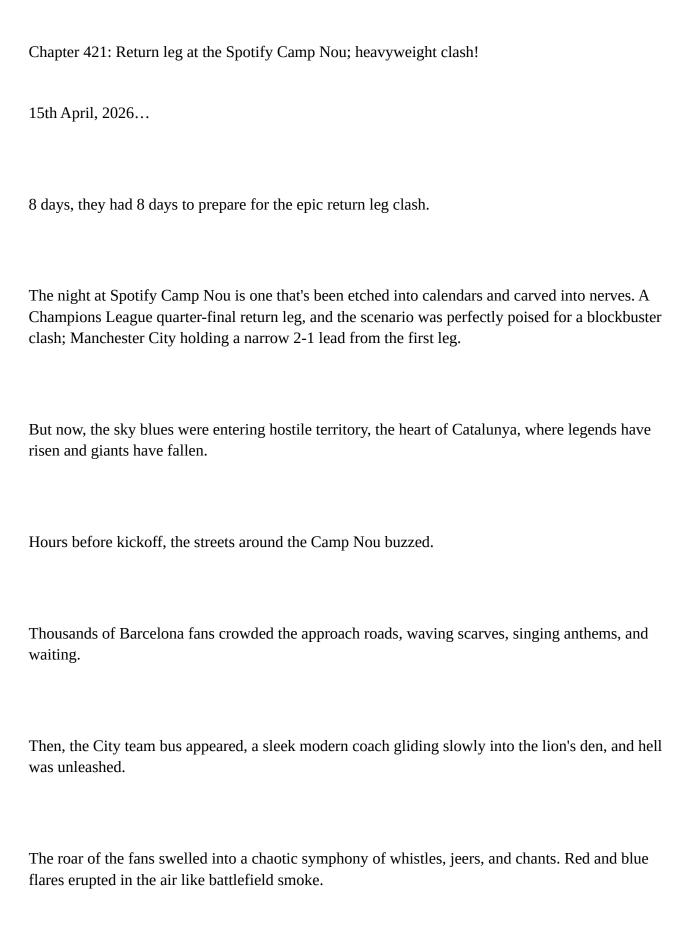
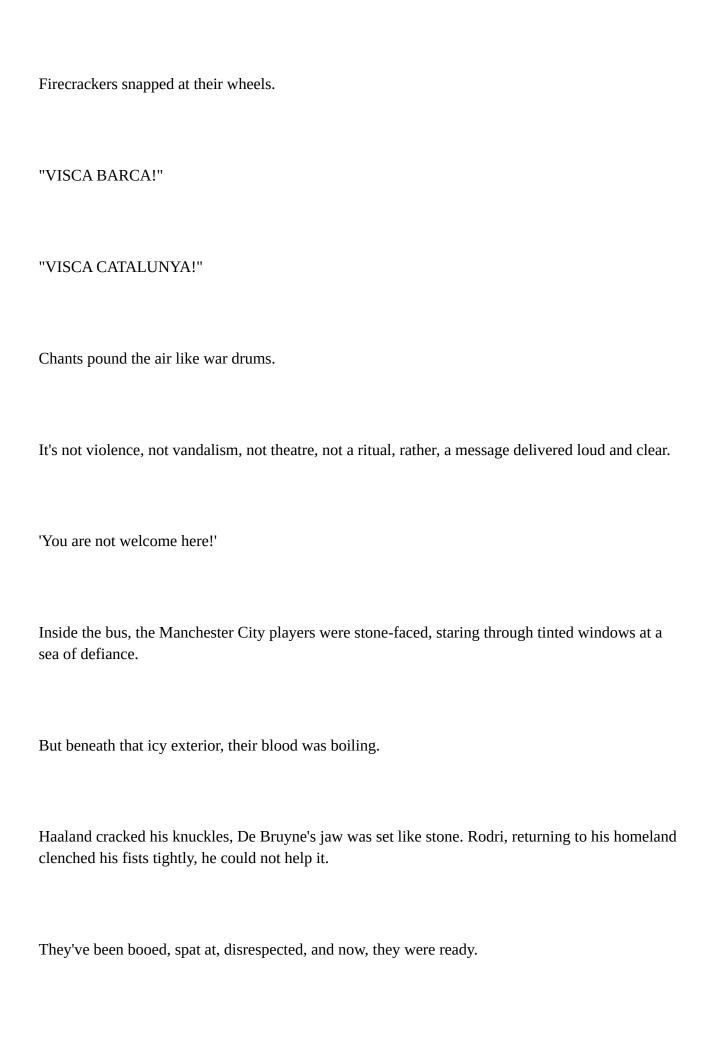
## Football God 421





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.

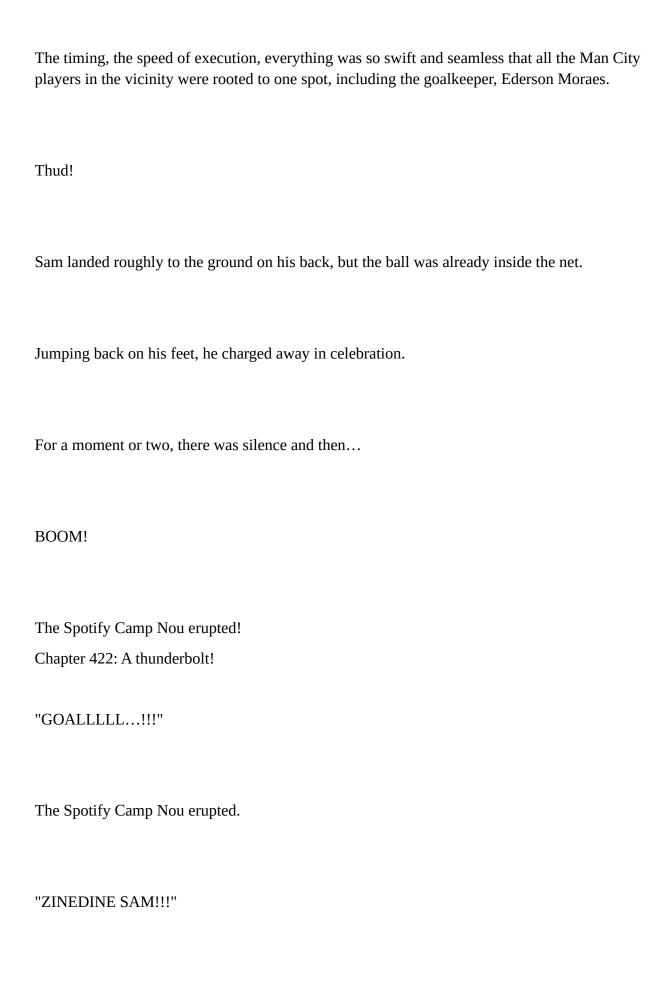
At first, Sam tried to be nonchalant but it was impossible.
This atmosphere, even with his almost 4 years' experience in football, this was a first, this was unprecedented.
He could not help it, his blood boiled.
He felt goosepimples, all his hair standing on end and with it, adrenaline surged through 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.



