

Football God 411

Chapter 411 411: Into the deep end [9]

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Round of 16:)

(Leg 1 of 2:)

(Lille – Barcelona)

(Date: 5th March, 2026)

After 8 games of toiling, securing victories and dominating, FC Barcelona made it to the knockout stage of the UEFA Champions League as the top team with the most points in the league phase.

And after the playoff games were concluded, the exciting round of 16 stage of the UEFA Champions League finally started.

Barca's round of 16 draw was a slightly simple one against Lille, but if they progressed past the French side, every other team in their side of the bracket was a fearsome powerhouse in their own right.

If FC Barcelona was to win another UEFA Champions League trophy after more than 10 years, their 6th trophy, they needed to be better than any other team in Europe since they would be pitted against the best of the best.

For this game, both teams started with their best lineups, and it showed.

Bolstered by the relentless energy of their home fans, Lille threatened within the first dozen minutes of the game and it eventually bore fruit.

In the 12th minute of the game, Jonathan David showed perfect target man instincts as with his back to goal, receiving a cross, he hit the ball with his backheel, sending it towards the top left corner and in goal.

It was a crazy goal!

"GOALLLLLLL...!!!"

Lille's Decathlon Arena stadium erupted, turning into a cauldron of noise.

The passion of the fans could be felt as Jonathan David charged towards the corner flag, sliding on his knees and celebrating the goal wildly.

Watching the stadium as they celebrated the goal, Sam could not help but feel wistful. 'In an alternate universe, I'd have played for Lille and not Fulham, right?'

He still remembered vividly.

After his 1 and half season with Enyimba FC in the NPFL, a few European clubs came for his signature then and if he didn't remember wrong, Sam thought Lille was one of them and they gave him the highest monetary offer.

In the end, he went to play for Fulham. He didn't regret his decision though.

Sam was not exactly sympathizing for them; he just entered that mood due to being influenced by the passion of the home fans in reaction to that goal. Well, he was still determined to doom them to defeat.

In this game, Sam was man marked again.

It only made him drop deep, increasing his influence in the overall dynamic of the game but Sam didn't get many sights at goal himself.

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

But then in the 2nd half, in the 53rd minute of the game, Pedri flared to life, floating a perfect ball towards the left corner of the Lille 18-yard box for Raphinha to tap into an empty net.

The Brazilian celebrated his goal exuberantly.

And then, just 5 minutes later, in the 58th minute, Raphinha did it again, this time from a Lamine Yamal trivela pass.

Yamal received the pass at the far-right side of the pitch, torched his marker with a silky dribble, leaving the poor guy on his butt and then stretching his body, he played an unreal trivela pass that teasingly rolled past Lille's defensive line, perfectly rolling into Raphinha's front.

Bam!

With one touch, Raphinha pushed the ball and surged past the onrushing goalkeeper, accelerating to prevent the ball from rolling out for a goal kick.

And then, from an acute angle, he hit it, sending it into the net.

BOOM!

The away section of the stadium erupted.

This game, Sam didn't have his usual level of influence but FC Barcelona won the game still. Raphinha won the man of the match award.

In another rare game this season, Sam failed to score or assist.

...

11th March, 2026...

A week later, FC Barcelona welcomed Lille to the Spotify Camp Nou.

Well, it was safe to say that the Catalans tore their opponents apart.

In the 1st minute of the game, Sam lashed into a perfect Pedri pass, lobbing it past the goalkeeper to score the first goal of the game.

In the 18th minute, Pedri doubled the score, making it 2-0 in Barca's favor.

In the 43rd minute of the game, Raphinha ended any contention in the tie as he scored Barca's third goal of the night, dooming any Lille hopes of a comeback.

In the 2nd half, Inigo Martinez leaped highest from a corner kick in the 82nd minute, scoring from a header to put his name on the scoresheet.

At the end, it was a rout.

FC Barcelona won 4-0 at home and 6-1 on aggregate.

With that, they progressed to the quarterfinals of the UEFA Champions League where they were guaranteed to meet a heavyweight of European football next based on the result of tomorrow's games, no matter the result.

The next day, Manchester City demolished Copenhagen in their tie, also progressing to the quarterfinals where they were automatically pitted against the Catalan giants in the next phase of the champions league.

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Quarterfinal:)

(Leg 1 of 2:)

(Barcelona – Man City)

(Date: 9th April, 2026)

9th April was still a long time from now though, and so FC Barcelona focused on the next game on their agenda, another league game.

And again, it was against a familiar opponent this season.

(La Liga:)

(Atletico Madrid – Barcelona)

(Date: 16th March, 2026)

Again, FC Barcelona was to clash against Atletico Madrid this season.

It was a league game and this time; they would be facing the Madrid team in away ground at the Metropolitano Stadium.

Hansi Flick may have not played against the Madrid side at their home stadium yet, but he already had multiple experiences of playing against them this season. Not just that.

More importantly, Hansi Flick had extensive data to pool from in his preparations for this blockbuster league game.

No matter what form his team and his players were in, Hansi Flick knew that a trip to the Metropolitano was going to be tricky.

He didn't fret over it too much though.

He simply did his best tactically, and left the rest to his players.

And finally, it was time to test their mettle.

Chapter 412 412: A blockbuster clash at the Metropolitano Stadium [1]

16th March, 2026...

A blockbuster clash between Atletico Madrid and FC Barcelona at the Metropolitano Stadium.

The atmosphere in Madrid was electric.

The Metropolitano was a cauldron of tension, a fortress bristling with defiance as Atletico Madrid and Barcelona clashed in this high-stakes La Liga showdown. The stakes were even higher due to their past history this season.

Every seat in the stadium was filled, the air thick with anticipation and hostility. It was not a derby game, but the atmosphere was like one of a derby.

It was a game between bitter rivals.

Atletico Madrid hated Barcelona's guts just as much as they hated the guts of their other nemesis, the club in the other side of Madrid, Real Madrid.

The red and white faithful roared with tribal pride, their chants thunderous and unrelenting, shaking the steel bones of the stadium.

But it was the traveling Barca fans, tucked into their section like a spark in dry grass who injected a reckless, overzealous energy into the night.

By now, it was no news that Barca was stringing up an all-time great season this campaign if they continued with this momentum to the end of the season.

They've beaten Atletico Madrid before this season, what was stopping them from defeating their rivals a second time?

Barca fans have witnessed their team perform so many miracles this season, Sam coming up so many times that despite the fact that this was the Metropolitano, they still didn't show any signs of fear.

Flares lit up their enclave in molten blue and red, smoke coiling into the sky like a warning.

They sang with delirious fervor, voices hoarse from passion and alcohol, jeering every Atletico gesture on the pitch, baiting the ultras with choruses that bordered on war cries.

But of course, Atletico Madrid fans were not about to let their Catalan rivals outshout them in their own stadium.

And so...

BOOM!

...It became a tug of war among the fans.

