

Football God 441

Chapter 441: A matchday to rest

(Copa del Rey:)

(Final:)

(Barcelona 2–1 Real Madrid)

(Date: 26th April, 2026)

...

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Semifinal:)

(Leg 1 of 2:)

(Barcelona 3–3 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)

16 days of death, 5 deciding games.

FC Barcelona already played 2/5 of the games. They won one, they lost one, now there were 3 games remaining in the grueling schedule of death.

FC Barcelona didn't lose any of the 2 games that they played but during that performance, there was a prevailing sense that the team was tired.

You could not blame them, the players were rightfully tired.

It was already matchday 34 of the Spanish La Liga, meaning that this season alone, FC Barcelona already played 34 games in the league. And as one of the biggest clubs in Spain, they didn't compete in the La Liga alone, they competed in other tournaments.

The elite club competition in Europe, the UEFA Champions League was the biggest but aside that, this season, FC Barcelona competed in the Supercopa de Espana, and the Copa del Rey.

Packing all those games together culminated into a grueling season where most of the starting FC Barcelona players were now tired and worn out.

Besides, on the back of the Inter Milan game, FC Barcelona just came from playing an intense El Clasico against their archrivals, Real Madrid.

No matter what form Real Madrid was in this season, the Spanish Capital Club was still a bonafide big club with some of the biggest names in football plying their trade for them. They were always a threat.

This was why for the Real Valladolid game, FC Barcelona fans clamored on social media, creating threads, pleading with Hansi Flick to rest all the important players in the team.

It was more than a decade already since FC Barcelona won the UEFA Champions League trophy. To the fans, the trophy was the priority this season.

Besides, it was not as if abandoning one game would doom the team.

Afterall, they had a sizeable 7 points lead above Real Madrid at the top of the Spanish La Liga table. So, they could afford to rotate heavily.

No one knew if the coach took the advice of the fans to do it, but on the prelude to the Valladolid game, Hansi Flick dropped a radical starting XI.

He heavily rotated the team.

FC Barcelona started with their regular 4-2-3-1 formation.

Inaki Pena, the backup goalkeeper started in between the posts for the Catalan club. Ahead of him was an unfamiliar defensive quadruple of Gerard Martin, Eric Garcia, Ronald Araujo, and Hector Fort in right back.

In the middle of the park was a midfield duo of Gavi and Frankie De Jong, while in attacking midfield was Fermin Lopez.

Further ahead, the offensive trio comprised Ansu Fati who was on the back of another loan season in left wing, Ferran Torres leading the line as the striker, Pablo Torre in right wing.

It was an entirely unfamiliar starting XI this season but no FC Barcelona fan complained. Rather, they traveling away fans kept up their support of the team.

They didn't place much hopes in getting a result from this game, but still, it was an opportunity for the club to give these players some playing experience.

For Real Valladolid, starting in a 4-1-4-1 formation, Ferreira started as the goalkeeper while ahead of him was a defensive quadruple of Aznou, Sanchez, Curnart, and Perez. Juric was the single man in defensive midfield.

Ahead of the defensive midfielder was a quadruple of Moro, Amallah, Chuki, and Anuar. Isolated up top was Latasa who led the line as the striker.

...

3rd May, 2026...

The atmosphere at the Jose Zorrilla Stadium was electric.

Today, the Real Valladolid fans could smell victory. Despite playing against the current best team in the league, they smelled victory because this was a vastly different Barcelona side than the normal one.

The fans smelled it, and so, they turned the stadium into a cage.

A cage of raucous noise and support for their team, and FC Barcelona was the beast now caught in this stage, about to be slaughtered.

FWEEE!

The game started.

The first half of this game was a complicated affair.

Both clubs struggled to settle into the game as the 2 midfield clashed, struggling to control and orchestrate the game for their team.

Even against a diminished and heavily rotated FC Barcelona side, the Valladolid club failed to get a foothold on the game.

Still, they dominated in certain aspects.

Just as the first half seemed destined to end as a boring affair, in the 44th minute of the game, one of the offensive Valladolid players scored a strong contender for the La Liga goal of the season award.

Receiving the ball a few meters from the 18-yard box, Chuki, the Real Valladolid midfielder pushed the ball forward a bit before unleashing a shot that was straight out of the Gorgon Medusa's box.

He unleashed an unreal knuckle ball shot fueled by instinct.

Inaki Pena dived but he could do nothing as the ball hit the top bar before bouncing down and into the net.

Real Valladolid celebrated the goal exuberantly.

The first half came to an end 1-0 in Real Valladolid's favor.

Second half started with no changes made between both teams. In the 2nd half, with a goal ahead already, Real Valladolid finally found their tempo and it led to a few dozen minutes of FC Barcelona being punished.

The unfamiliar defense was pushed to their limits, violating the advantages of their high offside trap to the limit as the Real Valladolid players were caught offside 6 different times in 30 minutes.

By the 80th minute, FC Barcelona was barely hanging on, Inaki Pena's impressive performance keeping them in the game.

In the 82nd minute, Hansi Flick made his first change, a double change; taking off Frankie De Jong and Ferran Torres, introducing Pedri and Pau Victor into the game on their stead.

With Pedri on the pitch, the game was no longer chaotic. Barcelona gained control over the midfield battle for the first time, making the away Barcelona fans erupt with Pedri chants.

It was no longer as lopsided, but Real Valladolid was still the superior side, until the 89th minute of the pitch.

2 Barcelona youngsters combined for an unreal moment of magic.

Pedri played a deep lobbed pass into the box which Pau Victor, the young Barca striker brought down with his chest. Just as the hefty Valladolid defenders clashed into him, before bringing him down, the young striker flicked the ball to his right where Pablo Torre lurked.

Bam!

It was an instinctive volleyed shot from the young attacker.

Ferreira was rooted to one spot, watching as the ball flashed past him into the net. The goalkeeper groaned and fell backward in frustration.

"GOALLLLL...!!!"

The away FC Barcelona fans celebrated excitedly like they just won the game.

The referee added 3 minutes of additional time. During those 3 minutes, Real Valladolid did everything to get the winning goal but it never came.

The game ended in a draw.

Chapter 442: Matchday? No, War Day

1 day later...

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Sam jogged through the streets of FC Barcelona alongside his crew, eliciting reactions from the fans who were already used to their daily morning schedule.

FC Barcelona fans gathered in the streets, allowing the 5 players to continue their jogging even as they waved banners at them.

The banners showed different drawings, some depicting Sam in a crown and holding a sword like some ancient conqueror King.

In others he was still the ancient conqueror King, and his Generals were behind him; Alejandro Balde, Pedri, Gavi, Raphinha, Lamine Yamal, and others.

"We must win in Italy!" They chanted in Spanish.

"We must kill the snake!"

"We shall kill the snake!"

Despite the commotion, none of the 5 youngsters jogging showed too much reaction as they focused on doing what they did best, working out.