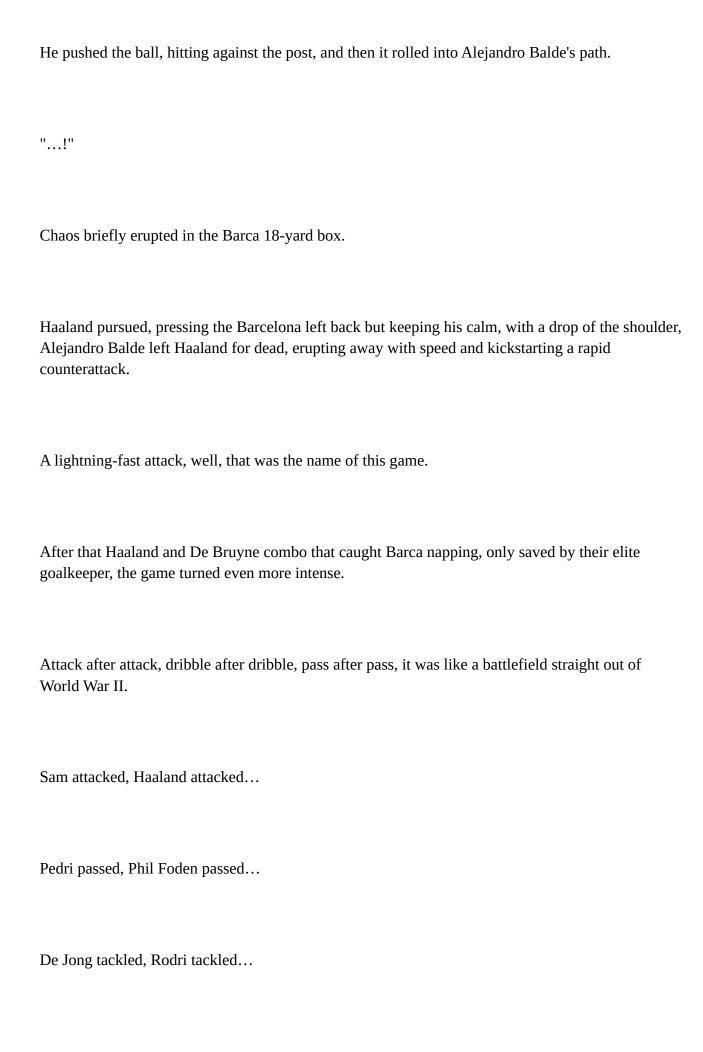
"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"
"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"
The commentators screamed in a shrill voice, unable to contain their emotions as Sam charged away towards the corner flag in celebration, pointing at his name and no. 10 jersey before a boiling Camp Nou.
"What a goal!"
"Sandwiched between 2 of the best center defenders 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?"

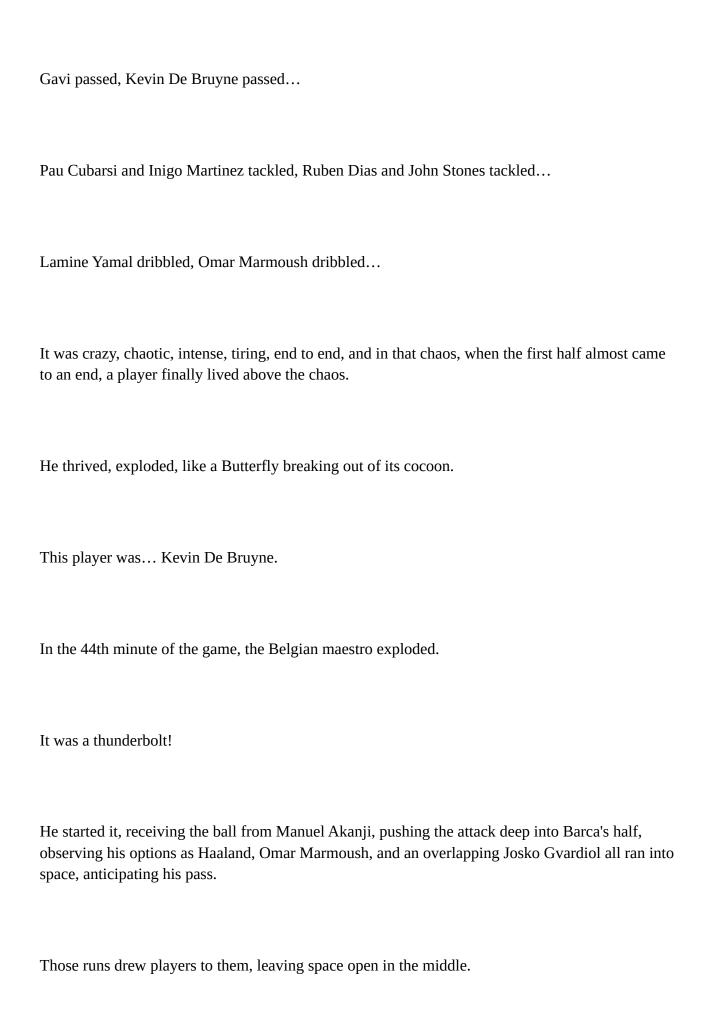


They were adamant not to let a goal in, and yet, just 6 minutes in, that fiend already breached them and scored, how?
Ruben Dias and John Stones stared at the celebrating Barca players in bewilderment, trying to make out the vague shape of the Barcelona striker celebrating among them.
The 2 center defenders 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.



