

Football God 421

Chapter 421: Return leg at the Spotify Camp Nou; heavyweight clash!

15th April, 2026...

8 days, they had 8 days to prepare for the epic return leg clash.

The night at Spotify Camp Nou is one that's been etched into calendars and carved into nerves. A Champions League quarter-final return leg, and the scenario was perfectly poised for a blockbuster clash; Manchester City holding a narrow 2-1 lead from the first leg.

But now, the sky blues were entering hostile territory, the heart of Catalunya, where legends have risen and giants have fallen.

Hours before kickoff, the streets around the Camp Nou buzzed.

Thousands of Barcelona fans crowded the approach roads, waving scarves, singing anthems, and waiting.

Then, the City team bus appeared, a sleek modern coach gliding slowly into the lion's den, and hell was unleashed.

The roar of the fans swelled into a chaotic symphony of whistles, jeers, and chants. Red and blue flares erupted in the air like battlefield smoke.

Firecrackers snapped at their wheels.

"VISCA BARCA!"

"VISCA CATALUNYA!"

Chants pound the air like war drums.

It's not violence, not vandalism, not theatre, not a ritual, rather, a message delivered loud and clear.

'You are not welcome here!'

Inside the bus, the Manchester City players were stone-faced, staring through tinted windows at a sea of defiance.

But beneath that icy exterior, their blood was boiling.

Haaland cracked his knuckles, De Bruyne's jaw was set like stone. Rodri, returning to his homeland clenched his fists tightly, he could not help it.

They've been booed, spat at, disrespected, and now, they were ready.

It was no longer about just defending a lead, now it was about proving that they can conquer football's most sacred battlefield.

It was about proving their coach's tactics; it was about proving their credentials at the very biggest stage of club football.

When they walked out for the warm-up, the welcome was deafening.

Not applause, a wall of sound designed to drown them. Every City touch during the warmup was met with a tsunami of whistles.

Tonight, the Catalan fans held nothing back; they went all out.

Every shot on goal was heckled with savage glee. Barcelona fans rose as one, building psychological pressure before the first whistle even blows.

And then... the stadium went dark.

A spotlight illuminated the massive centre tifo; a crimson and blue titan crushing a clockwork machine beneath its boot, with the phrase.

>"Aquesta es casa nostra – This is our home"<

BOOM!

The stadium stands quaked, fireworks arced above the stadium roof, and the Champions League anthem blared, barely audible over all the noise.

The Camp Nou became a living, screaming organism, and in its center, 22 players prepared to write another chapter of footballing folklore.

The Barcelona squad fed off this energy.

Youngsters like Pedri and Lamine Yamal looked possessed. Raphinha's eyes were fire, his experience steeled by the occasion.

As for Sam?

Badump! Badump!

Sam could feel his heart beating rapidly against his chest.

'This...!'

None of the Barca players knew about the elaborate preparations of the fans in preparation for this game. And this was why just like the Man City players, they were caught off guard by the atmosphere in the stadium.

At first, Sam tried to be nonchalant but it was impossible.

This atmosphere..., even with his almost 4 years' experience in football, this was a first, this was unprecedented.

He could not help it, his blood boiled.

He felt goosepimples, all his hair standing on end and with it, adrenaline surged through him like molten fire flowing through a volcano.

Sam's eyes burned with molten fire, wide with dark glee.

As for the City players?

They thrived in hate. They drank in the fury, their faces taut, adrenaline pumping, hearts thundering.

This isn't just a football match.

It is a clash of ideologies, of dynasties, of wills.

A place where one goal can change history.

And tonight, the gods of football were watching.

And then...

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle was like a beacon of light in a chaotic storm, a beacon that gave focused to frenzied predators stuck inside a rectangle-shaped pitch.

BZZZ!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, FC Barcelona erupted.

They started kickoff and with it, oppression started.

Riding the energy of the stadium, Barca dominated during the first few minutes of this game with ruthless efficiency.

Bam! Bam!

The ball was pinged left and right like a ping pong ball, cutting through Man City's formation time and time again as Pedri dominated the midfield battle.

That night, old fans didn't see Pedri, rather they saw Andres Iniesta.

The little devil was everywhere in the midfield, twisting and turning, cutting, shifting, orchestrating the deadly Barcelona dance, a dance of shadows.

And then, the first chance.

Pedri unleashed a devilishly accurate long pass to Lamine Yamal. The electric winger didn't miss a beat, controlling the ball with one silky touch of his right foot and then with his left just as Josko Gvardiol closed him down, he flicked the ball on.

With his left leg and the heel of his boots, Lamine Yamal flicked the ball into the box where Sam was already lurking.

Instantly, a tug of war started.

Ruben Dias and John Stones sandwiched Sam, wary of his threat but despite the physicality of his 2 markers, Sam still managed to do what he wanted.

'If it's my will..., who dares to stop me?'

He leapt high in between the 2 defenders, controlling the ball with his chest.

Ruben Dias tugged at Sam's right arm, cleverly displacing his balance. Sam's balance wavered, but sheer willpower pushed him on.

His initial intention was mooted, unleashed a volleyed shot.

But in that moment, Sam's brain was working on overdrive.

'If not a volley, then what else?'

The solution came immediately and Sam executed it without pause.

As he descended with the ball, he suddenly twisted his body in mid-air.

As Ruben Dias and John Stones watched with wide eyes, the Barca striker twisted in mid-air acrobatically, swinging his right leg at the ball, and then...

BAM!

An overhead kick!

No one saw it coming.

The timing, the speed of execution, everything was so swift and seamless that all the Man City players in the vicinity were rooted to one spot, including the goalkeeper, Ederson Moraes.

Thud!

Sam landed roughly to the ground on his back, but the ball was already inside the net.

Jumping back on his feet, he charged away in celebration.

For a moment or two, there was silence and then...

BOOM!

The Spotify Camp Nou erupted!

Chapter 422: A thunderbolt!

"GOALLLLL....!!!"

The Spotify Camp Nou erupted.

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

The commentators screamed in a shrill voice, unable to contain their emotions as Sam charged away towards the corner flag in celebration, pointing at his name and no. 10 jersey before a boiling Camp Nou.

"What a goal...!"

"Sandwiched between 2 of the best center defenders in the world, and yet, that was not enough to stop him!"

"Samuel Moses, the Monster! The man, the myth, the legend!"

"What an overhead kick!"

"And ladies and gentlemen, that is right up there with some of the best champions league goals that I've ever witnessed!"

"Barca hoped for a miracle, and it came early, as early as the 6th minute!"

"And of course, who else but Sam?"

"Who else but the devilish Nigerian, the slippery serpent, the unstoppable force of nature, the Catalan fury, the King of the Spotify Camp Nou!"

6th minute, 1-0...

Aggregate, 2-2...

That goal... rattled Manchester City.