Banners danced wildly in the wind across the stadium, most from Atletico Madrid fans but Barca fans also raised banners, some defiant, others profane, all unapologetically provocative and loud.

But one of them stood out.

[Samuel Moses]

[Happy 40th game of the season!]

Yes, this game was Sam's 40th game of the season in all competitions.

Heck, he already lost count if not for the banner. This season, FC Barcelona fans seemed determined to follow every single statistic of his to the tee.

The champions league clash against Lille may not have exactly pushed the Barca squad to its limits, but still, it was a UEFA Champions League clash, a competition where every team gave their all to win.

Most of the Barca players were tired, still affected by fatigue but Hansi Flick didn't change his formation still.

For this game, he started with his best starting XI.

And then...

FWEEEE!

The game started.

And from the first minute of the game, Barca took the game by the scruff of the neck, dominating, but their dominance was brief. It didn't last long.

Just like Barca, Atletico Madrid started with their best lineup.

And despite the initial dominance by the Catalan side, fueled by the relentless energy of their fans, Atletico Madrid were able to dig in and do what they did best under Diego Simeone, defend deep and hit them on the counter.

The 1st minute passed, Barca dominating...

The 2nd minute passed, the 5th..., the 10th..., then the 18th...

Barca was still dominating, attacking, when Atletico Madrid's stalwart defense won back the ball, immediately hitting the Catalans on the counter.

Pedri lobbed a tricky pass into the 18-yard box, aiming to send the ball beyond the reach of the Atletico Madrid defenders but Robin Le Normand was having none of it as the Spaniard jumped, leaping highest to get to the ball.

The Spaniard did it, and without hesitation, he headed the ball away to the right where Nahuel Molina, the Argentine International was already running.

Raphinha pressed the Argentine International but Molina was calm.

Bam!

He took just one touch of the ball before passing the torch on, kicking the ball forward towards Giovanni Simeone, another Argentine International and the Atletico Madrid coach's son.

The Argentine received the ball, ran a bit with it, raised his head, spotted Julian Alvarez's run before quickly kicking the ball long and high to the left.

Like a remote-controlled missile, the ball moved with speed, arriving perfectly before Julian Alvarez at the left-hand side of the pitch.

Jules Kounde, Barca's right back was caught out of position.

He seemed... to have beaten Barca's highline!

Bam!

The Argentine International, Julian Alvarez did not hesitate, kicking the ball long and abusing his rapid speed to chase after it.

Nicknamed the Spider, Alvarez was swift, rapid, and precise.

Pau Cubarsi soon blocked him, making him slow down but just as the young Spanish center back went for the tackle, Alvarez tricked him, nutmegging him and skipping past him.

Inigo Martinez read a moment of slight weakness in Alvarez's strides, making him to instinctively step forward to make an aggressive tackle.

But the Spider was rapid, too rapid.

With one silky touch, he pushed the ball past Martinez to the right and just as he was about to stagger out of balance, he hit the ball with his right foot.

BAM!

Marc Andre Ter Stegen dived after the ball but his reflexes were not fast enough. The ball flashed past him, diving into the net.

For a brief moment, there was silence, and then... the Metropolitan erupted, turning into a cauldron of noise.

Having been forced to defend since the first minute of this game, to launch their first attack and end up scoring in such decisive fashion left the fans of the Atletico persuasion feeling on top of the world.

The Atletico Madrid fans went haywire in joy, screaming at the top of their lungs, Julian Alvarez was also about to charge towards the corner flag to celebrate when he noticed one of the linesmen raising something... a flag.

Alvarez's eyes narrowed.

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded, confirming it.

It was an offside!

"F*ck!" Alvarez cursed.

Chapter 413: A blockbuster clash at the Metropolitano Stadium [2]

And just like that, Barca survived the scare.

After that scare though, the game became more even, Atletico Madrid slightly coming out of their shell to attack more.

But it was still more or less the same Diego Simeone football.

Nothing exciting, just plain, boring, old-school football. But it was effective. Like they say, if it ain't bad, don't fix it.

But then, today, it was not so good.

After repeated knocking at the door of the fearsome Atletico Madrid defense to no avail for more than 40 minutes, hit by a stroke of luck, FC Barcelona finally broke the duck, scoring the first goal of the game.

It came in the 42nd minute.

And once again, Sam was at the heart of the action.

Just like in the Lille game, Atletico Madrid gave one of their defenders the task of man-marking Sam on this game. Like most other teams that faced FC Barcelona this season, they were wary of the threat posed by their striker.

Clement Lenglet, the ex-Barca player man-marked Sam and he was doing an amazing job at it so far.

He was not alone in doing that unenviable job though.

It was just too easy for Sam to dribble past him though he also stood his ground most times. So, in most occasions, as soon as Sam received the ball, Clement Lenglet's role was not to stop him but to slow him down.

Slow him down long enough for any of his teammates to join him as fast as possible, double-teaming Sam to stop him.

The rest of the Barca attack was being shackled like this, even Lamine Yamal was tamed by an especially ferocious Cesar Aspilicueta this game.

The young Spaniard uncharacteristically lost the ball too many times.

The only player that played his normal game, dictating the tempo in the middle of the park was Pedri.

And yet, Pedri alone could not make Barca win.

This was why Atletico Madrid focused on the game changers, Sam, Raphinha, Lamine Yamal, locking them out of the game.

For over 40 minutes, it worked, till it no longer worked.

After more physical harassment from Clement Lenglet, Sam left his marker, leaving the striker position and dropping deep.

That was when Pedri played a pass to him.

As soon as the ball rolled towards him, Sam heard it...

Thud! Thud!

The sound of Lenglet's boots behind him, the defender clearly ready to do anything, no matter how dirty or rough to stop him in his tracks.

Knowing this, Sam didn't keep hold of the ball, he didn't even try to control it and rather flicked it on immediately.

Bam!

Bending his boots slightly, he flicked the ball, passing it on as soon as he arrived to the right, making Lenglet hesitate.

In that hesitation, Sam bent his body, using one hand to shove Lenglet's outstretched arms out of the way to avoid being grappled.

He escaped Lenglet's hold.

With Sam's back to the goal when he received the pass, to his right was Raphinha. The Brazilian was the recipient of Sam's pass and like Sam, he didn't receive a lot of time to settle on the ball.

As soon as the pass came, Raphinha didn't hesitate as noticing Sam's run after evading Clement Lenglet, he passed to him.

Pablo Barrios, the Atletico Madrid midfielder charged in, trying to stop Sam but having seen his shadow before he arrived, Sam reacted instinctively, hitting the ball, pushing it in between his legs.

As Sam was about to charge past him after the ball, desperate, Barrios tried to react but he was already too out of balance.

So, he slipped... and fell to his butt.

Thud!

Without looking at him, Sam kept moving, but then...

Whoosh!

A sliding tackle from Conor Gallagher.

Bam!

Reacting swiftly, Sam pushed the ball with the outside of his boot towards Lamine Yamal while jumping at the same time, narrowly avoiding Conor Gallagher's dangerously outstretched legs.