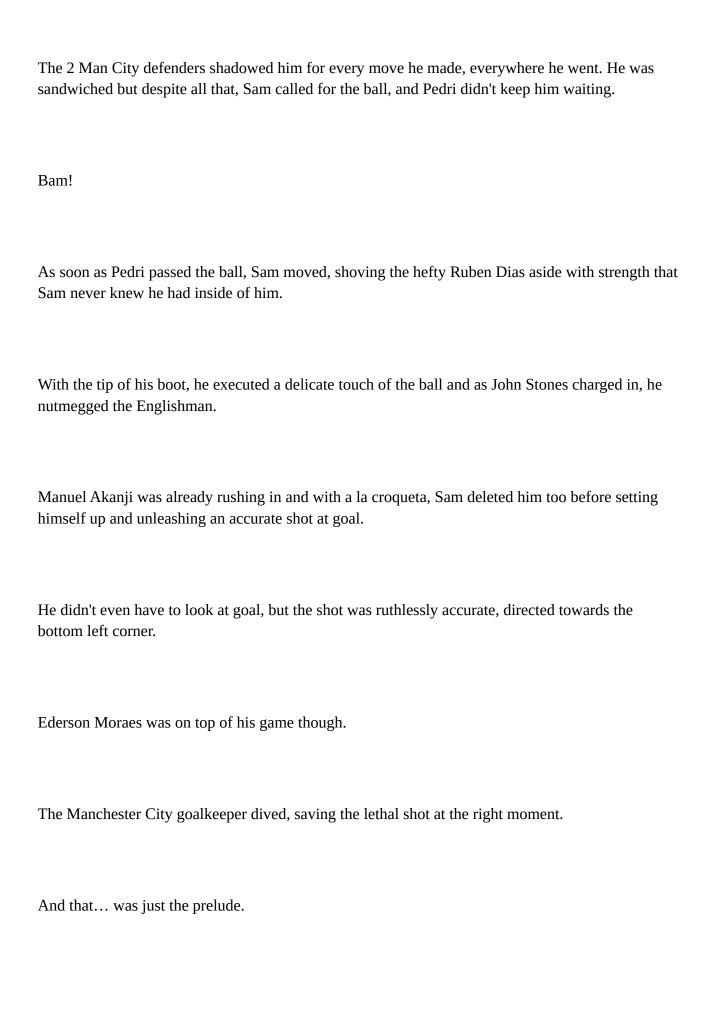


No one expected the sudden change in decision.
Mid-run, Kevin De Bruyne suddenly changed his mind and then after one more touch, he swung his right leg and then
POW!
The sound was like quaking thunder!
Hit by his lethal right foot, the ball flew like a missile with such force that it swerved unsteadily 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, they 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.

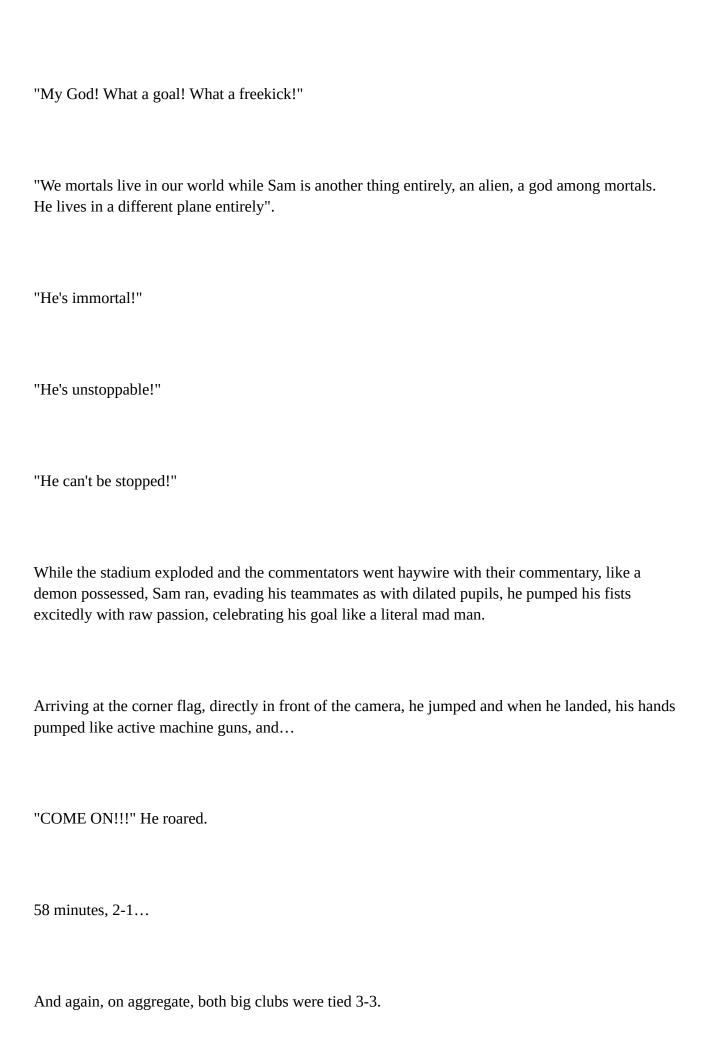


From the first minute of the second half, Sam became a menace, an extraterrestrial being with limitless potential.
Every move he made, every touch he took bordered on perfection.
He was shadowed for every move he made, and yet, they could not take the ball off him. The ball seemed to be glued to his 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 handing 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!