When this game started, Pep Guardiola, the Man City coach was sitting on the sideline but after that goal, the Catalan coach could no longer afford to sit down as anxious, he paced up and down the touchline.

It was just the 6th minute of this game, but Pep Guardiola's nerves were already stretched taut. This game was truly going to test his mental resilience.

And the coach was not the only one to react.

Just like Sam's blood boiled, the blood of the Manchester City players also boiled. Tonight, they were determined to give their best.

Heck, they were already giving their best.

They were adamant not to let a goal in, and yet, just 6 minutes in, that fiend already breached them and scored..., how?

Ruben Dias and John Stones stared at the celebrating Barca players in bewilderment, trying to make out the vague shape of the Barcelona striker celebrating among them.

The 2 center defenders were stumped at how that goal became reality, but in the end, it was reality and they had no choice but to accept it.

They could only make the resolution of not letting another goal in.

Ruben Dias growled, his eyes turning feral like a beast as he glared at the celebrating Barca players.

He clapped aggressively, aiming at his teammates. "Come on guys!"

"It's not the end of the world!"

"It's 2-2, come on, we're still in the game!"

Yes, Man City was still very much in the game.

Ruben Dias' shout and clap did the magic, making the players to calm their nerves, and then they developed laser focus on this game.

The Blaugrana celebration eventually came to an end, then...

FWEEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, this time, it was Man City's turn to bring out a miracle straight from Jesus' box.

Man City executed a move straight out of the training ground.

Gundogan passed to De Bruyne and the Belgian took one touch of the ball, allowing Erling Haaland to run all the way, penetrate into the Barca defense before suddenly playing a lethally accurate lobbed pass.

Bam!

The ball flew through the air, curving an arc like an AI-control mechanism was attached to it.

By the time it dipped, Erling Haaland was already in dangerous territory behind the Barca defense, having shoved Pau Cubarsi aside with his immense physicality. The ball dropped on his front.

And in that moment, time seemed to freeze in this iconic stadium.

Inigo Martinez followed behind, subtly grabbing Haaland's jersey to slow him down but that was not enough to slow down the towering Norwegian.

Haaland slowed down in his own time, when he was about to take the shot as time seemed to freeze for him also, and then...

WHOOOP!

The sequence of his leg suddenly erupting from a stationary position to swinging happened instantaneously, kicking off a storm in the immediate surrounding as his leg struck the ball with venom.

The ball flew with immense speed towards Ter Stegen's right. It was a sure goal, a definite one, right?

And yet in that moment, Marc Andre Ter Stegen, the German goalkeeper suddenly channeled the spirit of a prime Gianluigi Buffon, the Italian legend.

Thud!

Ter Stegen kicked the ground, pushing himself into the air as he jumped.

At almost point-blank range, Haaland hit the ball and with such speed and yet, despite all that, Ter Stegen managed to make it.

He pushed the ball, hitting against the post, and then it rolled into Alejandro Balde's path.

"...!"

Chaos briefly erupted in the Barca 18-yard box.

Haaland pursued, pressing the Barcelona left back but keeping his calm, with a drop of the shoulder, Alejandro Balde left Haaland for dead, erupting away with speed and kickstarting a rapid counterattack.

A lightning-fast attack, well, that was the name of this game.

After that Haaland and De Bruyne combo that caught Barca napping, only saved by their elite goalkeeper, the game turned even more intense.

Attack after attack, dribble after dribble, pass after pass, it was like a battlefield straight out of World War II.

Sam attacked, Haaland attacked...

Pedri passed, Phil Foden passed...

De Jong tackled, Rodri tackled...

Gavi passed, Kevin De Bruyne passed...

Pau Cubarsi and Inigo Martinez tackled, Ruben Dias and John Stones tackled...

Lamine Yamal dribbled, Omar Marmoush dribbled...

It was crazy, chaotic, intense, tiring, end to end, and in that chaos, when the first half almost came to an end, a player finally lived above the chaos.

He thrived, exploded, like a Butterfly breaking out of its cocoon.

This player was... Kevin De Bruyne.

In the 44th minute of the game, the Belgian maestro exploded.

It was a thunderbolt!

He started it, receiving the ball from Manuel Akanji, pushing the attack deep into Barca's half, observing his options as Haaland, Omar Marmoush, and an overlapping Josko Gvardiol all ran into space, anticipating his pass.

Those runs drew players to them, leaving space open in the middle.

No one expected the sudden change in decision.

Mid-run, Kevin De Bruyne suddenly changed his mind and then after one more touch, he swung his right leg and then...

POW!

The sound was like quaking thunder!

Hit by his lethal right foot, the ball flew like a missile with such force that it swerved unsteadily in the end, and then... it nestled in the top left corner.

Ter Stegen dived, but he stood no chance.

Brief silence followed, and then...

BOOM!

All hell broke loose at the Spotify Camp Nou!

Chapter 423: The flow state [1]

The flow state... what does it mean?

The flow state, also known as being in the zone is a mental state of deep absorption and focus in an activity.

It's an experience where time seems to disappear, self-consciousness fades, and you are completely engaged in what you're doing.

It is characterized by intense focus, loss of self-consciousness, altered time perception, intrinsic motivation, balance of challenge and skill, and a pervading feeling of control, domination.

Sam's blood was already boiling since, he was filled with adrenaline since, well, since the start of this game.

And yet, he didn't enter the flow state till he witnessed it.

BOOM!

The Spotify Camp Nou erupted.

"KEVIN DE BRUYNEEEEE!!!" The commentator screamed shrilly.

"THE BELGIAN MAESTRO!"

"THE MANCHESTER KING HAS STRUCK!"

"The best players show up in the biggest stages, and peel your eyes gentlemen, because Kevin De Bruyne has arrived!"

Witnessing Kevin De Bruyne carry the ball on that run, watching him score the goal, watching his home stadium erupt like a coliseum of madness, hearing the commentators wax lyrical about the goal, that became the catalyst that pushed Sam into a realm of altered time perception.

And unlike before, it was not off and on, it lingered.

Kevin De Bruyne scored in the 44th minute of the game, making it 1-1 in this game and 2-3 in aggregate score, giving Man City the lead again.

There was no more time to do anything.

The referee added just 2 minutes of additional time and it was over in a jiffy.

In no time, the players were walking to the tunnel, exhausted due to the sheer intensity of this first half.

And yet, even as he was sweating like a Bull for labor, his heart beating fast, his lungs burning, Sam was still in the zone state.

Throughout Hansi Flick's halftime speech, he didn't listen.

Heck, he didn't even hear anything that the coach said.

Sam was absentminded; all his focus and attention was left back on the pitch, analyzing the team, both his team and the opposition team, analyzing the movements of the players in the first half, their preferences, their positioning.

At this moment, Sam's brain moved like a supercomputer.

And in no time, they were going back to the pitch again.