Bam!

Tiki taka!

Lamine Yamal didn't hold on to the ball either. Showing his flare, as soon as he received the ball, he quickly sent it back with a silky backheeled touch.

The ball rolled into Sam's path in the 18-yard box.

By now, he was already dangerously close to Jan Oblak, the Atletico Madrid goalkeeper. And that was when a 2nd sliding tackle came in!

Whoosh!

This time, Sam didn't pass, neither did he jump.

He was moving with speed since, but as soon as Sam noticed the shadow movement first, he showed incredible technique, bringing his body to a halt immediately, killing all the momentum of his run.

He was only able to do this due to countless hours of training with the ball, mastering his physicality to an unreal level.

By stopping so abruptly, Sam allowed Robin Le Normand's sliding tackle to slide harmlessly past him, and then he moved again.

Thud!

Jan Oblak finally charged out as Robin Le Normand quickly inclined his head, looking, waiting to know their fate.

Jan Oblak's reaction was fast, but Sam already expected it, and so...

Bam!

He hit with the ball outside of his boot again, calmly nutmegging the goalkeeper as the ball rolled towards goal.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Nahuel Molina who had been charging back since increased his speed, chasing after the ball, trying to execute a goal line clearance but he was not fast enough. The ball just crossed the line when he arrived, hitting it outside.

But then...

FWEEE!

Goal line technology sealed Atletico Madrid's fate.

It was a goal.

BOOM!

The Metropolitano erupted, Barca fans roaring at the top of their lungs even as Sam charged towards the corner flag, doing the Cole Palmer Cold celebration.

'Damn!'

The Atletico Madrid fans were quiet, they truly felt cold.

That goal... decided the game.

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

The second half was even more boring and at the same time more tense than the first. Atletico Madrid came out more to attack, this time Barca being forced to defend. Even Sam went back to defend at times.

After 90 minutes, the game did not provide a second goal.

The game ended 0-1 in Barca's favor.

Another 3 points for the Catalan giants, another man of the match award for Sam in his milestone 40th game of the season.

Sam was living the life.

Chapter 414: Public figure

(ESPN News:)

(Another FC Barcelona game, another FC Barcelona win, another Sam MOTM performance. Samuel Moses's sole goal was the difference maker between FC Barcelona and Atletico Madrid. Video highlights attached:)

...

(Supersport News:)

(FC Barcelona on a quadruple race? The Catalan giants already won the Supercopa de Espana trophy this season, retaining it. They're in the semifinal of the Copa del Rey, they're in the quarterfinal of the UEFA Champions League, and the Spanish La Liga race is basically concluded already. Can they do it?)

(With Samuel Moses in their ranks, Barca is limitless this season.)

...

(GOAL.com:)

(Dissecting the statistics behind Sam's 40th game of the season: 40 games, 55 goals, 33 assists, 88 combined goal contributions!)

(Never has the world seen this since Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo!)

(This season, Samuel Moses has outscored Manchester United, Chelsea FC, Dortmund FC, and other notable football clubs in the world.)

(Give the ballon d'Or award to its rightful winner already.)

These days, the name Samuel Moses was synonymous with the word 'excellence' in football.

This season, Sam already became a benchmark for which other world class professional football players were gauged despite being just 20 years old, a fact that still left a lot of people reeling in shock and disbelief.

The striker was clever, mature far beyond his age.

And his athletic ability was just borderline crazy.

Since the turn of the year after returning from the AFCON tournament, Sam's popularity exploded again, reaching an all-time high.

Because of him, a lot of people that never watched the AFCON tournament watched it this year and they were not disappointed.

Watching the young Nigerian prodigy in action alone was worth it.

These days, Sam was a public figure.

After the AFCON tournament, even more prominent companies of the world approached him to sign endorsement deals. Finally acknowledging that his fiancée was better at these things than him, he left it all to Kayla and his father.

It still felt surreal but yes, Sam already engaged Kayla.

She was now his fiancée.

The person who was most happy by this was not Sam, not even Kayla, but rather Mrs. Moses. These days, the woman was always perpetually giddy, never failing to boast about her son and his fiancée at every opportunity that she got.

She kept pestering Sam about what day he decided for the marriage ceremony. Like usual, Sam was just left exasperated by his mom's nagging.

He kept evading her probing, but he knew that this strategy won't last much longer. Sooner or later, he would have to decide on a date.

Marriage, it was still an alien concept to Sam.

A few years ago, Sam never expected that he would be thinking about marriage at the young age of 20 but well, here he was.

Success had a way of changing expectations and the way you look at the world. His successful football career already changed his world in so many ways.

Sam didn't think too much about it though.

'We'll decide later'. He thought.

'For now,' he grinned. 'It's time for an interview'.

Yes, Sam was a public figure now and after the game against Atletico Madrid, one of the biggest TV shows in Spain decided to have an interview with him, reviewing his highly successful season so far.

"Sam, welcome to the show, how do you feel?"

Sam grinned. "I feel great".

The host smiled. He was a middle-aged man with short brown hair and a neatly trimmed brown beard. "Once again, your goal was the difference maker in a game where FC Barcelona was frustrated by the best defense in Spain".

"How does it feel to be the star of such a star-studded squad?"

Sam shrugged. "I don't really think about that much. Like you said, the Barca squad is star-studded. Rather than thinking about who is a star and who is not, I think on the pitch, all we think about is how to win".

"You're right". The host smiled. "Afterall, winning is the most important thing".

"This season, you've broken numerous goalscoring and assists records already. At this rate, you may go on and break Lionel Messi's record of the most goals and assists in a calendar year, how do you feel about that?"

Sam smiled and rubbed his nose. "First, I feel flattered that my name is being mentioned in the same breath as Lionel Messi". He chuckled. "Really".

He leaned back on his chair with a sigh. "Growing up, Lionel Messi was my idol, my G.O.A.T, the pinnacle of professional football".

"To know that I'm breaking records that were set for him, and with FC Barcelona, honestly, it warms my heart more than anything".

"I just wish he was here to witness me do it".

Smiling sheepishly, he looked at the camera. "Umm, Messi, if you're looking, one of my big dreams was playing for Barca while you watch from the stands. So um, if you can, visit the Spotify Camp Nou". He laughed.

The host laughed. "Well, Sam, I'm sure Messi heard you".

"I guess we have to watch out for the G.O.A.T now, right?"

"Yes". Sam laughed again.

After that, the host of the show asked a dozen more questions about Sam's season; about his growing popularity, how he was dealing with it; about his numbers this season, how he managed to stay fit throughout the season.

And then questions about the dynamic in the Barcelona squad under Hansi Flick, his relationship with his teammates, which of his teammates he was closest to, and who his best friend was.

When the host asked him who his best friend was, Sam stared at the middle-aged man with a strange smile on his face.

"You don't know him?"

The host was surprised by his question. "Your best friend? No". He laughed.