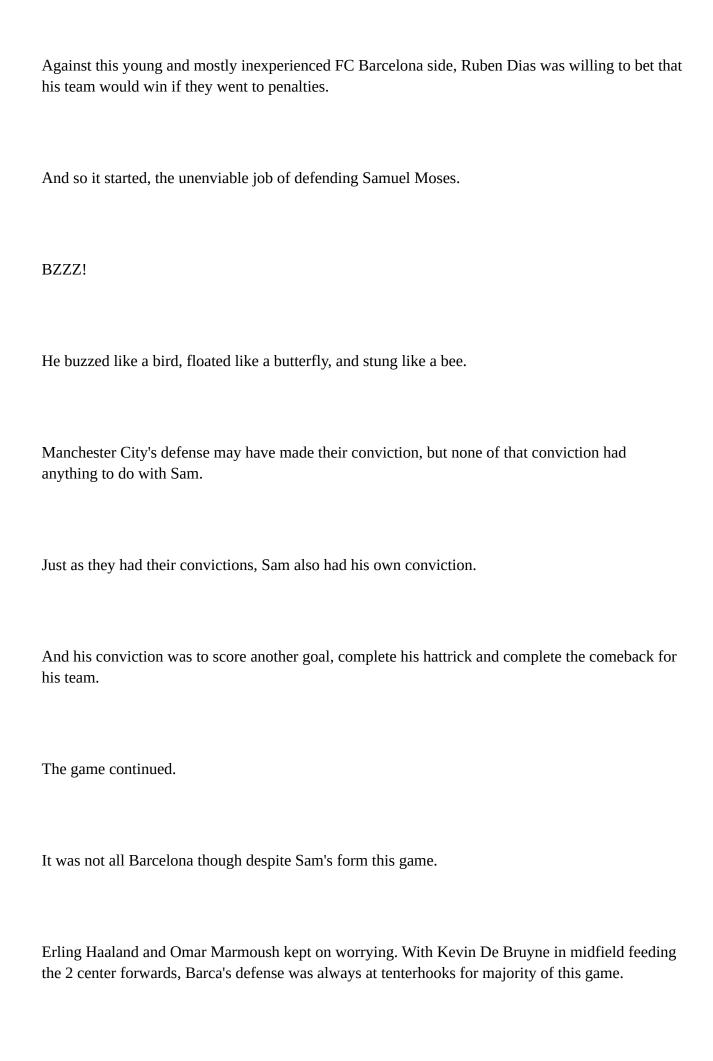


Then
BOOM!
All hell broke loose! Chapter 424 424: The flow state [2]
A freekick.
A shot, a goal.
BOOM!
The Spotify Camp Nou exploded.
"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"
"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"
"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"
The commentators screamed in a shrill voice.

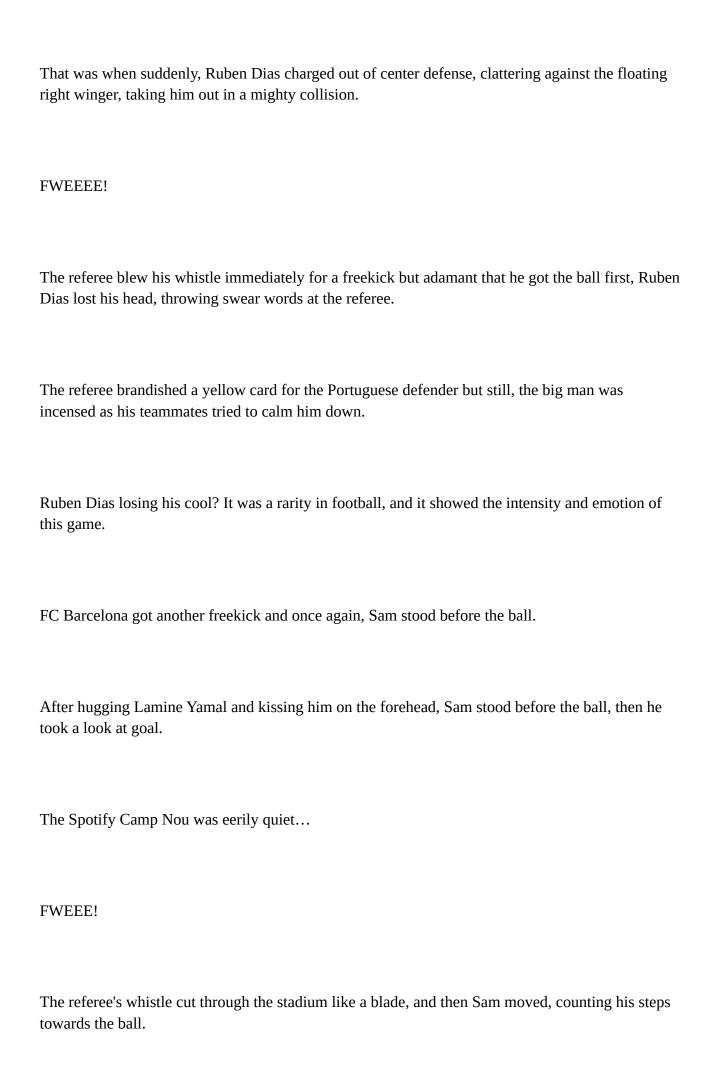


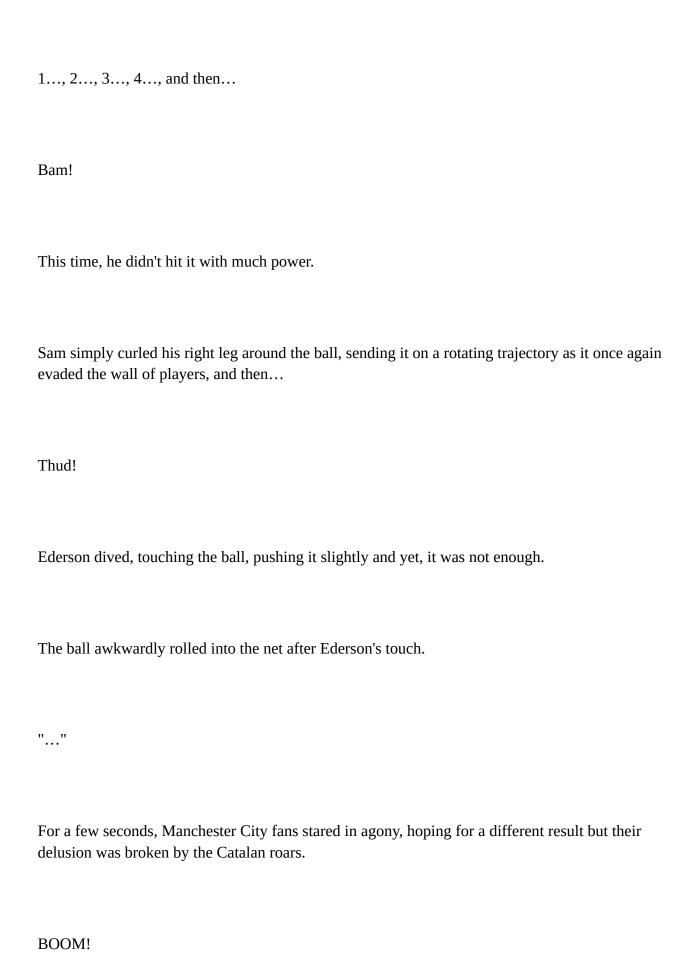
Sam was in the flow state.
He could not explain how he felt, but at this moment, he felt like he was capable of doing anything. And he felt that anything he did would be dangerous.
Conceding again after that Kevin De Bruyne goal left a bitter taste in the mouth of the Manchester City defenders, but there 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.