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded, the signal to continue the game.

Bam!

Manchester City started kickoff.

It took some time for Barca to win back possession and once they did, high up in the field, Sam called for the ball.

It was an irrational move.

The 2 Man City defenders shadowed him for every move he made, everywhere he went. He was sandwiched but despite all that, Sam called for the ball, and Pedri didn't keep him waiting.

Bam!

As soon as Pedri passed the ball, Sam moved, shoving the hefty Ruben Dias aside with strength that Sam never knew he had inside of him.

With the tip of his boot, he executed a delicate touch of the ball and as John Stones charged in, he nutmegged the Englishman.

Manuel Akanji was already rushing in and with a la croqueta, Sam deleted him too before setting himself up and unleashing an accurate shot at goal.

He didn't even have to look at goal, but the shot was ruthlessly accurate, directed towards the bottom left corner.

Ederson Moraes was on top of his game though.

The Manchester City goalkeeper dived, saving the lethal shot at the right moment.

And that... was just the prelude.

From the first minute of the second half, Sam became a menace, an extraterrestrial being with limitless potential.

Every move he made, every touch he took bordered on perfection.

He was shadowed for every move he made, and yet, they could not take the ball off him. The ball seemed to be glued to his feet.

He dribbled like a wizard, weaved in and out like a slippery eel, cut like a knife, hit like a truck.

Sam was everywhere.

And yet, the defiant Man City defenders stubbornly held, playing at an elite level to keep the machine-made striker at bay.

They were struggling, barely hanging on, even bleeding as Ruben Dias hit his nose against the ground at some point after being dribbled past by the electric Sam.

And yet, by blood and sweat, they were hanging on, defending like their lives depended on it.

But even as they did all that, they were not perfect.

After a dozen minutes and some more minutes since the second half started, they finally made a mistake, Manuel Akanji tripping Sam just outside the Manchester City 18-yard box.

FWEEEE!

The referee pointed to the spot; it was a freekick.

With grim determination, Ruben Dias coordinated with his goalkeeper, barking orders to set a perfect wall of players to defend the freekick.

And once again, it was an almost perfect wall.

But when Sam looked at the wall of players, and then the goal, he didn't see players at all. All he saw were digits and numbers.

His brain was now a computer, operating in 0s and 1s.

The angle of elevation, the angle of depression, mass times acceleration equals force, the air resistance, wind resistance..., all the calculations filled Sam's head in an instant as the wall was being arranged.

An average human being would have collapsed due to the surge of information, but in the flow state, Sam took it all calmly, and then...

FWEEEE!

Receiving the signal, he took a deep breath, leaned backward slightly, and jogged towards the ball.

1 step, 2 step, 3 step, 4 step, then...

BAM!

As soon as the ball was hit, all eyes followed it, time seemingly slowing down.

Ederson reacted, diving after the ball as it managed to curl beyond the reach of the almost perfect wall of players, rushing towards the net with speed.

The Brazilian goalkeeper dived, putting his all in the jump and yet, it was not enough.

The power behind the shot was too much, the curve was too much, the angle was too acute.

Whoosh!

The ball flew past, and then the net shook.

Silence.

Then...

BOOM!

All hell broke loose!

Chapter 424 424: The flow state [2]

A freekick.

A shot, a goal.

BOOM!

The Spotify Camp Nou exploded.

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

The commentators screamed in a shrill voice.

"My God! What a goal! What a freekick!"

"We mortals live in our world while Sam is another thing entirely, an alien, a god among mortals. He lives in a different plane entirely".

"He's immortal!"

"He's unstoppable!"

"He can't be stopped!"

While the stadium exploded and the commentators went haywire with their commentary, like a demon possessed, Sam ran, evading his teammates as with dilated pupils, he pumped his fists excitedly with raw passion, celebrating his goal like a literal mad man.

Arriving at the corner flag, directly in front of the camera, he jumped and when he landed, his hands pumped like active machine guns, and...

"COME ON!!!" He roared.

58 minutes, 2-1...

And again, on aggregate, both big clubs were tied 3-3.

Sam was in the flow state.

He could not explain how he felt, but at this moment, he felt like he was capable of doing anything. And he felt that anything he did would be dangerous.

Conceding again after that Kevin De Bruyne goal left a bitter taste in the mouth of the Manchester City defenders, but there was nothing they could do about it. The goal was already scored, the most they could do was focus on the future.

Afterall, they were elite defenders, some of the best in the world.

And so, the quadruple of Josko Gvardiol, Manuel Akanji, John Stones, and Ruben Dias returned to focusing on their job, keeping Barcelona's attack at bay on the night, most especially the boy, no, the man called Samuel Moses.

He was 20, but Ruben Dias dared not refer to the Nigerian as a boy anymore.

If what Sam was doing in this game was what boys were capable of doing, Ruben Dias wanted to be a boy again!

But no, apart from Sam, you can't see another 20-year-old doing what he did in the highest stage of club football, the UEFA Champions League.

He was a singular existence sitting at a pedestal of his own.

But despite playing against this singular existence, the Manchester City defenders didn't allow themselves to fall into despair.

They were determined not to let Sam score a single goal at the beginning of this game, and yet he already scored a brace.

That... could shatter any ego and yet, the defenders didn't fall to despair yet.

"Come on!" Ruben Dias roared, organizing his players.

Yes, they still had a chance.

A chance to win.

They may be losing on this game, but on aggregate, it was still 3-3, a draw.

The game was still tied. And if they believed in their attacking players and defended perfectly for the rest of this game, there was still a chance of winning.

And also, there was the option of going to penalties.

Against this young and mostly inexperienced FC Barcelona side, Ruben Dias was willing to bet that his team would win if they went to penalties.

And so it started, the unenviable job of defending Samuel Moses.

BZZZ!

He buzzed like a bird, floated like a butterfly, and stung like a bee.

Manchester City's defense may have made their conviction, but none of that conviction had anything to do with Sam.

Just as they had their convictions, Sam also had his own conviction.

And his conviction was to score another goal, complete his hatrick and complete the comeback for his team.

The game continued.

It was not all Barcelona though despite Sam's form this game.

Erling Haaland and Omar Marmoush kept on worrying. With Kevin De Bruyne in midfield feeding the 2 center forwards, Barca's defense was always at tenterhooks for majority of this game.

But by now, fatigue was already wearing in.

And as fatigue settled in, individual brilliance shone more.

That was when a certain youngster shone. As Gvardiol gave in to fatigue, Lamine Yamal seemed to finally wake up from his slumber.

The young Spaniard turned into an electric spark, a deadly electric spark.

BZZZ!

He moved and floated like a slippery eel.

Whenever the ball touched his leg, he was definitely torching an opposition player with his silky dribbling.

For the next 10 minutes after Sam's goal, Lamine Yamal was the best player and yet, Manchester City's defense refused to budge, until the 72nd minute...