50 meters to the Spotify Camp Nou, they erupted into a sprint.

This time, Lamine Yamal showed crazy speed, almost winning but Sam gave him an edge like usual.

"I almost won!" He lamented.

Sam laughed. "I almost let you win".

"Showoff". Yamal pouted.

The others laughed.

They entered the gym, carried a few weights, and worked their whole body before finally leaving the gym after Sam's system notified him of having completed another daily system quest.

Later in the day, after going home to freshen up, they returned to the stadium where they engaged in team training under Hansi Flick's guidance.

It was just the next day after the Real Valladolid game, but Hansi Flick was already training his players. He didn't give them a day off this time.

This was because FC Barcelona's next game was more than a normal game.

Matchday? Nah, more like war day.

And this was why Hansi Flick pushed his players.

After the team training that morning, the German coach finally revealed his starting XI to his players that he intended to start at the San Siro in Italy.

Compared to the starting XI that played against Real Valladolid, this was a starting XI that was more familiar to the players and the fans.

They'll start in their regular 4-2-3-1 formation, with Sam leading the line as the striker, flanked from both sides by Raphinha and Lamine Yamal. In attacking midfield is Gavi, and the center midfield duo is Pedri and Frankie De Jong.

In defense, the stalwart back four was back!

Inigo Martinez led the backline, leading a quadruple that comprised him, Alejandro Balde in left back, Pau Cubarsi as his partner in center defense, and Jules Kounde back in right back.

As for the goalkeeper spot? Marc Andre Ter Stegen was back.

...

The next day, 5th May; more jogging, more work at the gym, and more team training under Hansi Flick's rigorous tutelage.

In team training today, the German coach could not help himself nodding with a satisfied smile on his face.

His team... was ready.

Physically, psychologically, his team was ready. His defenders were healthy and in sync, his midfield were their usual selves again after having time to rest.

As for the attack? Lamine Yamal was electric as usual, Raphinha was a bundle of energy again. And Sam? Sam was Sam.

Overall, the coach was satisfied already.

He did his best in the preparations already, now was to leave the rest to fate.

That afternoon, the FC Barcelona players got an epic sendoff like civilians of a city sending off their warriors to war in a distant and hostile land.

Cheers and chants filled the stadium till the plane took off in Barcelona.

Hours later, they arrived in Italy.

They received a smaller but equally iconic welcome in Italy as FC Barcelona fans in the country came out to welcome their players.

They were in enemy ground now.

...

The next day, 6th May...

Milan, Italy.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

5 players in FC Barcelona track suits jogged through the streets of Milan, not caring that they were deep in enemy territory as they continued their daily ritual right there in Italy, under the sun where countless enemy fans watched.

They were not attacked by the fans, but they invited loud boos from Italian fans that saw them, eager to offset them psychologically before the game come evening, today.

In response, Sam and his friends simply increased the volume of music blasting in their ears from their air pods.

They jogged back to their hotel, and completed their daily ritual in the hotel gym. Only after that did their day start.

It felt like a movie but the D-day was already here.

The moment of truth.

They didn't let the occasion get to them though. Returning to their hotel rooms, they took their bath, freshened up before joining their teammates in the hall where Hansi Flick had the final team talk with them in preparation for evening.

After that team talk, it ended.

Preparation time was over.

...

7:20pm.

San Siro Stadium, Milan, Italy.

The night sky over Milan was an ominous shroud as the FC Barcelona team bus rolled into enemy territory.

Outside the San Siro, a mob of Inter Milan ultras had gathered hours before kickoff, flares blazing like infernal beacons, casting long shadows on the ancient walls of the stadium. They were eager to give their enemies a taste of their own medicine that they gave their players in Spain.

Smoke choked the air, drums thundered in the distance, and chants laced with venom and pride erupted like battle cries.

"Barca, tornate a casa!"

They screamed, faces contorted with passion, blue and black flags whipping violently in the wind.

As the bus pulled in, it was pelted with debris; plastic bottles, coins, the occasional stone, each bounce off the metal echoing like a warning shot.

The glass shook. Inside, tension thickened.

Even the veterans wore it like armor. Pedri clenched his jaw, eyes narrowed. Sam simply stared forward, unmoved, a warhorse in the calm before the charge.

Gavi? Ever the firebrand, he cracked his knuckles, adrenaline leaking through his silence. Hansi Flick sat at the front, arms folded, absorbing the hatred like fuel.

The moment they stepped into the San Siro turf, the hostility grew teeth.

A deafening chorus of whistles and jeers surged down from 75,000 strong. Inter's Curva Nord was a spectacle of coordinated chaos, banners sprawled across the stand, a massive tifo unfurled.

{Your Dream Dies Here!}

Fireworks exploded just outside the stadium walls, shaking the concrete with every burst. The air felt electric, volatile, as if the entire city had conspired to drown Barcelona in pressure and fury.

The players warmed up to a wall of noise, the kind that burrowed into your skin and rattled your nerves. But Barcelona didn't flinch.

They knew what this was; a sacred war.

Ter Stegen calmly adjusted his gloves. Raphinha smirked at the crowd, admiring the energy and then tossing a wink at a particularly enraged fan. Frankie De Jong motioned for silence, only to be met with a tidal wave of insults.

It was crazy.

Hostile? Absolutely. Intimidating? To some.

But to Barca, Hansi Flick's Barcelona, it was beautiful. It meant they were feared. It meant the stakes were real.

And then...

FWEEEEEE!

It started.

Chapter 443: 90 minutes to decide a season

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle cut through the noise like a blade, the sacred signal to start the game at the San Siro.

And the game started.

The 90 minutes journey started.

Tonight, this was a game to die for. A game to kill for.

90 minutes to decide a season for Inter Milan. But for FC Barcelona, the once Kings of Europe? It was 90 minutes to decide a decade.

It was more than a decade since FC Barcelona last made it to the final of the UEFA Champions League, in 2015 where they defeated another Italian side in a prime Juventus led by an ageing Gianluigi Buffon and Andrea Pirlo.

Tonight, it was not the final yet, but the road to the final.

It was the semifinal.

And it was not against that dynamic Juventus team, rather, it was against Simone Inzaghi's stalwart Inter Milan side.

The side boasting the best defense in all of Europe. A club that embraced and embodied the famous old-style defending of Italian clubs, a club that channeled the spirit of old Italian heroes; the Paulo Maldinis, the Nestas, the Cannavaros, the Leonardo Bonuccis and Girgio Chiellinis.

Last week, at the Spotify Camp Nou, FC Barcelona did it once, breaking down the stalwart defense that was feared across Europe as they scored 3 great goals.

Could they do it a second time?

Could they do it tonight?

Could they do it at the San Siro?

No one knew, and that was the joy of it, the unpredictability of the game. It was why millions of football fans across the world tuned in to watch the game.

And like expected, it was a banger.

It was an epic from the onset.