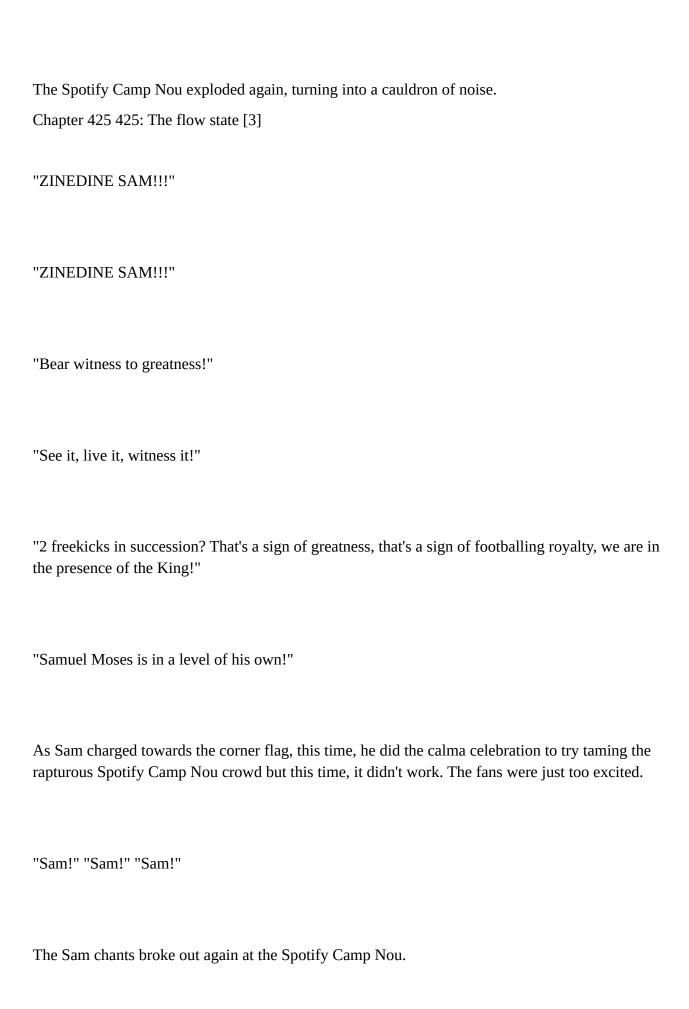
But despite playing against this singular existence, the Manchester City defenders didn't allow themselves to fall into despair.
They were determined not to let Sam score a single goal at the beginning of this game, and yet he already scored a brace.
That could shatter any ego and yet, the defenders 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.



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.



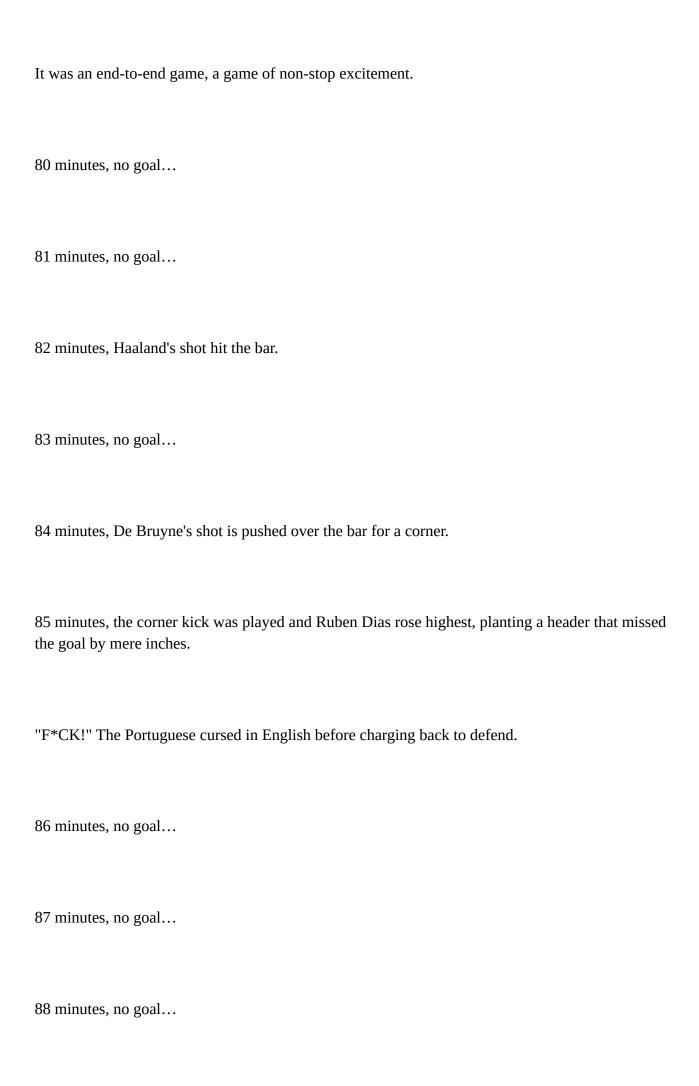




The atmosphere in this stadium was electric.
And while Barcelona celebrated, on the other side, Manchester City writhed in agony. Ruben Dias in particular was still incensed, gesticulating wildly as he showed his displeasure at the referee's previous decision to blow the foul.
And then, the came continued.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