Lamine Yamal left Josko Gvardiol for dead again, drifting inside, trying to create space to unleash a curled shot at goal.

That was when suddenly, Ruben Dias charged out of center defense, clattering against the floating right winger, taking him out in a mighty collision.

FWEEEE!

The referee blew his whistle immediately for a freekick but adamant that he got the ball first, Ruben Dias lost his head, throwing swear words at the referee.

The referee brandished a yellow card for the Portuguese defender but still, the big man was incensed as his teammates tried to calm him down.

Ruben Dias losing his cool? It was a rarity in football, and it showed the intensity and emotion of this game.

FC Barcelona got another freekick and once again, Sam stood before the ball.

After hugging Lamine Yamal and kissing him on the forehead, Sam stood before the ball, then he took a look at goal.

The Spotify Camp Nou was eerily quiet...

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle cut through the stadium like a blade, and then Sam moved, counting his steps towards the ball.

1..., 2..., 3..., 4..., and then...

Bam!

This time, he didn't hit it with much power.

Sam simply curled his right leg around the ball, sending it on a rotating trajectory as it once again evaded the wall of players, and then...

Thud!

Ederson dived, touching the ball, pushing it slightly and yet, it was not enough.

The ball awkwardly rolled into the net after Ederson's touch.

"..."

For a few seconds, Manchester City fans stared in agony, hoping for a different result but their delusion was broken by the Catalan roars.

BOOM!

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

Chapter 425 425: The flow state [3]

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"Bear witness to greatness!"

"See it, live it, witness it!"

"2 freekicks in succession? That's a sign of greatness, that's a sign of footballing royalty, we are in the presence of the King!"

"Samuel Moses is in a level of his own!"

As Sam charged towards the corner flag, this time, he did the calma celebration to try taming the rapturous Spotify Camp Nou crowd but this time, it didn't work. The fans were just too excited.

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

The Sam chants broke out again at the Spotify Camp Nou.

The atmosphere in this stadium was electric.

And while Barcelona celebrated, on the other side, Manchester City writhed in agony. Ruben Dias in particular was still incensed, gesticulating wildly as he showed his displeasure at the referee's previous decision to blow the foul.

And then, the game continued.

FWEEE!

Manchester City may be trailing now, but it was just by 1 goal.

Maybe, just maybe they still had a chance.

That maybe was all Ruben Dias needed to rally his team again for one final all-out charge. In those final minutes, Manchester City played like a club possessed.

Phil Foden who had been quiet for large swathes of this game finally came to life, weaving in and out of the Barca defense.

And finally, he started throwing his trademark outside the box shots.

None of them worked tonight though, at least not yet.

Marc Andre Ter Stegen was in amazing form and most importantly, the defense ahead of him defended him like their lives depended on it.

Maybe they were tired, but Barca's stalwart defense all season didn't show weakness as they tackled every loose ball, intercepted every pass, and closed down every opposition player with rugged determination and tirelessness.

The intensity of the game in the final minutes was like steam; energetic, fiery.

Not just Phil Foden, Kevin De Bruyne kept on doing his thing also as he took it to another level, not just throwing passes now but also unleashing trademark outside the box shots at every opportunity he got.

Ikay Gundogan kept on doing his thing, pinging the ball around and then in the 78th minute, Pep Guardiola finally did something that he almost never did.

He pulled the button, decisively flipping the game over.

The Catalan coach made a radical team change, taking off Ikay Gundogan and introducing Bernardo Silva. He also took off Omar Marmoush, introducing Rico Lewis as he didn't stop at just substitutions, but also a tactical overhaul.

From the 4-4-2 formation that Manchester City started with, they changed to a radically flexible 3-5-2 or 4-5-1 formation.

When in possession, it was a 3-5-2 formation as John Stones advanced into midfield, playing a makeshift number 8. Role while Phil Foden advances further up to join Erling Haaland in attack in Marmoush's absence.

And when out of possession, the team morphs, reverting back to a solid 4-5-1 formation to defend.

For the final 10 minutes of the game, Manchester City was dangerous.

The heart of every Barcelona fan on the stadium felt like it was being tightened by a wrench, the tension was that palpable.

Badump! Badump!

Their hearts beat drums of war at every Man City attack.

They shook in trepidation every time Erling Haaland got the ball.

Pep Guardiola seemed to have taken the nice Haaland out of the pitch, leaving an evil, anti-hero Haaland on the pitch who did not shy from playing dirty, abusing his physicality, pushing and shoving just to scavenge a chance.

He did scavenge some, but Ter Stegen was at the top of his game, playing like a prime Thibaut Courtois in between those posts.

It was an end-to-end game, a game of non-stop excitement.

80 minutes, no goal...

81 minutes, no goal...

82 minutes, Haaland's shot hit the bar.

83 minutes, no goal...

84 minutes, De Bruyne's shot is pushed over the bar for a corner.

85 minutes, the corner kick was played and Ruben Dias rose highest, planting a header that missed the goal by mere inches.

"F*CK!" The Portuguese cursed in English before charging back to defend.

86 minutes, no goal...

87 minutes, no goal...

88 minutes, no goal...

89 minutes, no goal...

90 minutes, no goal...

5 minutes was added to the game.

By now, few FC Barcelona fans could stay seated in the massive stadium.

Majority of them felt like they were sitting on pin needles and so, they stood up, hoping, praying for their team even as they kept up the support by roaring at the top of their lungs.

Every Man City touch was ridiculed with loud boos, while ever Barca touch was encouraged with wild cheers and chants.

It was chaos, it was war, it was madness.

90 plus 1 minute, no goal...

90 plus 2 minute, Phil Foden received a cut back pass from Erling Haaland who burst into the Barcelona 18-yard box, his quick feet enabling him to wiggle through players in tight space like they were not there, until...

WHOOSH!

...Until Ronald Araujo's no-nonsense defending swept the Englishman off his feet but since he made solid contact with the ball, it was not a foul.

Barca started a counterattack, but the big man Rodri cut it short.

He passed to Kevin De Bruyne who received it, controlled it, and hit an instinctive cross into the box, into Erling Haaland's path.

Haaland chased after the ball, Pau Cubarsi chased Haaland.

Haaland went ahead of the Barca defender, trying to awkwardly volley the ball in even as Ter Stegen reacted but before Haaland could hit the ball, Cubarsi, the young Barca center back dove into the ball's path, recklessly putting his head on the way to clear the ball to the side.

Bang!

Haaland's leg connected to the young player's head with power!

"...!" The stadium froze.

Alarm! Shock...

The medic rushed into the field, attending to the young player.

A minute or 2 later, Pau Cubarsi rose back to his feet with a bandage covering his head. He was adamant to continue.

Haaland didn't receive a card. Afterall, he never knew the young defender would be that reckless, he was aiming for the ball all along.