From the first minute of the game, FC Barcelona showed what they were made of at the San Siro.

Last week, they may have played at home but then, they were coming off the back of a grueling Copa del Rey final with none other than their archrivals, Real Madrid. A game that tested their grit and mettle.

Hansi Flick could not afford to push his players too much in that period so as not to risk injury, this was why Barcelona relieved the tempo of the game a bit.

But tonight?

Tonight, the core FC Barcelona players were well rested and hungry, starved of action, eager to enter the pitch and pounce on prey. Hunt, predate, and devour.

The Italian fans turned the stadium into a literal cauldron of noise.

BOOOOOO!!!

Loud boos followed every FC Barcelona touch of the ball and considering that for the first few minutes, Barcelona dominated possession after kickoff, it was a literal non-stop booing.

But despite the booing, FC Barcelona tried.

In the hostile atmosphere created by the enemy fans, the FC Barcelona players thrived, flexing the Hansi Flick mentality.

Tonight, Inter Milan started in their regular 3-5-2 formation.

Yann Sommer started in between the posts, while the defensive trio ahead of him comprised of Alessandro Bastoni, Acerbi, and Bisseck.

The midfield five comprised Federico Dimarco, Mkhitarjan, Calhanoglu, Nicolo Barella, and Denzel Dumfries. Ahead of the stacked midfield is the dynamic offensive duo of Lautaro Martinex and Marcus Thuram.

It was a fearsome Inter lineup, the best there was this season, and yet against the sledgehammer called FC Barcelona, even at home, this lineup could not dominate as they conceded possession to Hansi Flick's Barcelona.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Tiki taka, they passed it in triangular patterns around the midfield, running circles around the Inter Milan midfielders though they had more numbers in midfield.

Having more numbers in midfield did not mean they stayed in midfield though. Inter Milan's defense was feared for a reason.

When the opposition was in possession, the midfield tended to drop to defense, making it a literal 8-man defense.

And buoyed by their coach, Simone Inzaghi's defensive footballing philosophy, and buoyed even more by the noise being made by their fans, Inter Milan turned the San Siro into a fortress.

And in extension, the players turned their defense into an impenetrable bastion that was safe from the Barcelona invasion.

The FC Barcelona players were electric.

In midfield, Pedri and Frankie De Jong pulled the strings, helped by Gavi while in attack, FC Barcelona was just electric.

The dynamic Barca front trio tonight were electric.

Lamine Yamal seemed to have drunk directly from the cup of life before the game because the boy was playing like a magician.

With every swing of his wand, the teenage prodigy did something that made fans to rise to their feet in awe.

Was it a drop of the shoulder? A la croquet? An elastico? A nutmeg? A roulette? Lamine Yamal was a menace.

As for Raphinha, he was everywhere, running like a tireless bull.

He kept on running into space, making the Inter Milan defense shake in trepidation because FC Barcelona had more than enough players to feed him dangerous balls, their striker included.

Yes, tonight, Sam played like a god.

His impact was felt.

Every touch of the ball that he had felt like a touch from heaven. Every movement of his body left the defenders panicking, scrambling, resulting in silly tackles that attracted 2 yellow cards already.

Sam didn't have a single shot at goal yet but still, his impact was felt.

He and Lamine Yamal were menaces together. Where Yamal stopped, he started from there, running rings around the Inter Milan defense, playmaking to set up Raphinha at every opportunity.

The Inter defense was just too solid to let out an easy goal. If it was any other defense in Europe, Sam was sure that they would have scored already.

And yet, it was not all Barcelona.

Inter Milan may not be technical and dynamic like FC Barcelona, but they also had their own style of play; grounded, old-school, physical attacking style.

Abusing the physicality of their attackers, Inter Milan also created their own chances, and unlike FC Barcelona, they took actual shots at goal but Ter Stegen was on top of his game, saving every shot that was sent his way.

In the 23rd minute of the game, against the run of play, Lautaro Martinez did it, putting the ball in the net.

But before he could celebrate.

FWEEE!

The offside flag was raised.

'Dammit!'

That was the closest that Inter Milan got.

In the 38th minute, Lamine Yamal hit the bar after a crazy solo run and shot.

5 minutes later, Sam weaved his way through the Inter Milan defense like a weaver, unleashing a shot only for Yann Sommer to pull off a crazy save.

It was a game filled with a lot of tension.

It was intense, it was end to end.

And then, the first half finally came to an end.

0-0.

Chapter 444: Like a God

Halftime...

The tension in the FC Barcelona dressing room was palpable.

It was just 45 minutes but the FC Barcelona players were filled with sweat, slugging water down their throats.

Hansi Flick sat among his players, quiet for a few minutes, but then he stood up. In direct contrast to the tension that filled the room at this moment, the German coach had a relaxed smile on his face.

"Who are we?" He asked.

His players looked at him.

Hansi Flick shook his head, disappointed. "Who are we?" He raised his voice.

"Barcelona". Pedri answered.

"Good!" Hansi Flick asked, then with burning eyes, he looked round his players and asked again. "Who are we?"

"Barcelona they answered".

He grinned, then yelled. "WHO ARE WE?!"

"BARCELONA!" The players roared.

"Good, good thing you know". He smiled. "You hear all that noise? All that booing in the first half, it's a good sign, signs that they fear us".

"I know what my team can do, and you also know what we can do".

"All we need is to calm down and do it".

"1 goal, that's all we need. Maybe 2, but first things first". He chuckled.

The players finally smiled, looking at their coach with a new fire in his eyes.

"Do you believe we can win?"

"Yes coach!"

"Do you believe we can do it?"

"Yes coach!"

"Then let's go and do it!"

"WE'RE FC BARCELONA!"

"VISCA BARCA!"

Halftime elapsed.

The players stepped back into the pitch. Stepping into the pitch again, Sam was assaulted by the loud noise of the Inter fans again but this time, all it triggered in him was a defiant will to win.

He grinned darkly.

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

The voice already started singing in his head.

This time, it sang a lullaby of liberation.

FWEEE!

The second half started and all hell broke loose.

Just like the FC Barcelona players, Simone Inzaghi also addressed his players during halftime, setting the flames of determination ablaze in their souls.

The war that started in the first half continued in the second.

This time, Inter Milan stood as an even fiercer resistance, matching FC Barcelona's pressure man to man.

They hit back with the same pressure, more potent, more charged.

It was the UEFA Champions League final.

If anything, to them, this was the final of the tournament already. If they won this game, they would be one step to winning the trophy already.

So, there was no need trying to preserve themselves, preserve energy.

The players of both teams went all out, leaving it all on the pitch.

Elite players thrive in tight situations. And tonight, a stand-out for FC Barcelona this season did what he did best again, being clutch.

In the 55th minute of this game, Sam struck, like a Viper.

After dribbling from the right, Lamine Yamal was forced to drift back outside the box where he noticed that Sam dropped out of the 18-yard box also, all parts of the strategies they were employing to break down Inter's fearsome defense.