## 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".

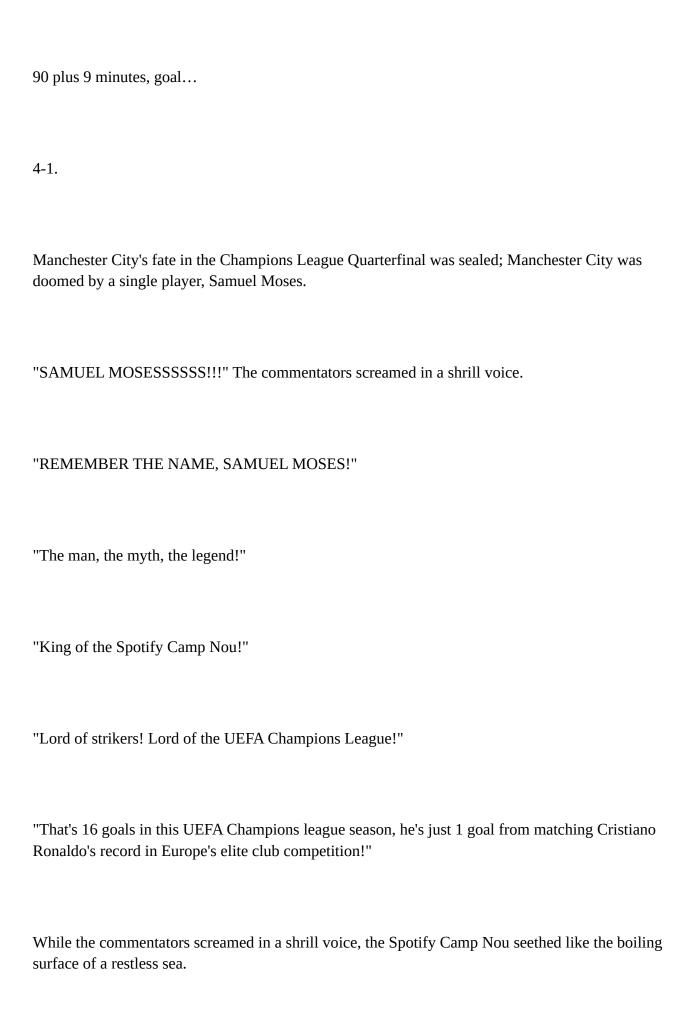
"Ok then," Raphinha patted him by the back before moving further to the side. "Do it then". He said.
Raphinha didn't leave that spot entirely because he served as an extra form of distraction. He already agreed to let Sam take the freekick, but Ederson, Manchester City's goalkeeper doesn't have to know.
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 hattrick 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 yo 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 less 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



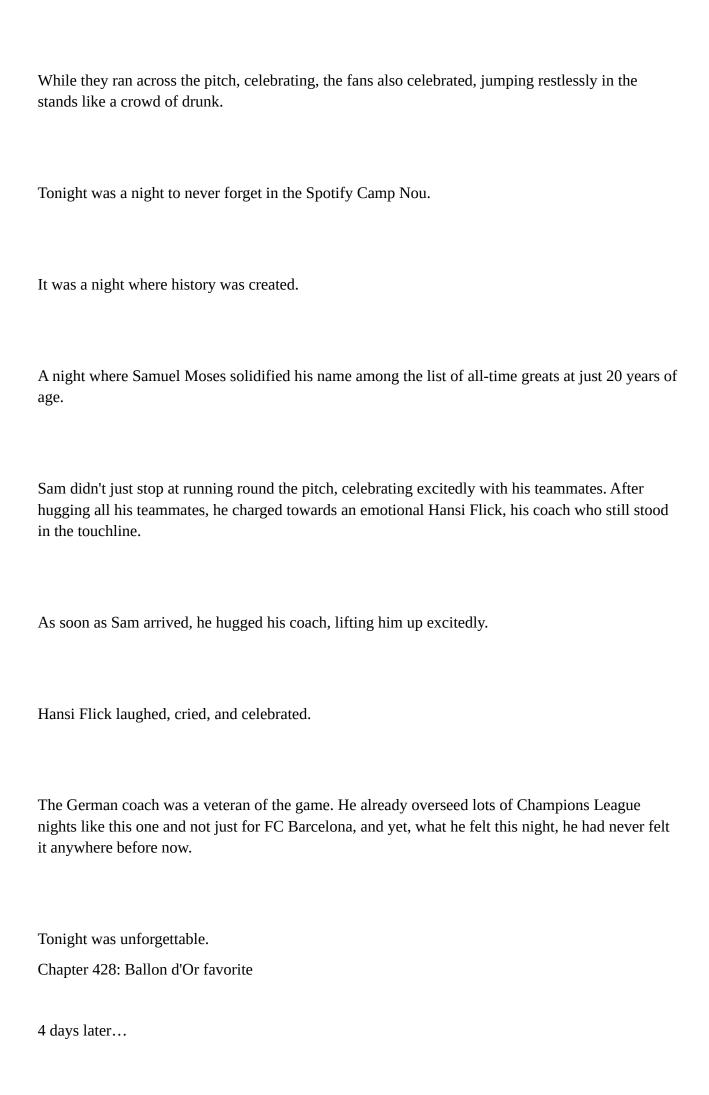
Some fans broke down in tears, others were more rapid, tearing their clothes violently as they celebrated with sheer passion and joy.
As Sam charged towards the corner flag, the fans closest to the blockade gestured at him with joyful expressions, eager to touch the helm of his shirt, and Sam obliged 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?







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.





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 your 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.

