1 assist in 2 games.

This AFCON tournament, the offensive players were going haywire, showcasing their talent as they dazzled with impressive goalscoring performances.

With the end of matchday 2, all eyes focused on matchday 3.

(AFCON 2025:)

(Group Stage- Matchday 3 of 3:)

(Angola – Egypt)

(Date: 29th December, 2025)

...

(Zambia – Morocco)

(Date: 29th December, 2025)

...

(Zimbabwe – South Africa)

(Date: 29th December, 2025)

...

(Comoros – Mali)

(Date: 29th December, 2025)

...

(Uganda – Nigeria)

(Date: 29th December, 2025)

...

(Botswana – DR Congo)

(Date: 30th December, 2025)

...

(Tanzania – Tunisia)

(Date: 30th December, 2025)

...

(Benin – Senegal)

(Date: 30th December, 2025)

...

(Equatorial Guinea – Algeria)

(Date: 31st December, 2025)

...

(Sudan – Burkina Faso)

(Date: 31st December, 2025)

...

(Gabon – Ivory Coast)

(Date: 31st December, 2025)

...

(Mozambique – Cameroon)

(Date: 31st December, 2025)

Matchday 3 of 3 of the group stage, the penultimate games of the group stage of the 2025 AFCON tournament.

The last game that would decide which country progressed and which were eliminated, the deciding game of the group stage.

The attention across Africa honed on 29th, 30th, and 31st December, the days that would determine the joy and sorrow of millions of football fans across the continent of Africa, Nigeria included.

The preparations for the game were more intense than usual, more driven than usual, players determined to give beyond 100% on the pitch.

Like this, time moved fast and, in a jiffy, it was D-day.

It was 29th December.

Egypt started the matchday by playing their final game of the group stage against Angola, a must-win game for the Pharaohs of Egypt.