The Inter defense responded to Sam's erratic movements, becoming slightly disorganized.

For a moment, Lamine Yamal became bold.

He wanted to take advantage of the slight opening that Sam's movement caused to have a go at it, trying to curl the ball in but then he changed his mind.

Sam was right here, so why take the risk?

Bam!

He passed the ball to Sam and immediately, an Inter player applied pressure on him, Calhanoglou. Expecting it, Sam used it against the enemy player.

At the last moment, he jumped over the ball, rapidly spinning around even as caught off guard, Halkan Calhanoglou let the ball roll in between his legs.

The Inter Milan midfielder tugged at Sam as soon as he moved but expecting it again, Sam slowed down, letting the midfielder clatter into him from behind. Smashing against his tall and powerful frame was like hitting a wall; Calhanoglou staggered, falling gracelessly to the ground.

Sam pushed forward, entering the 18-yard box.

Whoosh!

Denzel Dumfries went on a sliding tackle.

But having anticipated it with his spatial awareness, Sam slowed down, trapping the ball and letting the Inter Milan player slide past.

Then, he moved.

He barely moved, when Alessandro Bastoni stuck out a leg, perfectly aiming to tackle the ball.

It was an inch-perfect tackle.

And yet, in that moment, Sam was already in the state of ultra-instinct.

He had no right reacting to that inch-perfect tackle but he did. At the last moment, Sam's legs snapped like a Viper's bite, moving the ball one way and flicking it the other way in one smooth motion... an Elastico!

Bastoni was left awkwardly on his knees.

Sam cut through the Inter Milan defense entirely only this one time like a hot knife through butter, but it was enough. He was a clinical striker.

Yann Sommer rushed out of his post immediately after Sam moved past Bastoni to the left, but with his spatial awareness, once again, Sam predicted it even before the goalkeeper moved.

As soon as Sommer moved, Sam's right leg also moved, hitting the ball with the outside of his boot and sending the ball straight at goal.

Yann Sommer reacted, flailing his arms.

But it was not enough. The ball curved past his grasp, rising high before nestling into the top right corner.

Silence, just for a few seconds, then...

BOOM!

The away section of the San Siro exploded.

"GOALLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLL...!"

The FC Barcelona faithful roared at the top of their lungs even as Sam charged towards the corner flag with a goofy smile on his face, sliding on his knees even as he crossed his hands over each other, doing his Black Panther celebration.

His teammates swarmed him, celebrating at the top of their lungs.

Inter Milan was stunned.

The commentators were going crazy.

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"ZINEDINE SAM!!!"

"HE'S STRUCK AGAIN! CLUTCH PLAYER! CLUTCH STRIKER!"

"Just when Barca needed him the most! He's showed up like a god!"

"How lucky they are to have him, the best striker in the world bar none!"

Chapter 445: A famous victory in Milan

Like a God.

It was a strong word, an offensive word to some, but he used it.

The commentators used it because they could not help it. Watching Sam erupt like some monster, tearing the fearsome Inter Milan defense down with sheer brilliance, they could not hold themselves from comparing him to a God.

A football God.

In the 55th minute of this game, Sam scored.

55 minutes, 0-1...

Aggregate, 3-4...

After what seemed like forever, FC Barcelona were ahead again in the semifinal tie of the UEFA Champions League.

The traveling FC Barcelona fans celebrated for a long time, their excitement levels rising to an entirely new crescendo in this semifinal.

And then...

FWEEE!

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

The Inter Milan fans across the stadium roared, turning the San Siro even more heated. This time, their voices were more aggressive, more hostile and slightly panicked. Clearly, they wanted their team to go on the attack.

And yet, the Inter Milan players didn't go on the attack.

That was not their style of play. That was not Simone Inzaghi's way, and tonight, the home fans felt themselves frustrated like never before with their team.

Inter Milan was losing, and yet, they continued playing their normal game, giving the Catalans the chance to ride the momentum of their goal and create even more danger with the ball.

Lamine Yamal remained a menace, combining with Kouunde, Sam, and Pedri to devastating effect as they kept on trying audacious dribbles.

Most worked, some didn't.

And yet, all of it caused the home Italian fans trepidation as they felt like any tiny mistake could result in a goal.

This was not a game for the faint-hearted.

This was a game of real tension, a game that could induce high blood pressure in the weak.

In the 61st minute, receiving the ball outside the box, with a drop of the shoulder, Sam nutmegged Calnanoglou, bursting into the Inter Milan 18-yard box before unleashing a piledriver at goal.

POW!

The sound of the ball being hit reverberated like thunder.

And this time, Yann Sommer outdid himself, going down fast enough on a full stretch dive to push the ball against the post, ricocheting back into his defender's path and Bastoni did not hesitate, clearing the ball to safety.

But in this game, safety was an illusion. It was that intense.

In the 66th minute, Inter Milan finally found what they wanted, a counterattacking chance. Federico Dimarco ran like a mad man with the ball through the flanks before crossing to Lautaro Martinez.

Martinez jumped, winning the aerial ball but just before he could shoot the ball after landing, Pau Cubarsi recklessly put his head on the way again, heading the ball away.

The young center defender would have suffered a head injury if Lautaro Martinez didn't hold his leg at the last moment.

When the Argentine striker stood up, helping the defender up as he massaged his head, he looked at him with an incredulous expression on his face.

'What a madman!' He thought.

Pau Cubarsi barely reacted to his look, already focusing back on the game.

In the 72nd minute, Nicolo Barella dribbled into the Barca 18-yard box after another counterattacking run but Ter Stegen calmly took his shot from the air before throwing it up field, launching a Barca counter-counterattack.

The last 2 dozen minutes of the game was a thriller.

FC Barcelona tried their best to break down the Inter Milan defense a second time, and score their second goal of the night, while Inter also struggled to break Barcelona's defense.

After all the fanfare, all the psychological ploy, the home advantage, the noise being made by their fans, all of it didn't seem to matter as FC Barcelona continued playing at an absolutely elite level.

In the 77th minute, Raphinha got the next best chance of this game, bursting into the 18-yard box from the left like a ghost before sneaking a powerful shot towards the bottom right corner.

Yann Sommer was beaten, but not the Inter defense. Once again, Alessandro Bastoni was a rock at the back for the Italian club.

The Italian defender reacted as soon as Raphinha hit the ball, falling back towards the left side of his net from his perspective.

And when the ball came, he was fast enough to push his leg out, intercepting the ball before it could sneak into his net.

It was a goal-line clearance!

Awkwardly, Bastoni clattered painfully into the post. He groaned in pain but he already did his work, and adrenaline made the pain feel mild.

After his goal-line clearance, another defender, Acerbi jumped in, clearing the ball but due to the tension, it was another botched clearance.

Instead of clearing the ball up field, the ball fell towards Lamine Yamal who was at the edge of the box.