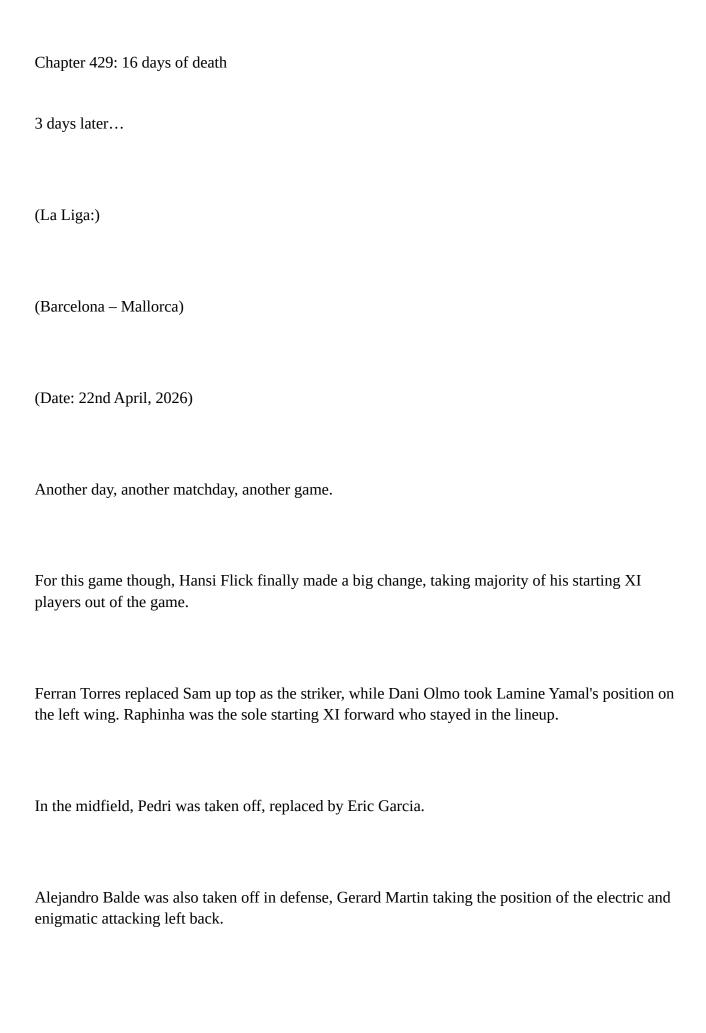
Just before the game started at the Spotify Camp Nou though, Sam received one of the biggest surprises of his life from the Catalan club.
Joan Laporta, the club President himself walked into the pitch carrying a golden plaque with the number 100 engraved in bold.
It was a golden plaque to honor Sam's 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 booth, 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 wen 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.





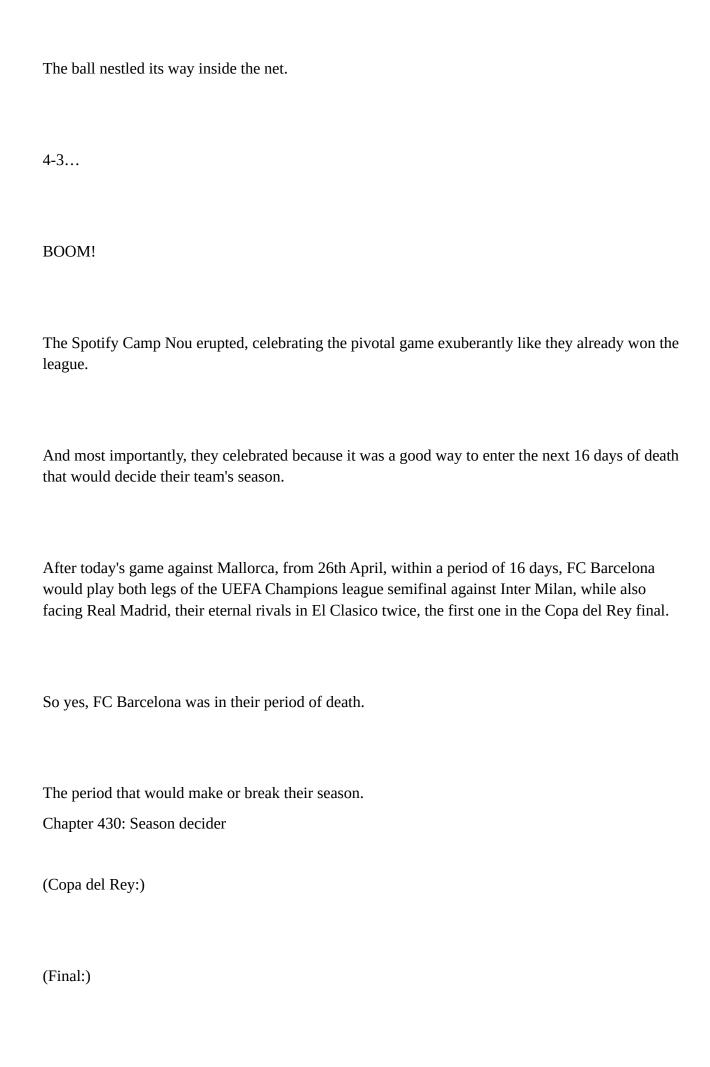
Just 3 minutes after Ferran Torres' goal, Mallorca equalized.
Darder, the center midfielder was the one who did, scoring an absolute banger from outside the box as he volleyed the ball in with venom.
That goal rattled Marc Andre Ter Stegen.
In the blink of an eye, 1-1.
After that goal, Barcelona cracked 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.

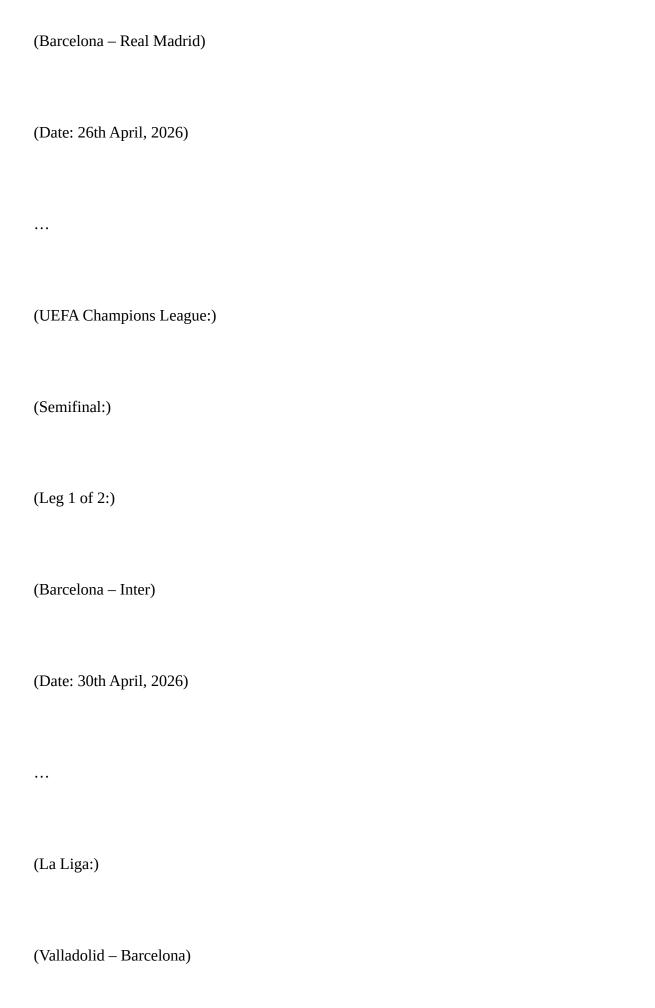
This time, it was one of the 2 center forwards, Larin.
With a clever run, he was able to beat Barcelona's offside trap, running with the ball before shooting past a helpless Ter Stegen.
52 minutes, 1-2
While the away fans celebrated excitedly, large swathes of the Spotify Camp Nou was left in stunned 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.