It was already past the 90 plus 5th minute, but the referee didn't blow the whistle yet due to the delay.

90 plus 6 minutes, no goal...

90 plus 7 minutes, no goal...

90 plus 8 minutes...

FWEEEE!

Not the final whistle, a freekick.

Rodri swept Raphinha off his feet in an overzealous challenge uncharacteristic of the Spanish midfielder, earning a straight red card.

The foul took place more than 30 yards away from the Man City goal.

Sam and Raphinha stood before the ball.

"Wow, what do we have here?"

"Another freekick".

"Surely, it's too far away from goal, he wouldn't try it right?"

Tick! Tock!

Time ticked.

Chapter 426: Forging a legend

FWEEE!

Another foul, a Rodri red card, and another Barcelona freekick.

By now, Manchester City's defenders saw freekicks this game as some kind of voodoo. Afterall, with it, Sam already traumatized this defense that came to Spain, Barcelona with determination to not let a single goal in.

And yet, that kid, Sam already let in 3, 2 from freekicks.

So you wouldn't blame them for being wary of freekicks.

And yet, this time, Rodri's challenge took out Raphinha from more than 30 yards away from the goal. Surely, there was no way this was another goalscoring chance for FC Barcelona, right?

Not just the defenders thought this way, the commentators also echoed their sentiments, showing how pessimistic they were.

Pessimistic? Maybe more like realistic.

"Wow, what do we have here?"

"Another freekick".

"Surely, it's too far away from goal, he wouldn't try it right?"

Tick! Tock!

Time ticked.

Badump! Badump!

Standing before the ball alongside Raphinha, Sam could still feel his heart beating rapidly like the drums of liberation stretching free inside of him.

He was tired.

After over 90 minutes of this grueling game, giving his all to barely keep his team ahead, he was tired. He was exhausted, and yet, standing over this ball again, Sam could not help the flames of excitement blooming in his heart.

Like the bible says, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

The look in Sam's eyes, that look..., his spirit still boiled with zeal and fiery passion and yet his body looked exhausted.

But who cares?

Sam's mamba mentality entailed a few core principles, and one of them was to never stop giving his all till he fell down out of exhaustion.

'I'm not on the floor, so I can do it!'

It sounded arrogant, but this was Sam. This mentality was his; it is what enabled him to climb the hierarchy of football royalty so fast with his system.

If he believed it, then he could do it.

30 yards from goal? Heck, he didn't even care if it was 50 yards from goal at this moment, Sam believed that he could score it and so he would!

Raphinha looked at his younger colleague, focusing on his eyes. He recognized that look, he had seen it in Sam's eyes countless times in training and every time that look came out, the kid ends up doing something outrageous.

Raphinha chuckled, walking closer. "You're not tired huh, little devil?"

Sam looked at him and grinned, then slightly shook his head.

Raphinha smiled. "Are you confident?"

Sam looked at him.

"I want to do it".

"Ok then," Raphinha patted him by the back before moving further to the side. "Do it then". He said.

Raphinha didn't leave that spot entirely because he served as an extra form of distraction. He already agreed to let Sam take the freekick, but Ederson, Manchester City's goalkeeper doesn't have to know.

He was ready to get any advantage he could to help increase Sam's chances of scoring from this freekick, his 3rd of the game.

Now that he thought about it, if Sam scored, it would be a hatrick of freekicks.

Raphinha's eyes widened slightly as he threw one last look at his teammate. 'This guy..., is he even human?'

He sighed. Now he understood what old Barcelona players felt when playing alongside the legendary Lionel Messi.

He loved it though, and it excited him to no end.

FWEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded again, the signal to take the freekick and all of a sudden, the Spotify Camp Nou became as quiet as a church.

Nerves were stretched taut, breaths were held, eyes strained in focus..., could he do it?

Could he actually do it?!

Sam took a deep breath.

Then...

~----~

[You have accessed ability card: Bend it like Beckham!]

[Card Effects:]

>This card can only be used during a set-piece. Once used, for 10 minutes, for every freekick that your team gets, you gain the ability and technique of a prime David Beckham, giving you a +80% scoring buff when taking a free-kick<

...

[You have made use of ability card: Bend it like Beckham!]

~-----~

The last usage of the 'Bend it like Beckham' ability card.

Yes, Sam felt confident in his ability and the way he felt at this moment. But also, he could feel the exhaustion in his bones, how heavy his legs now felt.

Besides, he knew what was at stake. Not even the game, Barca already own, but a place in history. Getting a hattrick of assists, scoring 4 goals against Manchester City in the UEFA Champions League Quarterfinal, he could not help butterflies fluttering his stomach at the prospect of it.

He was at the precipice of history.

Maybe it was a foolish decision. Maybe it was wiser to keep this ability for other games when he truly needed it, but at this moment, Sam was willing to be foolish, or selfish depending on how you looked at it.

Being foolish, sometimes, it was the mark of humanity. And Sam was human.

As soon as he used the ability card, he felt a slight surge of electricity erupt from the sole of his leg, spreading through his body.

Sam's eyes ignited with a crimson light, and then, he moved.

Thud!

His leg hit the ground; first touch...

Thud!

Second touch...

Thud!

Third touch...

Thud!

Fourth touch, and then...

Sam raised his right leg back before swinging with a force that seemed capable of turning stone to dust!

His boot hit the ball straight at the center, and then, all hell broke loose.

BAM!

This was no caressed, finesse shot, rather, it was a powerful knuckle ball!

WHOOSH!

The ball flew like a missile, waving in the air like a flag. It flew high into the air, above the Man City wall of players, and then it dipped behind the wall, flying towards the top right corner.

Thud!

Ederson took a step, and stretching his body on a full body dive, he jumped after the ball. The goalkeeper gave his all, and yet, it was not enough.

History was created.

The ball nestled into the net, past Ederson, crushing Manchester City dreams around the world, scoring FC Barcelona's 4th goal of the night.

Silence, for a brief moment, then...

BOOOM!

The Spotify Camp Nou exploded.

Chapter 427: The legend of Sam

90 plus 9 minutes, goal...

4-1.

Manchester City's fate in the Champions League Quarterfinal was sealed; Manchester City was doomed by a single player, Samuel Moses.

"SAMUEL MOSESSSSSSS!!!" The commentators screamed in a shrill voice.

"REMEMBER THE NAME, SAMUEL MOSES!"

"The man, the myth, the legend!"

"King of the Spotify Camp Nou!"

"Lord of strikers! Lord of the UEFA Champions League!"

"That's 16 goals in this UEFA Champions league season, he's just 1 goal from matching Cristiano Ronaldo's record in Europe's elite club competition!"

While the commentators screamed in a shrill voice, the Spotify Camp Nou seethed like the boiling surface of a restless sea.