Sam smiled. "With the amount of information about me that is online these days, I would have thought you'd know. My best friend is Ian".

His smile widened thinking of Ian who was now closer than ever to getting his medical license.

"Me and Ian, we've been together in like forever".

"There's no phase of my life that I can think back to with Ian not in it. He's always been there, running with me, playing with me, moving forward with me".

"In a few years, he'll get his medical license and then," he grinned. "I'll have my personal doctor".

He looked at the camera. "Fans, those of you who are worried about my fitness, don't worry. With Ian, I'll be as safe as anything can be".

"Besides, you can patronize him too. He's my best friend so it should be a no-brainer," he grinned. "He's good at what he does".

After a few more questions, including questions on FC Barcelona's next fixtures and if they actually had what it took to win a quadruple this season, the show finally came to an end.

Sam was at the height of his career.

Could he climb even higher?

Who knows? But he was excited to know.

Chapter 415: Blitz

After the Atletico Madrid game and the interview that followed, Sam didn't have the chance to engage in anymore idle activities simply because this was still the deep end of the season.

And FC Barcelona was at the heart of it, competing in 4 different competitions still, trying to win every single one of them.

Sam didn't change anything, he continued his boring, monotonic schedule.

Every day, he tackled his daily system mission alongside his friends, jogging through the streets of Barcelona, working out at the Spotify Camp Nou gym, and being punctual for team training every single day.

Not just that, Sam organized personal training sessions with his friends.

Before now, Pedri, Gavi, Lamine Yamal, and Alejandro Balde were already billed and recognized as some of the best and most exciting players in their different positions in the world.

They were taking the world of football by storm since, but with Sam's crazy rise, their success was put into perspective.

The 4 Spanish players once thought they already hit their peak, the best form that they could reach, but playing alongside Sam and being friends with him but things into perspective.

Being privileged to train with him every day, they learned a bitter truth, the truth that they were not yet at their peak.

Maybe they were but heck, they could go further.

There was nothing like perfection, just a constant chase for it. That was what they learned from the Black Mamba himself.

Staying around Sam everyday has a way of affecting your psyche, you start developing the same mamba mentality that he has.

The mentality that everything is achievable with the right amount of hard work, the mentality that impossible is nothing.

And so, they worked, and worked, and worked again.

And the games kept coming, and they tackled them as they came.

It was almost... a blitz.

Well, it was, the well-oiled machine piloted by Hansi Flick took on the rest of the football world without fear, competing in 4 different competitions.

The first of them all were 2 La Liga clashes.

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Osasuna)

(Date: 27th March, 2026)

...

(Barcelona – Girona)

(Date: 30th March, 2026)

Hansi Flick approached both games cleverly, brilliantly rotating his team while keeping enough elite players on the pitch to pose a threat.

The first game against Osasuna was a breeze to the Barca players.

This time, Raphinha took matters into his own hands, scoring his first hattrick of the season. The game ended 4-0, a totally one-sided thrashing.

The first goal came as early as the 18th minute, and this time, it was tiki taka football at its finest. Raphinha played one touch football with Sam, cutting Osasuna's defense open like a hot knife through butter before eventually poking the ball past the goalkeeper.

The second goal came in the 23rd minute, this time Lamine Yamal receiving a pass from Pedri before dribbling into the box and passing it into the bottom right corner, deceiving the goalkeeper to score.

The first half came to an end 2-0 in Barca's favor.

Mere 3 minutes after second half started, Sam was tripped just outside the box and feeling it today, Raphinha requested from the striker to take the freekick.

Sam didn't argue, letting the Brazilian loose as Raphinha whipped in a perfect freekick, sending it into the top right corner.

In the 48th minute, 3-0...

And then in the 77th minute, Raphinha got his hattrick, lashing with a powerful volleyed shot after a silky Pau Cubarsi pass from deep.

And like that, Barca won 4-0.

Raphinha won the man of the match award.

Against Girona was not much different. At the Spotify Camp Nou, the Catalans put out an almost perfect display, clinching victory with a 3-1 score line.

This time, Sam was the star of the show.

The first 2 goals were absolute stunners, both sent from outside the box, beating Girona's goalkeeper with both his left and right foot.

Sam's lightning-fast double in the 12th and 15th minute doomed Girona, wiping away any hopes of an upset at the Spotify Camp Nou.

In the 2nd half, Gavi completed the route, scoring from an Alejandro Balde pass after an overlapping run.

Girona got a consolation goal late on but it didn't matter.

Sam won the man of the match award.

...

(Copa del Rey:)

(Semifinal:)

(Leg 2 of 2:)

(Atletico Madrid – Barcelona)

This season, the Catalan and Madrid clubs were at loggerheads with each other as this was already their 4th clash of the season.

In the first leg of the semifinal clash, Atletico Madrid secured a 4-4 draw at the Spotify Camp Nou. At the Metropolitano, theoretically, they were supposed to have the advantage but it didn't amount to much in the end.

Once again, a player was their doom... Samuel Moses.

Sam didn't score a goal neither did he register and assist but he was everywhere this game, helping Pedri orchestrate play from deep.

His imprints were in everything Barca, pressurizing the Madrid side.

The first half ended in a goalless draw but in the 2nd half, Jules Kounde whipped a cross in for Raphinha to lash in, scoring the first goal of the game in the 64th minute.

And then in the 78th minute, Barca completed their assignment, this time Frankie De Jong scoring the goal after a series of passing sequences that started from Sam winning the ball from high up.

And just like that, Atletico Madrid trailed 0-2 in their own home stadium, in the semifinal of the Copa del Rey.

The Atletico Madrid fans were incensed but they didn't let it show against their players, turning into furious support for their team instead.

They booed every touch that a Barca player made after the 78th minute, their voices rising loudest when Sam touched the ball.

It seemed to work, Barca failed to score a third goal but Atletico Madrid also failed to breach Barca's highline effectively.

Julian Alvarez was caught offside 6 times!

And so, Barca won.

Once again this season, in a high stakes game against the Catalan giants, Atletico Madrid saw themselves on the wrong side of a 0-2 score line.

This time, it was even more destructive as they were knocked out of the Copa del Rey tournament.

Barca progressed.

They blitzed through 3 opponents like they were not there.

Chapter 416: Against Real Betis

It was a Saturday evening in Barcelona.

5th April, 2026...

The return leg of the La Liga fixture against Real Betis.

These days, weeks precisely, FC Barcelona was unplayable, unreal.

They were on a generational run of form.

To most FC Barcelona fans, the notion of their main striker being Robert Lewandowski was as ancient as Slim Shady ruling the world of rap in the early 2000s. This season, Sam was doing the work even better than the real striker.

This FC Barcelona side was just a well-oiled machine firing on all cylinders, a machine that could not be stopped, churning with peak efficiency.

Hansi Flick football was gold, unplayable, untouchable.

And with Sam, that menace, they were unbeatable.