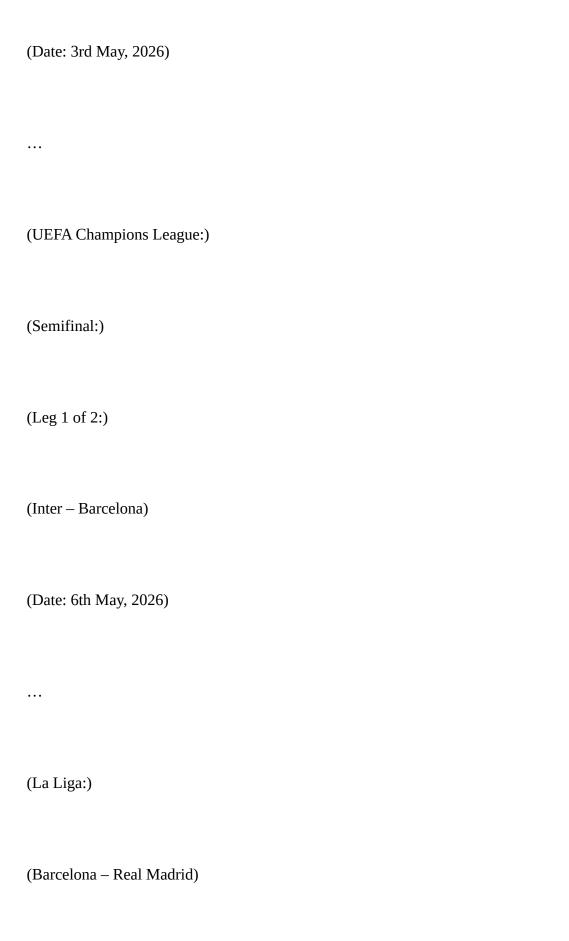
In the 65th minute, Sam slipped a ball to Raphinha whose first touch flicked it into Dani Olmo's path.
The Spanish attacking midfielder calmly rolled the ball into the box with his right foot and then with his left, he rifled it into the net.
GOALLLLL!!!
The fans in the Spotify Camp Nou roared with barely 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.



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.

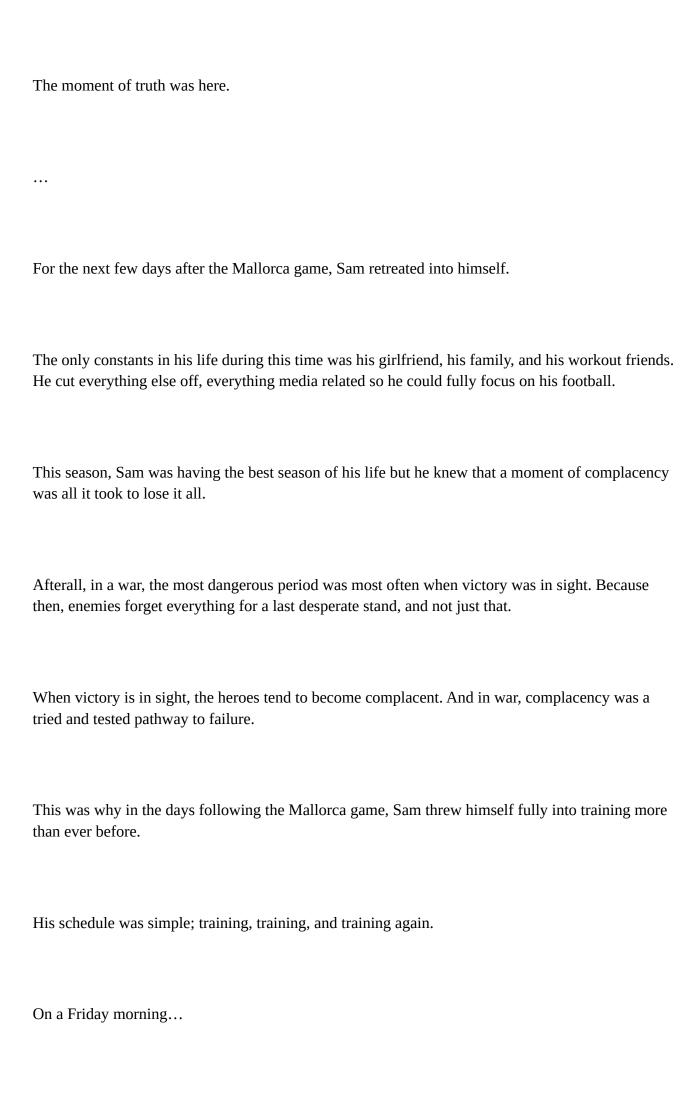








Then, FC Barcelona still had the MSN front trio of Messi, Suarez, and Neymar.
Then, in midfield, Barcelona had the likes of Andres Iniesta, Sergio Busquests, and Ivan Rakitic holding the fort, all Catalan legends.
This was a vastly different FC Barcelona side with different faces, but this season, the 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.



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!
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.



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.