Some fans broke down in tears, others were more rapid, tearing their clothes violently as they celebrated with sheer passion and joy.

As Sam charged towards the corner flag, the fans closest to the blockade gestured at him with joyful expressions, eager to touch the hem of his shirt, and Sam obliged the excited fans.

Afterall, he was also in a great mood; he was excited.

Charging to the corner flag, Sam jumped over the broadcasting board and when he got to the blockade, he jumped again, climbing it and with that, the fans closest to the blockade embraced him excitedly.

"COME ON!!!"

They screamed, hugging Sam, pumping their fists excitedly.

Sam hugged them back, feeling his blood pump rapidly like it was being channeled from a high-pressure pumping machine. His adrenaline levels were high.

Not just Sam, other FC Barcelona fans joined him, celebrating with him as the whole club and its gigantic fanbase went haywire in the passion of the game.

As for Manchester City?

After that last goal, Ruben Dias, the Manchester City defender finally gave up, falling to his butt as he sprawled helplessly on the pitch, looking at the sky with a distant, confused expression on his face.

Anyone who saw him could read the silent question on his face.

'How?!'

Just how did the bastard do it?

Scoring a hatrick of freekicks in a single game, and in such a pivotal game too, against Manchester City, in the quarterfinal of the UEFA Champions League.

Most of the other Man City players, especially the defenders were like Ruben Dias, sprawled helplessly on the pitch, some sitting, distant looks on their faces while others simply laid down on the pitch, utterly exhausted.

And then, the commentators finally started waxing lyrical.

They couldn't help it, it felt like a travesty not to gush about this performance, and literally worship it.

"Ah, what a game!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, what we are witnessing tonight is not merely football, it's artistry painted in technicolour on the canvas of the UEFA Champions League".

"Etch his name in the stars, because tonight, under the lights of the Spotify Camp Nou, a legend has been carved into stone!"

"Four goals. FOUR!"

"Against Manchester City, the behemoth of English football, the oil-rich juggernaut that crushes dreams for breakfast".

"But not tonight. Tonight, they were made to bow".

"And not just bow, to kneel before a one-man orchestra in Blaugrana".

"Barcelona's maestro, the architect of chaos, the sculptor of moments divine!"

"Three, yes, THREE freekicks, script that!"

"Three freekicks, each one more audacious than the last. As if Poseidon himself curled the ball with tridents of pure magic".

"From over 30 yards, from the flank, even from a near-impossible angle that mocked geometry itself; each strike bent time, defied physics, and found the net like destiny written in flame".

"He's not just a player. He's a religion. A philosophy. The reincarnation of every great that ever wore the crest".

"And that overhead kick? My God!"

"A moment of pure insolence. Sam against Ruben Dias and John Stones, Sam against the world, and yet, physicality bordering on divine, control bordering on the otherworldly, and a finish that whispered, 'You are not worthy', as the ball almost kissed the underside of the crossbar before nestling home".

"The Nou Camp isn't roaring, its weeping. Overwhelmed".

"The gods of football have chosen their prophet. His boots are dipped in gold, his breath sings hymns of victory, and his name... oh, his name will echo through the rivers of time like thunder".

"Samuel Moses, Barcelona's golden child, the tormentor of Manchester, the miracle in human form".

"Take a bow, genius".

"The night belongs to you!"

The celebrations took even longer than expected, stretching on as the fans did not want to let their players back to the pitch and even the players were reluctant to return to the pitch.

The score line was now 4-1, and the aggregate score was now 5-3.

The tie was more or less decided, but then, the game must continue.

As soon as the players returned to the pitch though and Manchester City dispiritedly kicked off the game, a familiar sound cut through the stadium.

The referee's whistle.

FWEEEE!

The game was over.

Immediately, the stadium that was just barely calmed down erupted again in ecstasy, the players running across the pitch as they celebrated this legendary performance in their home stadium.

Tonight, it was all Samuel Moses.

His name was written and plastered all over the game but in the end, it was a collective team effort, and so his teammates could also bask in the glory.

While they ran across the pitch, celebrating, the fans also celebrated, jumping restlessly in the stands like a crowd of drunk.

Tonight was a night to never forget in the Spotify Camp Nou.

It was a night where history was created.

A night where Samuel Moses solidified his name among the list of all-time greats at just 20 years of age.

Sam didn't just stop at running round the pitch, celebrating excitedly with his teammates. After hugging all his teammates, he charged towards an emotional Hansi Flick, his coach who still stood in the touchline.

As soon as Sam arrived, he hugged his coach, lifting him up excitedly.

Hansi Flick laughed, cried, and celebrated.

The German coach was a veteran of the game. He already overseed lots of Champions League nights like this one and not just for FC Barcelona, and yet, what he felt this night, he had never felt it anywhere before now.

Tonight was unforgettable.

Chapter 428: Ballon d'Or favorite

4 days later...

Barcelona, Spotify Camp Nou.

"Good afternoon Pedri, welcome to the stadium. How are you feeling?"

Pedri flashed a smile at the reporter. "I'm good, and you?"

"I'm great". The female reporter grinned.

"Before you go in, please I have one question," her grin slowly turned mischievous. "Who do you think is the ballon d'or favorite this season?"

Hearing that question, Pedri looked at the reporter with a befuddled look that said 'did you really just ask that?'

He chuckled. "Sam, of course".

Pedri hesitated a bit before adding. "After what he did last time out against Manchester City, anybody would be a fool to think he doesn't deserve it".

The reporter's smile widened. "You think so?"

"Of course!"

And with that, the Spanish midfielder wore his headsets back on before trudging off into the stadium, idly waving at the fans.

That afternoon, not just Pedri, other FC Barcelona players who reported to the stadium were haunted by the referees, all asking the same question and all of them had the same answers.

Sam was the sole favorite for the ballon d'or this season.

Lamine Yamal's response was even more dramatic. "Huh?"

"Did you really just ask that?" He asked in Spanish. "4 goals in the quarterfinal of the UEFA Champions League, and against Manchester City".

He raised an eyebrow. "65 goals and 35 assists in just 46 games, and its not even the end of the season yet. That's 100 goal contributions!"

The teenage Spanish winger chuckled. "Show me another striker with anywhere near these statistics and we'll talk".

The reporter only laughed, agreeing with him.

Well, you could not blame the young Spanish winger's enthusiasm.

Sam was truly having an all-time great season. 65 goals in 2 seasons was a solid return for any striker in Europe, and yet Sam already had it in one season, in his debut season for FC Barcelona to boot.

Not just that, added with his 35 assists in just 46 games, making a total of 100 goal contributions in a single season, he was currently recording the single most prolific season in football history since Lionel Messi.

A few more of those and he'd eclipse the mercurial Argentine.

It was already 4 days since the epic UEFA Champions League quarterfinal clash against Manchester City. And during this time, Sam was the talk of the town.