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Real Betis)

(Date: 5th April, 2026)

In the first leg of this fixture, just a few months after Anthony made the switch from Manchester United to the Spanish La Liga, plying his trade for Real Betis, they actually managed to play the Catalan giants to a draw.

On that game, Anthony was a menace to the Barca defense.

Could they do it again? Today?

Well, the questions would answer themselves in a few hours.

The Real Betis squad came to the Spotify Camp Nou in high spirits. Afterall, despite coming to the stadium of the most in-form team in Spain, they were no slouch either, they were in a good run of form.

They were on a run of 5 games without a loss, 3 wins.

And so, Real Betis came confident.

Like expected, both teams lined up with their best formation.

For Barcelona, Hansi Flick stuck with his 4-2-3-1 formation, Ter Stegen between the posts; Alejandro Balde, Pau Cubarsi, Ronald Araujo, and Jules Kound in defense; Pedri and Frankie De Jong in midfield.

As for attack, Gavi took the attacking midfield role, Lamine Yamal playing to his right as the right winger, Raphinha on his left as the left winger, while Barca's sharpest weapon, Sam stayed up front leading the line as the striker.

As for Real Betis? They started with the same 4-2-3-1 formation.

Adrian started in between the posts as the goalkeeper; Perraud, Natan, Bartra, and Ruibal started in defense; Altimira and Cardoso started in midfield, while the attack consisted of familiar faces like expected.

Giovanni Lo Celso played in attacking midfield, while to his right was the G.O.A.T, Anthony. To Lo Celso's right was Fornals, and up ahead leading the line as the striker was Hernandez.

The atmosphere at the Spotify Camp Nou was electric.

The home fans were loud but not just them, the traveling away fans were charged with endless energy. They clearly had hopes of creating an upset.

Could they?

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle cut through the clamor like the edge of a blade, and then, the action started on the pitch.

The first half was a bloodbath.

Both sides recklessly went on the attack, throwing themselves at each other recklessly in a game of end-to-end football, attacking relentlessly.

Of course, it was extremely exciting for the neutral onlookers.

For the fans connected to both teams though, it was nothing short of nerve-wracking.

The sheer amount of shots on target, the sheer amount of goalkeeper saves, both goalkeeper were in top form.

The game was exciting but the first game didn't come till later in the first half.

Heck, it came in additional time of the first half.

And of course, it came from the King in Catalan, Samuel Moses.

It originated from a corner kick.

Pedri played a short pass to Gavi who stood with him close to the corner, and as he charged out from the corner flag, a Real Betis player quickly closing them down, Gavi left the ball to his Spanish counterpart.

As chaos started in the Real Betis 18-yard box, Pedri took one last look inside the box, and then...

Bam!

He hit it.

A delicate, silky, devilishly accurate cross.

It was a literal piece of art as the ball floated through the air, creating an arc as it curved, diving towards the other end of the box... where a few players in blue and red lurked. And one of them was... Sam.

Thud!

Kicking the ground, Sam leaped high into the air.

And for a brief moment, he seemed to be floating, suspended in the air.

"...!"

Time seemed to freeze.

In that brief moment in the air, Sam seemed to turn into a prime Cristiano Ronaldo and as the ball descended, he twisted his head swiftly after the ball.

Bam!

The ball hit his head and with the last-second twist of his head, he directed it, planting an accurate header towards the top left corner.

Adrian, Real Betis' goalkeeper reacted, diving but it was too late, and dangerous.

At the last moment, the goalkeeper recoiled, protecting himself as he crashed into the goalpost. He barely protected his head.

And the outcome?

The ball nestled into the net.

"GOALLLL...!!!"

The Spotify Camp Nou erupted, turning into a cauldron of noise.

What... a goal!

The commentators went haywire, going lyrical as they described the goal, screaming shrilly at the top of their lungs.

That goal was magical, but it was not the only goal.

In the 2nd half, Barca started an onslaught. Sam got the 2nd goal, setting the tempo and this time he lashed into a Lamine Yamal cross, scoring an incredible bicycle kick goal, another highlight in this game.

He scored in the 55th minute of the game.

55 minutes, 2-0...

Pedri found the net in the 61st minute, sealing the game but Barca was not satisfied yet. Alejandro Balde scored the 4th goal of the game.

Running all the way from defense with the ball, the attacking left back dribbled through Real Betis players like they were not there and suddenly one-on-one with the goalkeeper, he kept his composure to score an amazing goal.

"GOALLLLL...!!!"

The energy in this stadium exploded, turning into a supernova!

BARCA... was unplayable.

After 90 minutes, the game ended 4-0 in favor of Barcelona, and Sam claimed another man of the match award.

Chapter 417: UEFA Champions League Quarterfinal; Man City vs Barcelona [1]

Just like Atletico Madrid, Real Betis was blown out of the way by the unstoppable hurricane called FC Barcelona.

Their quadruple hopes were still alive.

In the Copa del Rey, FC Barcelona was already in the final where Real Madrid awaited them. In the league, they had a comfortable 7-point lead over second-place Real Madrid now.

And now, they could finally focus on the biggest of their 4 targets for the season, the UEFA Champions League.

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Quarterfinal:)

(Leg 1 of 2:)

(Man City – Barcelona)

(Date: 9th April, 2026)

Last season, after years of dominance in the English Premier League, Pep Guardiola's Man City finally faltered, having their very first off season, the worst of the Catalan tactician's Man City career.

They called it worst because it was Manchester City though. Under Pep Guardiola, the sky blues already built too fearsome of a reputation in England.

In recent years, they were the benchmark of excellence in English football.

This was why their fall was scrutinized so much.

But that so-called fall was subjective. After all, despite the so-called fall, Manchester City still finished in the top 4 of the English premier leagues, meaning they were part of the best 4 English teams last season.

They may have gone trophyless, but still it was not a total disaster.

Despite this though, a lot of people, fans came for Man City's head. The scrutiny was borderline crazy, the criticism was depression-inducing, it was pure chaos and for a time, even the stalwart Pep Guardiola seemed to run out of ideas.

Man City legends like Kevin De Bruyne and Bernardo Silva were called washed, fans seeking for their departure.

Erling Haaland was called a ghost in games that mattered.

Pep Guardiola was called to resign, that he already lost his magic touch.

Well, despite all that criticism, Manchester City held. They managed to stay stalwart. Despite the rest of the English premier league attacking and criticizing them, somehow, they managed to keep their head in the game.

They accepted the failure of the 2025/2025 season, and then they went to holidays to prepare for a comeback in the 2025/2026 season.

Well, the sky blues did it..., they were back.

Manchester City was comfortably leading the premier league race this season as the top club, they were still in the FA Cup, and most importantly, they were now in the quarterfinal of the UEFA Champions League, about to clash with Barcelona.

This season, Haaland already returned to his goalscoring best.

Kevin De Bruyne somehow overcame his injury issues, staying fit and with it, the Belgian maestro returned to his very best.