Receiving the ball, the young Spanish winger went to work as Inter Milan players quickly closed him down.

A stagger, a drop of the shoulder, a ball shuffle, another ball push, and then...

BAM!

Lamine Yamal cradled the ball with the inside of his left foot, curling it towards the top left corner with terrible precision.

And yet, once again, Yann Sommer stood tall like a wall.

The goalkeeper dived, doing the incredible to get a touch on the ball, tipping it over the bar for a corner kick.

FC Barcelona played the corner kick. Inigo Martinez rose highest, planting a firm header at goal but it was too direct. Yann Sommer picked the ball from the air, rushing forward to find a good passing option, but he didn't find one.

Inter Milan was desperate now, time was running out.

It was 80 minutes already, yet still no goal.

85 minutes, still no goal...

Inter Milan finally left their shell, recklessly going on the attack.

Ready for the pressure, the Barcelona defense caught Inter offside twice in 3 minutes. Besides, due to pushing so eagerly up field, Inter was exposed at the back as Raphinha almost scored the 2nd goal if not for another Yann Sommer intervention at the back.

The game was end to end, filled with tension, passion, and determination.

And yet, inevitably, there are always losers and winners.

FWEEEE!

The ref's whistle sounded.

The game... was over.

Chapter 446: Champions league finalists

FWEEEE!

The final whistle pierced through the thick Milanese night like the cry of a divine decree. The game... was over.

Silence, brief, solemn silence.

The FC Barcelona players could not believe it, they had done it; 0-1 at the San Siro, 4-3 on aggregate.

They had done it. They had beaten Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey final, played Inter Milan right after in the first leg, and now ended it with a victory in enemy turf, at the San Siro.

In that instant, the tension that had gripped the visitors' hearts for ninety minutes shattered into unfiltered, uncontainable euphoria.

The Barcelona bench erupted; coaches, players, and staff spilling onto the pitch like a tidal wave of blue and garnet. Hansi Flick leapt into the arms of his assistants, fists raised, eyes gleaming with vindication.

The joy of the German coach could not be contained.

Sam fell to his knees, arms spread to the heavens, a quiet prayer lost in the roar. Even he could not believe it.

Heck, this was his first season competing in the UEFA Champions League and now, he was already in the final of the elite competition of European clubs.

Not just that, that goal in the 55th minute of the game made it 17 for Sam this season in the UEFA Champions League.

Cristiano Ronaldo was the record holder of the most goals scored in a single UEFA Champions League season with 17, and after this unforgettable night in Milan, Sam just wrote his name in footballing folklore again.

He matched Cristiano Ronaldo's record.

And if he went on to score another goal in the final, he would have eclipsed the legendary Portuguese forward, claiming a record from him.

All these were thoughts for the future. Now, all he thought of was how happy he was; the joy, the euphoria, it was unmistakably striking.

Gavi sprinted toward the away fans, thumping the Barca crest on his chest, screaming something no one could hear but everyone could feel.

'VISCA BARCA!'

The players embraced like survivors, worn from battle but unbroken.

Tears welled in Pedri's eyes; hot tears of pride, of struggle, of dream reignited. Raphinha climbed the advertising boards and stood tall, arms outstretched, soaking in the adoration from the traveling cules, who had drowned out a city in celebration.

In the away corner of the San Siro, Barcelona's faithful shook the very foundations with their noise.

Flags waved like flames in a storm. Flares lit up the night. Some cried, others sang. All of them believed again.

And in brutal contrast, the Curva Nord fell into stunned silence.

Inter fans stood motionless, blue and black scarves limp in their hands. Some shouted in frustration, others quietly made for the exits, heads bowed, hearts broken. The dream of Istanbul had died in their own cathedral.

As the players gathered in midfield, hand in hand, facing the away stand, the stadium was divided between defiance and despair.

One half of San Siro had become holy ground; the other a graveyard of lost hope. The commentary cemented the moment in history.

The commentators went haywire. "Barca are UEFA champions league finalists again!"

From the smoke and steel of San Siro's heart, they carved a path with grit and art".

"Not just a goal, but a reckoning, a roar as Barca rose, Champions once more".

"Through jeers and fire, they found their light".

"In enemy lands, they claimed the night".

"The echoes of Milan shall long recall, the night the giants danced and did not fall".

Sam won the man of the match award.

And of course, he added to the post-match press conference.

...

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Semifinal:)

(Leg 2 of 2:)

(PSG – Arsenal)

(Aggregate: 1-0)

(Date: 7th May, 2026)

It was 7th May, 2026...

The atmosphere at the Parc des' Princes was electric as Parisian fans welcomed their England counterparts all the way from London.

It was the 2nd day of UEFA Champions League football, the 2nd semifinal.

This time, between PSG and Arsenal.

Last week, while Inter held Barca to a 3-3 draw at the Spotify Camp Nou, PSG showed their superiority in enemy soil, fertilizing the seeds of qualification with a 0-1 win at the Emirates Stadium in London.

And now, the return leg of the UEFA Champions League clash started.

FWEEEE!

Last week, PSG dominated, but tonight, they blew their opponents away.

Buoyed by the loud noise being made by their fans, PSG played like a well-oiled machine churning with unmatched efficiency as they ground Arsenal to the bones and yet, against the run of play, the London club scored first.

And it was their starboy who struck, Bukayo Saka.

Receiving the ball from the right, he wriggled past his marker, ventured close to the 18-yard box, evaded a few challenges before curling an absolute golazo into the top left corner of the net past Donnarumma's grasp.

18 minutes, 0-1, 1-1 on aggregate...

Was that the premise to an Arsenal comeback?

No. Simple as that.

That goal was the catalyst that riled the rampant Parisians up. PSG woke up like an Ancient Dragon that had slumbered for a millennium who finally woke up, and with it, they tore Arsenal to shreds.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia was the architect for the Arsenal downfall.

The Georgian scored the first goal just 4 minutes after Saka's goal in the 22nd minute, curling a similar shot from the left this time. Despite David Raya going on a full stretch dive, the rotating ball evaded his touch and nestled into the net.

In the 33rd minute, Kvaratskhelia did it again, dribbling through multiple Arsenal players before passing the ball for Mikel Merino to direct into the net.

The comeback was complete!

And yet, PSG was not satisfied yet.

In the 45th minute, Dembele went on a rampaging dribble that cut through Arsenal players like they were not there before setting Kvaratskhelia up again for the winger to curl into the net a second time.

18 minutes, 0-1...

45 minutes, 3-1...

The fortunes of this game changed so suddenly, so fast.

The game ended in the first half. The second half was much more tame, a goalless draw.

Arsenal lost. PSG qualified.

The UEFA Champions League finalists were confirmed.

Chapter 447: Footballing heritage

(UEFA Champions League:)

(Final:)

(Barcelona – PSG)

(Date: 31st May, 2026)

It was scheduled, the final of the 2025/26 UEFA Champions League. Including its 2 finalists.