Heck, not just the talk of the town, the talk of all Europe.

His fame was already at an all-time high, and yet, somehow, he became even more famous. Sam was now an idol of football, a bonafide footballing superstar.

That game took a lot out of FC Barcelona fans but here they were again, preparing for the start of another game, this time a La Liga game.

The players were tired, but they were in the deep end of the season. They had no choice than to keep on playing. Hansi Flick believed in his players' resilience, he believed they could handle it.

And so, Sam made the lineup again.

Just before the game started at the Spotify Camp Nou though, Sam received one of the biggest surprises of his life from the Catalan club.

Joan Laporta, the club President himself walked into the pitch carrying a golden plaque with the number 100 engraved in bold.

It was a golden plaque to honor Sam's legendary debut season, to honor his 100 goal contributions in just 46 games this season.

The date he scored the 100th goal contribution was engraved in the plaque, including the date that he scored his first goal contribution for FC Barcelona.

Sam... felt honored.

FC Barcelona was one of the biggest football clubs in the world. To be honored by them in this manner, it showed how amazing of a season he was having since his debut for the Catalan club.

Sam was happy, but his move was made even more giddy by the fact that just yesterday, he finalized contract talks with the club.

After that Manchester City game, a lot of things changed for Sam, mostly his status in the football world.

He was now one of the biggest players in the world of football.

And with that label, a lot of other big clubs now showed interest in him. And to secure their prized asset, despite the fact that it was not even one year since he signed for the club, FC Barcelona upgraded Sam's contract, making him the highest-earning player in the club.

And with this golden plaque honor to boot, Sam was in a great mood. And when the game started, his mood reflected on the pitch.

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Celta Vigo)

(Date: 19th April, 2026)

FWEEE!

The referee's whistle cut through the noise of the stadium like a blade, and with it, FC Barcelona's composed destruction started.

Knowing just how fatigued their opponent must be, Celta Vigo hoped to pressure the home side and get a result.

After the referee's whistle, during the first few minutes of the game, Celta Vigo actually had the better chances, pressuring Barcelona and eventually in the 19th minute, their pressure bore fruit as they scored the 1st goal of the game.

But that was where their luck ended because in the 28th minute, Barca started its comeback, Pedri assisting Lamine Yamal for the first Barcelona goal.

The midfielder slipped in a delicious through pass for the winger who didn't make a mistake, taking the ball in his strides and poking it past the goalkeeper.

The first half came to an end 1-1.

The second half was more dramatic, as FC Barcelona bared their fangs more with Celta Vigo threatening at opportune moments.

In the end, Inigo Martinez scored the 2nd goal of the game from a Raphinha corner kick in the 84th minute just when it seemed like Celta Vigo was about to run away from the Spotify Camp Nou with a point.

And even with that, Barca was not satisfied yet.

In the 90th minute, Sam finally got his name on the scoresheet, scoring from close range from a sweet Lamine Yamal cross.

The game ended 3-1 in Barcelona's favor.

Lamine Yamal got the man of the match award, but Sam played a starring role once again, solidifying his position as the best player in the world.

Chapter 429: 16 days of death

3 days later...

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Mallorca)

(Date: 22nd April, 2026)

Another day, another matchday, another game.

For this game though, Hansi Flick finally made a big change, taking majority of his starting XI players out of the game.

Ferran Torres replaced Sam up top as the striker, while Dani Olmo took Lamine Yamal's position on the left wing. Raphinha was the sole starting XI forward who stayed in the lineup.

In the midfield, Pedri was taken off, replaced by Eric Garcia.

Alejandro Balde was also taken off in defense, Gerard Martin taking the position of the electric and enigmatic attacking left back.

As soon as the game started, once again, just like Celta Vigo, despite the fact that they were in the Spotify Camp Nou, Mallorca approached this game with the gutsy boldness to take a good result back home.

The reason for their confidence?

Simple. Hansi Flick's rotation.

Lining up in a 5-3-2 formation, this was a dynamic Mallorca side.

With Greif holding the fort as their goalkeeper, Maffeo, Valjent, Raillo, Copete, and Mojica formed the valiant 5-man defense.

Ahead of them was the midfield trio of Rodriguez, Costa, and Darder, while further of them in attack was Abdon and Larin.

As soon as the game started, for the first few minutes, FC Barcelona dominated possession but the visitors had the more clear-cut chances.

Nerves were high at the Spotify Camp Nou for a few minutes, right until Ferran Torres struck in the 12th minute of the game, scoring the first goal.

The Spotify Camp Nou celebrated the goal exuberantly, bringing some much-needed calmness to the stadium but that calmness didn't last.

Just 3 minutes after Ferran Torres' goal, Mallorca equalized.

Darder, the center midfielder was the one who did, scoring an absolute banger from outside the box as he volleyed the ball in with venom.

That goal rattled Marc Andre Ter Stegen.

In the blink of an eye, 1-1.

After that goal, Barcelona cracked down with their players, Raphinha leading the charge to score the 2nd goal even as Frankie De Jong tried to orchestrate play from deep in Pedri's absence.

It didn't yield much fruit though, the midfield seemed disjointed without the calming presence of Pedri Gonzalez.

The first half came to an end 1-1 for the 2nd consecutive league game.

During halftime, Hansi Flick had a fiery team talk with his players, refusing to make any change.

But as soon as his players returned to the pitch for the second half, they played with energy, but they lacked cohesion and balance.

Barca seemed to have lost their identity and just 7 minutes after the 2nd half started, Mallorca capitulated on their opponent's weakness.

This time, it was one of the 2 center forwards, Larin.

With a clever run, he was able to beat Barcelona's offside trap, running with the ball before shooting past a helpless Ter Stegen.

52 minutes, 1-2...

While the away fans celebrated excitedly, large swathes of the Spotify Camp Nou was left in stunned silence.

And yet, that was not all.

In the 62nd minute, 10 minutes after his first goal, Larin got his brace after another perfect sequence of deceiving Barcelona's offside trap as this time, taking the ball calmly in his strides, he lobbed Ter Stegen, scoring his team's 3rd goal of the night.

In the blink of an eye, Barcelona was trailing by 2 goals!

Hansi Flick finally made changes, taking off Gavi, pushing Dani Olmo to the attacking midfield spot while introducing Sam and Lamine Yamal.

The impact of the substitutes was felt almost immediately.

In the 65th minute, Sam slipped a ball to Raphinha whose first touch flicked it into Dani Olmo's path.

The Spanish attacking midfielder calmly rolled the ball into the box with his right foot and then with his left, he rifled it into the net.

GOALLLLLLL...!!!

The fans in the Spotify Camp Nou roared with barely suppressed anger.

Their voices were now extremely loud, and riding this energy, FC Barcelona dug into their dogged reserves, Sam leading the charge.