De Bruyne said it himself at the beginning of the season, this was his final run in a Manchester City jersey.

It was the final charge of the assist king in Manchester.

Not just him, other veterans like Ikey Gundogan and Bernardo Silva decided to stay for 1 more season, though both now played in a reduced role.

And of course, with Rodri back, Manchester City was suddenly the all-conquering side that the whole of Europe once feared again.

Pep Guardiola was back being the tactical genius again, the football maniac.

This was why this quarterfinal clash was so pivotal and filled with so much hype. Afterall, this was a clash between 2 of the most inform teams in Europe.

Barcelona was taking the Spanish La Liga by storm this season while Manchester City was once again taking the English Premier League by storm.

In the goals' side, Haaland was Sam's only close contender this season.

And in the assist side, De Bruyne was the closest to Sam.

In the build-up to the game, three names dominated; Samuel Moses, Erling Haaland, and Kevin De Bruyne.

It was going to be a clash of epic proportions.

And then, the official lineup was released.

Hansi Flick didn't change anything, it was the same lineup that he used against Real Betis. As for Pep Guardiola, he also used his best lineup.

Lining up in a 4-4-2 formation, Ederson manned the posts for the Manchester club, while the defense comprised of Josko Gvardiol in left back, Ruben Dias and John Stones in center defense, and Manuel Akanji in right back.

In midfield was Rodri holding the fort, joined by Phil Foden, and both flanked by Kevin De Bruyne on the right and Ikey Gundogan on the left.

As for the 2-man attack, it was formed by Omar Marmoush and Erling Haaland. This season, the duo already built a fearsome reputation for themselves.

They were called the twin Devils of Manchester.

When the Barcelona team bus showed up to the Etihad, they received a sufficiently hostile welcome.

The atmosphere inside the Etihad was crazy, electric.

Since his career started, Sam had played in multiple big and iconic stadiums, exposed to crazy atmospheres and noise but today..., the atmosphere at the Etihad was something else.

This season, Manchester City fans were extra passionate.

An off-season was all it took for them to appreciate what their coach and players had been doing since. And now, their support for the club was even more staunch and stalwart.

Exposed to this atmosphere, Sam could not help it, he felt awe, and a bit of trepidation but he didn't let that feeling settled.

That feeling made him feel... challenged.

And trust Sam, challenges were his daily staple; he loved them.

He embraced the challenge, letting it become a fuel that ignited something inside of him. A fire.

Once the spark lit up, it soon turned into a blazing inferno.

Badump! Badump!

Sam could feel his heart beating fast.

The atmosphere was slightly cold but he could feel none of it as adrenaline surged through his bloodstream, keeping his brain awake and alert.

Even while he stood still, he felt like he was floating.

Sam recognized this feeling.

He grinned. 'Today is gonna be a great day'.

The players shook hands, separated into their different sides of the pitch, went into formation, and then...

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle cut through the atmosphere, serving as the signal.

The game started.

Chapter 418 418: UEFA Champions League Quarterfinal; Man City vs Barcelona [2]

FWEEEE!

The whistle cut through the stadium like a blade, and then, it started.

The war at the Etihad.

2 of the most in-form teams in the UEFA Champions League this season clashed in a highly-anticipated game, a game that promised excitement, action, and drama. A game where the star players took the stage as well as their coaches did.

Yes, tonight, it was not just a clash between the players of both teams, a lot of it was also focused on the 2 coaches.

The reason for the focus on Hansi Flick was self-explanatory. Last season, he led Barca's resurgence at the top of European football and this season, with the addition of Sam, the German coach was forging an all-time great season with the Catalan club.

As for Pep Guardiola? It was simple, the coach was Catalan.

He was born and bred in Barcelona.

Not just that, he was an FC Barcelona product. He once played for the club as a defensive midfielder having graduated from the academy; he had the Barca DNA soaked and ingrained in his bones.

Still, that was not all.

The true reason for the scrutiny and excitement is because in history, certain Barca squads are recognized among the best football squads of all time, and the all-conquering Barca squads coached by Pep Guardiola fall into this category.

Pep Guardiola is a Barca legend.

This was not just any game; it was a game of lost love, lingering love, complicated emotions, and pure Catalan football.

The game started, and Hansi Flick's Barca let loose.

The 2 clubs' philosophies under their different coaches could not have been more different, and it added to the excitement of the game.

Hansi Flick's Barca held on to the crisp passing style DNA of the club, but with a twist, the Hansi Flick twist.

Instead of just passing, passing till you score, Hansi Flick's Barca is high octane. It utilizes lots of precise passing, yes. But it also utilizes electric wingers in Raphinha and Lamine Yamal, adding a direct element to Barca's style of play.

And most importantly, he played a very highline, a system that most clubs across Europe were yet to fully grasp even in the coach's 2nd season in charge.

As for Pep Guardiola?

He was Barca through and through.

Even with Manchester City, he stayed true to his Catalan heritage, drilling a Man City team that excelled in patiently passing their opponent to death.

This game was as much a clash of footballing philosophies as it was a clash of players; which philosophy would win?

BOOM!

The Etihad was loud.

The Manchester City fans created an atmosphere of noise that buoyed their team on like a mantle of power, infusing them with relentless energy and for the first few minutes of the game, they dominated.

Barca was forced to defend.

Bam! Bam!

Crisp, short passes tore the Barca formation open again and again.

In the middle of the park, the midfield quadruple of Rodri, Phil Foden, Ikey Gundogan, and Kevin De Bruyne dominated the game, overwhelming Barca's midfield for a time as they passed circles around their opponents.

And whenever the ball got to Kevin, the Belgian maestro, the Barca defense shuddered in trepidation with lingering fear of the Belgian's passing ability.

Kevin De Bruyne already released 2 of those killer passes that cut the Barca defense open, his teammates just failing to capitulate on the chances that he reacted.

Also, the Barca defense was playing at an elite level.

Not just Barca, Man City's defense was a rock this game.

Even with the fearsome attacking trio of Sam, Lamine Yamal, and Raphinha, Man City's drilled defense this season held their own against the onslaught of highly talented forwards.

It was an exciting game of end-to-end football.

Barcelona was more on the backfoot, but more often than not, it was even and there were exciting matchups all over the pitch.

Phil Foden vs Pedri in the middle of the park.

Erling Haaland and Omar Marmoush vs Inigo Martinez and Pau Cubarsi.

Kevin de Bruyne vs the whole Barca defense.

Lamine Yamal vs Josko Gvardiol.

Raphinha vs Manuel Ajanji.

Rodri vs every Barca player that tried to run through his side of the pitch with the ball. This game, the towering Spaniard was perfect in his tackling and interception. He limited the ball being fed to Barca's lethal striker.

The game was tough, end to end, and extremely exciting, but then just a few minutes after 10 minutes, a player struck...

...SAM!

Sam struck first.

For the first 10 minutes of this game, he was starved of chances as the towering Ruben Dias shadowed him, monitoring his every move.