This season, FC Barcelona and PSG had truly legendary runs, not just in the UEFA Champions League but also in their various domestic leagues.

For FC Barcelona, not only did they win the Supercopa de Espana and Copa del Rey trophies against their archrivals, Real Madrid, but they were still leading the La Liga race, and now they were champions league finalists.

They were on course for a legendary quadruple trophy season.

Hansi Flick's Barcelona was truly a menace, the German coach was a magician but this season, everyone knew what the true difference was. It was the young Nigerian striker, Samuel Moses.

Sam was at the heart of everything Barca this season. He dribbled, dominated play, scored, and assisted this season.

This season, he was a complete player.

He did everything; from scoring outside the box goals, scoring penalties, freekicks, scoring headers, acrobatic goals, Sam did everything this season.

And finally, his club was at the true critical stage of the season.

The part of the season that'll truly show if they had what it takes to not only chase but claim all 4 trophies that they were vying for this season.

If in the end, FC Barcelona lost the UEFA Champions League final, and even the league title too, it would still be a legendary football season for the Catalan club, and most importantly for their striker.

After the Inter Milan game, Sam's 52nd game of the season, he took his tally for the season to 72 goals and 39 assists.

Combined, that is 111 goal contributions in a single season!

At this point, if it was not clear before, the whole world was already forced into submission that they were not witnessing just any talent but an all-time great footballer in action at the peak of his powers.

Sam was different, a maverick. He was part of that elite group of players that you watch and never forget, that group of players that you watch and proudly tell tales of to your grandchildren at your old age.

That was who Samuel Moses was, the Nigerian Zidane.

Heck, that comparison was an old one. By now, a lot of people were already convinced that Sam was better than the French maestro.

Some claimed it was too early to judge, that maybe he was a one-season wonder but his most staunch fans shut it all up.

"Are you guys crazy?!"

"Which one-season wonder have you seen scored 40 goals in a season? Does that ring a bell? Any? What of 50? 60? 70? 72 freaking goals, any ring a bell?!"

"Show me a one-season wonder that scores that many goals and we'll talk".

"And one that not just scores that, but assists 39 times, one more assist to make 40. Are you guys blind? Deaf? Dumb?"

Sam's fame was at its peak, at the young age of 20.

That was the most frightening thing about it, Sam was just 20, which meant that he had decades of football ahead of him.

With a talent like his, he could well go on to keep on playing at the ripe old age of 38 or even 40 still at the top level.

And his consistency, jogging every morning, visiting the Spotify Camp Nou gym every day; he was the Black Mamba of football.

With that mentality, his body would be at an elite level well into his 30s.

While FC Barcelona had Hansi Flick and Sam, PSG simply had Luis Enrique.

The Spanish coach who once won a famous treble for FC Barcelona, the last FC Barcelona coach who led the club to a UEFA Champions League win would be the club's opponent in the final.

PSG under Luis Enrique was different. With Kylian Mbappe gone to Real Madrid, the Spanish coach got to implement all his ideas in the team.

And now, he transformed PSG into one of the most tight-knit, team work-driven teams in Europe.

With the likes of Desire Doue, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Bradely Barcola, and a revived Ousmane Dembele in attack, PSG had one of the most electric attacking unit in Europe. And that was not their only positive.

PSG's midfield was an elite one comprising of a prime Vitorinha, Fabian Ruiz, and the young menace, Joao Neves.

To many football fans, their defense is their weakness but that is only when contrasted against their out of the world midfield and offensive unit.

Compared against most clubs in Europe, PSG's defense was still a world class one, comprising the likes of Nuno Mendes, Achraf Hakimi, Pacho, and a tested veteran in Marquinhos.

PSG; Paris Saint Germain. FC Barcelona.

Both were fearsome clubs this season, well-drilled machines that were churning with peak efficiency.

It was the final that most neutral football fans hoped for.

Two elite teams with similar football philosophies, playing raw exciting and attacking football; Hansi Flick ball vs Luis Enrique ball.

The old vs the new.

It was going to be a war, exacerbated by the bad blood and history between the 2 clubs in the UEFA Champions League.

In 2016, FC Barcelona pulled off a famous comeback against PSG in the quarterfinal of the UEFA Champions League that would become known as the La Ramontada.

Having suffered a 4-0 defeat at the Parc des Princes, PSG's home stadium, the tie was all but done. So Europe thought, but Barcelona thought different.

When the Parisians came to Barcelona, they faced the full fury of Catalan football and Catalan heritage.

FC Barcelona battered PSG 6-1, the last goal scored in injury time to secure a famous victory at the Camp Nou.

All this and more added even more juice to the UEFA Champions League final. It was going to be an exciting spectacle.

That was for then though.

For now, another important match beckoned for FC Barcelona.

El Clasico beckoned... the final El Clasico of the season.

Chapter 448: Final El Clasico of the season

The city of Barcelona pulsed with restless energy days before the final El Clasico of the season.

The victory in Milan had not dulled the hunger; rather, it had sharpened it.

And now, Real Madrid was coming to the Spotify Camp Nou, and the Catalan faithful had one goal: to bury their rivals beneath a thunderstorm of pride and vengeance; to rub their superiority this season on their faces.

And then, it was D-day.

11th May, 2026...

(La Liga:)

(Barcelona – Real Madrid)

On matchday, the streets swarmed with a sea of Blaugrana, drums echoing off the buildings, chants erupting from balconies, cafes, and alleyways.

Fireworks crackled as early as noon. The sun barely stood a chance against the smoke that curled into the sky from flares and fireworks, painting the air in warlike hues of red and blue.

As the Real Madrid team bus approached, it was met with the kind of welcome forged in centuries of rivalry and resentment.

Thousands of fans lined the route, screaming, whistling, waving flags and banners like weapons. One of the banners, a massive one read:

>Madridistas no sou benvinguts<

Smoke bombs exploded in brilliant bursts of color. The bus crawled forward, surrounded by riot police, its tinted windows hiding faces surely steeled, but not immune.

By contrast, when the Barcelona team bus emerged from the tunnel into the stadium, it was like the arrival of returning conquerors.

Flares lit up the entrance like a coliseum gate; fans pounded on the bus as if to send strength through the stee.

"VISCA BARCA!" They roared, a tidal chant that didn't stop.

It only grew louder.

Inside the Spotify Camp Nou, the cauldron had already reached a boiling point. Over 90,000 fans had turned the stadium into a living, screaming organism.

Tifos rippled like banners on a battlefield, massive murals of Cruyff, Messi, Iniesta, and Sam loomed high over the pitch like guardian spirits. A banner stretched across one stand, reading:

"We sent Italy to sleep. Now we wake Spain up".

The air crackled with hostility; every blade of grass felt charged.

Real Madrid stepped out into a storm. The boos were relentless, like a hurricane against their every touch. Whistles, insults, chants that shook the rafters.