Just 2 minutes after Dani Olmo's goal, Raphinha did it again, this time Sam once again slipping a deceiving pass into his path.

One touch shot!

BAM!

The Brazilian didn't even try to control the ball and despite his awkward stance, he hit the ball first time with venom, sending it straight to the roof of the net through the middle.

The Mallorca goalkeeper jumped, flailing his arms but he didn't get it; the ball flashed past him before he could react.

In the blink of an eye, 3-3!

BZZZ!

The atmosphere at the Spotify Camp Nou was now electric.

It was fever pitch tension.

Barcelona attacked, while Mallorca now defended for their lives, sometimes coming out of their shell with half-hearted counterattacks that were quickly snuffed out before they could become dangerous.

70 minutes, no goal...

80 minutes, no goal...

90 minutes, no goal...

90 plus 2 minutes, no goal...

90 plus 5 minutes, no goal...

90 plus 7 minutes...

FWEEE!

Dani Olmo won a penalty for Barcelona!

In the 90 plus 7 minute.

Sam stood over the ball, facing the goalkeeper who tried to taunt him to throw him off his game. He smiled slightly.

FWEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, he took a deep breath and did a short run, then a calculated stagger to through the goalkeeper off, then...

Bam!

He calmly hit it towards the top right corner, leaving the goalkeeper little chance though he dived the right way.

The ball nestled its way inside the net.

4-3...

BOOM!

The Spotify Camp Nou erupted, celebrating the pivotal game exuberantly like they already won the league.

And most importantly, they celebrated because it was a good way to enter the next 16 days of death that would decide their team's season.

After today's game against Mallorca, from 26th April, within a period of 16 days, FC Barcelona would play both legs of the UEFA Champions league semifinal against Inter Milan, while also facing Real Madrid, their eternal rivals in El Clasico twice, the first one in the Copa del Rey final.

So yes, FC Barcelona was in their period of death.

The period that would make or break their season.

Chapter 430: Season decider

(Copa del Rey:)

(Final:)

(Barcelona – Real Madrid)

(Date: 26th April, 2026)

...

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Semifinal:)

(Leg 1 of 2:)

(Barcelona – Inter)

(Date: 30th April, 2026)

...

(La Liga:)

(Valladolid – Barcelona)

(Date: 3rd May, 2026)

...

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Semifinal:)

(Leg 1 of 2:)

(Inter – Barcelona)

(Date: 6th May, 2026)

...

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Real Madrid)

(Date: 11th May, 2026)

5 games, but they were not just any 5 games.

This was a fixture of 5 games that had the capacity to decide the success or failure of FC Barcelona's season, the season decider games.

If FC Barcelona win all 5 of these games within a period of 16 days, then, this season would be on course to becoming their most successful season in over a decade as they would be on course to another historic treble win.

Winning the Copa del Rey final would add another trophy to their cabinet for the season, and an important one too.

Another reason why it was important to win the game was the fact that the final opponent was their eternal rivals, Real Madrid.

It was an El Clasico final.

Winning the final that way would add an extra touch of joy to it, and so the FC Barcelona players, fans, and their coach were determined to make it happen.

Winning the 2-leg semifinal game against Inter Milan would push FC Barcelona to the final of the UEFA Champions League for the first time in over a decade. The last time they made the final was in 2015 when they went all the way to win the tournament.

Then, FC Barcelona still had the MSN front trio of Messi, Suarez, and Neymar.

Then, in midfield, Barcelona had the likes of Andres Iniesta, Sergio Busquets, and Ivan Rakitic holding the fort, all Catalan legends.

This was a vastly different FC Barcelona side with different faces, but this season, the fans were optimistic of their chances of going all the way.

Afterall, this season, it was prime Hansi Flick ball in play.

Most importantly, this season, they had Sam.

As for the league games; the season was not over yet. They were leading the league race, but Real Madrid was hot on their heels having been knocked out of the UEFA Champions League already.

If they blundered in multiple games, their archrivals could do the impossible and snatch the league title from them.

This was why for the next 5 games, FC Barcelona did not just have to maintain maximum focus, they also had to play at their best.

This was the time to play their best football of the season.

The moment of truth was here.

...

For the next few days after the Mallorca game, Sam retreated into himself.

The only constants in his life during this time was his girlfriend, his family, and his workout friends. He cut everything else off, everything media related so he could fully focus on his football.

This season, Sam was having the best season of his life but he knew that a moment of complacency was all it took to lose it all.

Afterall, in a war, the most dangerous period was most often when victory was in sight. Because then, enemies forget everything for a last desperate stand, and not just that.

When victory is in sight, the heroes tend to become complacent. And in war, complacency was a tried and tested pathway to failure.

This was why in the days following the Mallorca game, Sam threw himself fully into training more than ever before.

His schedule was simple; training, training, and training again.

On a Friday morning...

With his headset blocking his ear, loud music blasting to his hearing, Sam forgot everything else, only cognitive of his jogging partners as they jogged the length of the city of Barcelona.

For the final 50 meters, today, he was merciless.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Sam dug in, turning into a mirage and ruffling dust in his wake as his legs carried him like the flash, giving his friends a sizeable distance in the race today.

At the end, they panted heavily, looking at him like he was a monster.

Sam simply chuckled, leading them deeper into the stadium.

That morning, they worked out, straining their muscles to maximum effect. And at the end, all 5 of them felt some fatigue but physically, they felt invigorated.

Their bodies were as light as a feather.

That day's team training, the 5 of them were the best players in training by a mile and finally, Hansi Flick did his last team talk with his players.

Tomorrow was the big day, the moment of truth, one of the big finals that they've been working hard towards all season.

The El Clasico Copa del Rey final against Real Madrid.

Hansi Flick faced his players.

"Tomorrow, we'll be one step closest to achieving one of our big dreams for the season," he smiled.
"Winning the Copa del Rey trophy".

"I know you can do it, so let's do it".

"Yes coach!" They cheered in Spanish.

By now, Hansi Flick was already proficient in Spanish enough to communicate directly with his players.

He did his last tactical talk with them. He didn't tweak anything; he already perfected the formation for the final long ago. And he already did his best to drill it into the subconscious of his players.

As for the starting XI? It was a familiar one.

Arranged in a 4-2-3-1 formation, Marc Andre Ter Stegen protected the goal as the goalkeeper, while ahead of him was a defensive quadruple of Alejandro Balde, Inigo Martinez, Pau Cubarsi, and Jules Kounde.

Further ahead of them in midfield was the duo of Pedri and Frankie De Jong. In attacking midfield was Gavi, while the attacking trio comprised of Raphinha in the left, Sam in the middle as the striker, and Lamine Yamal on the right.

This was vintage Barca, the best Barcelona starting XI this season.

The game would be played at the Estadio La Cartuja de Sevilla in Seville.

The next day, hours before the game, the FC Barcelona squad arrived in the city of Seville.