For the first 10 minutes of this game, Sam had just 2 touches of the ball, 2 touches! That was how hopeless his situation was this game.

But then, the single instance when he finally abandoned his spot as the mine striker, dropping deep, that was when everything changed.

Ruben Dias knew that Sam won't stay in one place all game, his fellow defenders knew. Afterall, even their coach already discussed that point for them.

They've watched countless games and seen how Sam do it, but still, when the time came, reality was vastly different from a highlight reel.

Bam!

Pedri played a long ground pass towards Sam.

Ruben Dias quickly closed him down, slightly pushing against his back but resting his body backward on the defender, Sam managed to absolve the pressure, holding his ground as the ball rolled towards him.

With his back towards goal and Ruben Dias, one moment, it seemed as if he was about to trap the ball and then in the last second, he inclined his leg, flicking the ball with his heel instead to the right.

Whoosh!

The ball rose high into the air to the right, Ruben Dias quickly following it with his eyes but before the defender could react, the more agile Sam already did.

Spinning in one place, Sam evaded Ruben Dias' press.

He chased the ball, then...

Bam!

He hit the ball with his chest, pushing it further forward into the Man City 18-yard box.

John Stones quickly reacted, closing him down.

After hitting the ball with his chest, Sam controlled it some more with his lap, keeping his eyes on John Stones. And then... what he waited for came.

Ruben Dias rapidly recovered, closing the distance.

Hearing the sound of boots hitting the ground, Sam's eyes gleamed, and then...

Tap!

A delicate tap of the ball, so delicate it almost didn't make a sound.

With that silky touch of the ball, flicking his leg at the last moment, the ball moved backwards slightly and to the right since Sam was now facing the goal.

The ball flew through the air, and Ruben Dias flew past it with speed.

The Portuguese defender realized his mistake too late.

John Stones who didn't have to fight against the force of inertia reacted faster, charging forward and jumping, blocking with his leg and body. But it was too late.

Immediately after flicking the ball, Sam turned after it and then...

BAM!

A volleyed shot with his right foot, so powerful it sounded like a gunshot.

It's speed? It was that of a missile.

Ederson was rooted to one spot.

The net shook...

"GOALLLLLLLL...!!!"

Etihad roared to life.

Chapter 419 419: War at the Etihad

Barca scored first!

At the Etihad.

Yes, the Catalan club was in form, maybe even the form of their lives but no one saw this coming, not even the Barca players themselves.

They expected to play a hard and extremely tough game, a game where Man City held the most advantages, and yet, they scored first.

"GOALLLL...!!!"

The Barca players celebrated excitedly, their fans joining them, roaring at the top of their lungs even as the commentators went haywire, waxing lyrical about the crazy nature of that goal and how unexpected it was.

Charging towards the corner flag, Sam slid on his knees in celebration and when he rose to his feet, he kissed the Barcelona badge passionately.

And then, the Sam chants broke out at the Etihad.

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

The Man City fans felt a sense of déjà vu.

They've heard this chant before, but not from Barca fans. Then, it was from Fulham fans. Against them, this Sam always seemed to receive a boost.

'This bastard...!'

They were incensed but there was nothing they could do.

And then, the referee's whistle reverberated again; the game continued.

That goal felt like an injection of energy to the Barca players as with it, their gameplay improved immediately with Sam leading the charge.

But despite that goal, Man City didn't rollover in defeat though.

Not tonight, not in front of their fans!

Rather, the sky-blues showed defiant energy and fight.

Sam scored in the 14th minute of the game and from then on, it didn't seem like a game of football anymore, rather it felt like a war.

War at the Etihad.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

And the ammunition and bullets were the star players of both sides.

After that goal, Ruben Dias and John Stones were even more rough on Sam, Barca's star player but Sam didn't cower. He took them on without fear and the result of it was extreme exhaustion.

He was sweating like a Bull of labor.

In the tightness of the game, in the middle of the pitch, Pedri and Phil Foden shined for their respective teams.

Anytime they had the ball in the middle of the park, they seemed always able to do something that made their fans rise to their feet in awe and excitement.

With silky touches, deceptive body movement and body feints, they weaved in and out, throwing passes like and right like Ancient Weavers of destruction.

Ikay Gundogan assisted Phil Foden in dictating the tempo of the game.

As for Kevin De Bruyne, he was a menace all game, throwing passes left and right, chasing the ball down relentlessly.

He was giving his all in the game.

And then Rodri? He was a rock in the middle of the park. No one could pass him.

And on the other side, just as Sam tangled with Ruben Dias and John Stones, so did Omar Marmoush and Erling Haaland tangled with Barca's center defenders all night, pushing them to the limit.

It was a tight game.

It was an exciting game.

And then...

FWEEEE!

First half came to an end, 0-1...

During halftime, Hansi Flick had a passionate team talk with his players, emphasizing the important of winning this game.

He admonished his players to stay focused till the final whistle.

Pep Guardiola?

The Catalan coach ignited a fire in the cold expanse of his players' hearts.

And in the second half, Man City erupted.

They came out with vastly different energy; the way they carried themselves was different; the way they played, chased after the ball, passed, all of it was different; more focused, more straightforward, and more lethal.

For a few minutes after the restart, Barca failed to adjust to the sudden radical tempo switch of their opponents, and they were punished for it.

In the 53rd minute, Kevin De Bruyne finally did it.

From the right, after evading a tackle from Frankie De Jong, the Belgian maestro whipped his right leg, floating a dangerous cross into the box.

The ball seemed to have been overhit, but was it really?

The ball passed above all the players in Barca's box, floating towards the edge of the post, where Marc Andre Ter Stegen was already rushing towards, and then... a miracle happened at the Etihad.

Whoosh!

The ball that seemed to be overhit, one player could get to it.

Erling Haaland leapt high, soaring into the air like some bird and just as the ball was about to float out for a goal kick, he raised his right leg high acrobatically, placing it in the ball's path, and then...

Bam!

His leg touched the ball!

The ball that seemed unassailable, unreachable by any other player, the tall, imposing, and athletic Erling Haaland got to it.

And with his touch, he redirected the ball... straight into Barca's net.

The Barca players were still stunned, unsure of exactly what just happened. They were only distracted by the sound of Erling Haaland rushing off to celebrate, and the subsequent roar of tens of thousands of fans at the Etihad.

BOOM!

The Etihad turned into a cauldron of noise.

Waving his arms wildly like a wild animal, Erling Haaland rushed towards the corner flag, celebrating his goal passionately.

After the celebrations died down...

FWEEE!

The game continued.

But, Erling Haaland was already in the zone state.

Just 3 minutes after his first goal, he did it again. But this time, luck played in his favor, luck in the form of a stalwart Rodri.

Barca was in the sequence of another attack when a perfect but heavy tackle from Rodri took Frankie De Jong off his feet. De Jong barely landed when Rodri rose back up from his knee.

He raised his head and looked, then...