And Barcelona's players?

They fed on it.

Gavi beat his chest like a warrior before kickoff. Ter Stegen walked with the calm of a general, while Sam gave a wry smile, nodding to the crowd as if to say, 'leave it to us'.

Tonight, it was a must-win game for Real Madrid.

The Catalans already stole everything from them this season. If they wanted to avoid a fate of going this season trophyless, their only hope laid on the La Liga title and to have a tiny chance of winning it, they must win today's game.

This was why Real Madrid fielded their best lineup of players, forcing the recovering Kylian Mbappe back into the starting XI.

Real Madrid played a 4-4-2 formation.

In between the goals for the Spanish Capital Club was Thibaut Courtois, while the defensive quadruple ahead of him comprised Ferland Mendy, Antonio Rudiger, Raul Asencio, and Trent Alexander Arnold.

In midfield was the quadruple of Federico Valverde, Dani Ceballos, Jude Bellingham, and Arda Guler.

Arda Guler, the young Turkish prodigy already settled somewhat in his second season in Madrid, featuring more regularly for the Spanish Capital Club.

As for Real Madrid's offensive duo? It was Vinicius Jnr. and Kylian Mbappe.

As for Barcelona, Hansi Flick started with exactly the same lineup that he used to play the Inter Milan second leg game.

The main difference was that this time, they had the home advantage.

The Spotify Camp Nou wasn't just a stadium this night.

It was a cathedral of defiance, a fortress of fury, and hell for anyone in white.

FWEEE!

The referee's whistle cut through the bustle of the stadium, and it started.

Like usual, FC Barcelona hoped to start the game on the front foot, eager to pressure their opponents but not tonight.

Tonight, fueled by pure spite, Real Madrid was ready for their archrivals.

They counter-pressed Barcelona.

The Real Madrid midfield swarmed like locusts, elite locusts, leading the press to keep the pressure on their opponents even as they aimed to pressure them too. Against a weaker opponent, Barcelona would have easily beat the press but this was Real Madrid.

After 2 minutes, 3 minutes, 5 minutes, 8 minutes..., the game finally settled.

It was no longer one-sided. It became even.

Real Madrid played their hearts out on the pitch. The lethargy from the grueling semifinal clash against Inter Milan still showed on the body language of the Barca players, and the Madrid players took advantage of it.

Vinicius and Mbappe especially were pure menace.

With their speed, they terrorized the Barcelona defense, being careful so as to not be caught offside.

After so many games of being punished by Barcelona's highline, they already learned a few tricks to beat the offside trap.

And tonight, they did it.

In the 26th minute of the game, Real Madrid struck, hitting the anvil while it was still hot. And Vinicius Jnr. was the star this time.

One moment, Real Madrid was on the defensive and the next, they already transitioned from defense to offense so smoothly that it was scary.

As soon as the ball was won, Vinicius and Mbappe started running.

Rudiger passed to Vinicius and after taking one touch, without even looking first, Trent Alexander Arnold played an unreal cross field pass to the other side of the pitch where Vinicius Jnr. ran.

Vinicius blitzed past Jules Kounde with speed, taking the ball in his strides before cutting in and charging straight at goal.

With a fake shot, he sat Ter Stegen to the ground.

As soon as the German goalkeeper went down, Vinicius lobbed the ball above him. Even before the ball entered the net, he was already running away in celebration.

"GOALLLLLLL...!"

The away stands at the Spotify Camp Nou erupted as Vinicius ran to the corner flag, doing the calma celebration and drawing the ire of Barcelona fans.

Real Madrid's victory didn't last though.

As soon as the game restarted, Barcelona equalized almost instantly.

Lamine Yamal struck.

Chapter 449: The Yamal show [1]

26 minutes, 0-1...

The lead didn't last though, Lamine Yamal struck.

FWEEE!

FC Barcelona restarted the game and this time, they decided not to rush things, passing the ball around as they embodied the Barca DNA of tiki taka football for a few minutes.

From Pedri to Frankie De Jong to Jules Kounde, all the way to Sam and Gavi up field, FC Barcelona pinged the ball around, for almost 2 minutes, till the ball got to Lamine Yamal deep at the right side of the pitch.

Pedri played an accurate long cross to Lamine Yamal and as soon as the ball got to the young winger, Ferland Mendy, Real Madrid's left back pressed.

As soon as Mendy pressed, Lamine Yamal read his move, reacting.

He rolled the ball with one leg before pushing it with his other leg, nutmegging the left back. Ferland Mendy tried to grab Yamal but reacting fast again, he jumped, evading the left back.

And just like that, he left his marker for dead.

Yamal was not free yet though as Jude Bellingham already dropped back, initiating the press after he beat Ferland Mendy.

Bellingham focused on defending his inside to prevent Lamine Yamal from penetrating into the 18-yard box with his dribbling. He wanted to push the winger to dribble outward.

Yamal knew what his opponent's intentions were, and he didn't resist it. Rather, he accepted it, dribbling outside and away from Bellingham.

Dani Ceballos crossed the distance to him next, pressing but Yamal kept his cool. With a drop of the shoulder and a la croqueta, he blitzed past the midfielder.

Bang!

Another Madrid player clattered into Sam, hitting him from the side even as the player's elbow hit his ribs.

Lamine Yamal felt a spike of pain but he didn't react to it, gritting his teeth through it to push forward, and then...

BAM!

Lamine Yamal hit his trademark flair shot, curling the ball towards the top corner of the net.

Thibaut Courtois knew exactly what the young winger was about to do, this was why he reacted fast, jumping. And yet, it was not enough.

The angle on Yamal's shot was too acute.

It floated like a curve ball, moving past Courtois' hand, then it kissed the top bar before bouncing down and into the net.

Silence, then...

BOOM!

The Spotify Camp Nou erupted.

"WOW! LAMINE YAMAL, WHAT A GOAL!"

"A STUNNING SOLO RUN!"

"The teenage wonder has added another volume to the Lamine Yamal collection!"

"He blitzed through Ferland Mendy, shrugged off Jude Bellingham, sent Dani Ceballos to the shadow realm, held his ground against Federico Valverde and still managed to shoot, scoring such an outrageous goal past Courtois!"

"What a goal!"

Lamine Yamal rushed towards the corner flag, sliding on his knees in celebration even as the Barcelona fans cheered him on.

His teammates swarmed him, celebrating with him.

Mere 2 minutes after Real Madrid's goal, in the 28th minute, Lamine Yamal did it, bringing the game back level.

28 minutes, 2-2...

The game continued.

After that goal, Barca gained dominance over the game but as Sam was finally unlocked, causing menace in and around the Real Madrid 18-yard box.

Yet, Sam didn't score a goal though despite his threat, neither did Barcelona.

In the 37th minute of the game, FC Barcelona was stunned again and this time, it was Jude Bellingham.

And again, it was another counter.