Bam!

He hit a long-grounded pass.

Because as soon as he won the ball, Erling Haaland started running. Not just him, Omar Marmoush too.

For a moment, Pau Cubarsi was stumped, wondering which of the 2 center forwards he should follow but the more experienced Inigo Martinez already reacted, going after Omar Marmoush.

But the pass was towards Haaland.

Pau Cubarsi jumped on a sliding tackle to try intercepting the pass but he timed it wrong, the ball rolled past him, into Haaland's path.

Haaland took one touch of the ball to set himself up.

By now, Inigo Martinez already recovered, charging towards him even as Alejandro Balde also closed the striker down from the right.

But it didn't matter.

Because at that moment, just inside the 18-yard box, Haaland raised his leg and then.

WHOOOP!

The Man City striker unleashed a powerful shot.

Ter Stegen dived but he stood no chance as Haaland's shot was precise, straight towards the top right corner.

It powered its way into the net, and then...

BOOM!

The Etihad exploded.

Chapter 420: Prelude to the 2nd leg

50th minute, 0-1...

53rd minute, 1-1...

56th minute, 2-1...

In less than 10 minutes, the complexion of the game changed completely.

BOOM!

The Etihad exploded.

The fans in sky blue in this stadium erupted, jumping up and down, some removing their jerseys and waving it wildly, others collapsing in tears as they celebrated the goal exuberantly.

While this happened, the star of the moment, Erling Haaland was already charging towards the corner flag amid the cauldron of noise.

The Norwegian striker had a big smile on his face, waving his right hand as he celebration passionately. And then, he slid on his knees in celebration.

Behind him, his teammates surged forward, celebrating with him.

Erling Haaland didn't stop at that. Immediately after his sliding tackle, he sat on the pitch, curling his legs together in a yoga meditation pose.

He did his iconic meditation celebration.

And amid all the chaos, the commentators went loose.

"HAALANDDDDDD!!!" The excited commentator screamed.

"ERLING HAALANDDDDDD!"

"ERLING HAALANDDDDDD!"

"The Norwegian King has struck!"

"The Viking King has struck at the Etihad, when Man City needed it the most!"

"Best striker in the world?"

"There you have it, this is him, ERLING HAALAND!"

"This is the best striker in the world!"

"The best players leave their mark in the biggest stages, and this is one of the biggest stages you can ever think of, against Hansi Flick's Barcelona, against Samuel Moses's Barcelona, and yet, Haaland did it!"

"This is the mark of greatness!"

The stunned Barcelona players watched as their opponents celebrated.

FC Barcelona did not play a bad game tonight. Far from it. They played an amazing game; it was just that the game was just so tight.

And in the tightness, Haaland picked his moment to shine.

Tonight was his night.

"Come on guys!" Sam clapped, bringing his teammates back to the game. "It's not over yet, there's still time!"

Sam was right, there was still time.

But tonight, he underestimated the impact of momentum and fan energy. Most importantly, he underestimated the Etihad.

From the 1st minute till now, the game had been even but after Haaland's lightning-fast brace, the momentum finally swung in Man City's favor.

This sudden advantage? The sky blues were determined not to let go of it. Not just the players, the fans too, and of course the coach.

Pep Guardiola regained his energy after Haaland's brace, walking to the touchline as there, he regained his animated coaching energy as he gesticulated all game, directing his players on how to defend, limit the threat of the Barca players and manage their lead.

Well, it worked.

In the storm of a seething Etihad, Barcelona toiled, Sam toiled, Raphinha toiled, Pedri toiled, and yet it was not enough.

Haaland came close to getting a hatrick in the 77th minute but Ter Stegen's strong hands stopped the shot.

And just like that, Barca lost the first leg of this UEFA Champions League clash in England, at the Etihad Stadium.

The final scoreline was 2-1 in Man City's favor.

Erling Haaland won the man of the match award for his electric performance.

...

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Quarterfinal:)

(Leg 2 of 2:)

(Barcelona – Man City)

(Aggregate: 1-2)

(Date: 15th April, 2026)

It was already a day after the damning defeat in England.

Sam and the rest of the FC Barcelona squad were already back in Spain. The defeat was damning, demoralizing but they could not afford to dwell on it.

Afterall, they were in the deep end of the season already.

Sam and his friends wanted nothing more than to ruminate on the defeat, focusing all their time and attention on preparing for revenge on the return leg but sometimes, things don't always go according to plan.

Especially when playing for a big club like FC Barcelona, and when you were competing in so many competitions.

There were 8 days separating the 2 leg UEFA champions league game, but in between, there was another game, a La Liga game.

(La Liga:)

(Leganes – Barcelona)

(Date: 12th April, 2026)

This game risked derailing their focus on the return leg of the Champions League game, but they had no choice. Hansi Flick had to face the challenge.

Alongside his teammates and their coach, Sam returned to a familiar monotone schedule..., train, train, and train again.

He had no time to think of nothing else.

In these few days, all Sam could think of was football.

And his family seemed to understand his need to focus, they gave him space. Even Kayla limited the time she nagged and spoke with her fiancée.

Like this, Sam developed laser focus on his profession, football.

And the first D-day came.

Hansi Flick started with a vastly changed starting XI against Leganes. Big names like Sam, Pedri, Lamine Yamal, and Alejandro Balde all started in the bench, giving chance to Ferran Torres, Eric Garcia, Dani Olmo, and Gerard Martin.

This left the team vulnerable though.

A spirited Leganes side fought tooth and nail against this FC Barcelona side. Barca scored first, Ferran Torres scoring as early as the 4th minute of the game, but then Barca lost control of the game.

Leganes scored in the 22nd and 35th minute of the game, stealing the momentum, and they sealed it with a third goal in the 45th minute.

In the second half, a reluctant Hansi Flick was left with no choice.

He brought out the big guns; Sam, Pedri, Lamine Yamal.

Just 2 minutes after coming on, Sam assisted Raphinha, slipping a pass for the electric Brazilian to blast into the net.

The first half started 3-1 in Leganes' favor.

2 minutes with Sam, Pedri, and Lamine Yamal in the game and it became 3-2, and that was just the start.

In the 66th minute, Lamine Yamal scored an Ankara Messi goal.

Receiving the ball in the halfway line, the teenage wonder wiggled past 7 Leganes players like they were not there!

After that crazy dribble, he nutmegged the goalkeeper, scoring a confident contender for the goal of the season.

66th minute, 3-3...

For the rest of this game, Leganes held on for dear life, and yet, it was still not enough against this Barca side.

In the 90th minute, Barca scored a 4th time.

Sam leaped highest from a Pedri corner, powering a header past Leganes' goalkeeper and into the net.

The away section exploded in this game.

Barca stole a late victory, Sam winning another man of the match award with his goal plus assist this game.

And with that out of the way, the prelude for the main game continued.

Time moved fast.

In the twinkle of an eye, D-day came.

The day, the moment of truth was here... 15th April.