It was vintage counterattacking Real Madrid tonight.

Federico Valverde won the ball back after a stray pass from Inigo Martinez, immediately feeding the ball to Vinicius Jnr.

Kounde quickly closed down the dangerous Brazilian but Vinicius didn't try to dribble past the Frenchman this time, rather passing to Kylian Mbappe before erupting with speed, running out of bounds outside the pitch to evade Kounde.

Pau Cubarsi was already pressing Kylian Mbappe as soon as the ball was passed, this was why instead of holding on to it, he hit it first time.

Bam!

He played a one-two with Vinicius Jnr., setting the Brazilian loose.

Vinicius erupted with speed, bombing down the flanks with the ball even as the Barca defense retreated in trepidation.

Pau Cubarsi raised his arms, calling for an offside but the linesman ignored him. The Brazilian managed to beat the offside trap.

Somehow, Inigo Martinez managed to return fast enough to defend, pressing the Brazilian, forcing him to slow down.

Vinicius slowing down allowed Kounde and Pau Cubarsi to arrive in time, and immediately, their attention went to the rampaging Kylian Mbappe who just bombed into the 18-yard box, asking for the pass.

Vinicius didn't pass to Mbappe though, he was already marked. Instead, he passed it behind Mbappe, to the space behind him.

A moment ago, no one was there but as soon as the ball was hit...

Whoosh!

Jude Bellingham appeared.

With his lap, Bellingham controlled Vinicius' pass and before Pau Cubarsi could react, turning to defend against him, he hit the ball with his right leg.

Bam!

Ter Stegen was rooted to one spot, watching as the ball flew past him, nestling into the left side of the net.

"GOALLLLL!"

The away end at the Spotify Camp Nou erupted again.

Jogging to the corner flag, Jude Bellingham slowed down and did his iconic celebrating, sending the fans into a frenzy.

Tonight, it was the Madrid show, or so Madrid fans thought.

37 minutes, 1-2...

5 minutes later, the Yamal show continued.

This time, it was Sam who won the ball back due to pressing high. As soon as he won back the ball from Rudiger, Sam stood his ground before the German's physicality before passing to the left where Lamine Yamal lurked.

Trent Alexander Arnold was already shadowing Raphinha, leaving Yamal as the only passing option.

Bam!

Yamal struck the ball instinctively as soon as Sam passed it. And yet, somehow, Raul Asencio managed to slide in front of goal, stopping the ball with a goal line clearance.

But it was not over yet.

This was because the rebound fell in front of Lamine Yamal again. The young Spaniard didn't hesitate, instinctively heading the ball into a free net.

FC Barcelona scored again.

2-2.

Chapter 450: The Yamal show [2]

Halftime. 2-2.

While the players walked down the tunnel for the halftime, the commentators could not help going lyrical about the stunning first half that they witnessed between these 2 footballing giants and archrivals.

"What a half!"

"What a game!"

"This first half, it was the Lamine Yamal show!"

"That first goal, oh my word!"

"Vinicius scores, and yet Yamal says... 'I can't be outdone!' He scores a solid contender for the goal of the season award to equalize the game".

"Jude Bellingham strikes next, fed by Vinicius and yet once again, Yamal is not satisfied. The second goal was less glamorous but considering that they were losing, FC Barcelona fans around the world loved it nonetheless".

"What a performance!"

"It's Vinicius vs Yamal today".

During halftime, Hansi Flick had only a few words for his players.

He didn't have a lot of things to say to them, they played a good game. He simply commended them for the performance, encouraging them to be more defensively disciplined in the 2nd half.

A few minutes later, second half started...

As soon as the game started, FC Barcelona started an attacking sequence that was straight out of the training ground.

As soon as the ball was passed to Pedri, Sam started running down the pitch. Then, Pedri played a long lobbed pass towards Sam.

It took the Madrid defense a moment for them to realize the threat, but by then, it was already too late. Sam was already about overtaking the Madrid defense as the ball descended when Rudiger made a crazy decision.

He lunged at Sam recklessly, elbowing his face with his hand.

"..."

For a few seconds, as Sam collapsed to the ground from the impact, he felt nothing and then, suddenly, the pain came.

It was sharp, biting, as if something cracked in his face.

"Ugh!" Sam groaned, writhing in pain on the pitch.

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle reverberated, blowing for a foul as he gave Antonio Rudiger a straight red card.

But that was not enough. Sam was the most important member of the FC Barcelona squad this season. And to see him be brutally brought down in such a manner, the FC Barcelona players were incensed.

Gavi rushed up to Rudiger immediately, angrily standing up for his friend as he had to be held back by Raphinha in the end.

The referee already gave a red card, so there was not much they could do.

The Real Madrid players couldn't even protest the decision; Sam writhing in pain on the ground was enough evidence. Besides, more evidence was on his face, the blood flowing from his face.

For a moment, panic settled in the stadium as the medic rushed to the pitch, attending to Sam who was in a world of pain.

Clearly, something broke in his face.

There was a clamor in the stadium stands as FC Barcelona fans watched their star player writhe in pain, anxiety and fear written all over their faces.

In the end, Sam was stretchered off the pitch.

And with him, Rudiger also trudged off the pitch to a chorus of angry boos from the FC Barcelona fans.

With that, Real Madrid was left to play the rest of the game with just 10 men but with Sam out of the pitch, FC Barcelona just lost a big part of their game plan.

Both coaches made changes.

Hansi Flick substituted Ferran Torres in for Sam, while Carlo Ancellotti made a more defensive change, bringing David Alaba for Dani Ceballos as he tweaked the formation of his team on the pitch.

With just 10 men now, to close up the space that Rudiger's absence left in their formation, Real Madrid changed to a 4-4-1 formation.

Kylian Mbappe was the only man left in attack as even Vinicius Jnr. was now tasked with a more defensive role this game.

FWEEE!

The referee blew his whistle again, the signal to continue the game.

Raphinha stood before the ball, about to take the free kick. After receiving a signal, he did a short run before hitting the ball.

He hit the ball well but it was too close to the goalkeeper as Thibaut Courtois claimed the ball from the air after a simple dive.

Then, rushing forward, he threw the ball long, quickly starting a counterattack but Kylian Mbappe barely started running when he was clattered on by a stalwart Inigo Martinez.

"Ahh!" Kylian Mbappe screamed in pain before collapsing to the pitch.

No one knew if Inigo Martinez did it deliberately as a form of revenge for Sam, but that action made the tension in this stadium rise even further as the referee blew his whistle again, showing the defender a yellow card.

The Real Madrid players protested the decision but the referee paid them no mind, giving the signal for the game to continue.

The game continued.

With 10 men, Real Madrid suffered.

FC Barcelona played like soldiers at war, repeatedly going on attack raids on the Real Madrid 18-yard box as Thibaut Courtois was forced into constant goal-saving mode. He was barely keeping his team in the game.

The game became more physical, more brutal, more tension-filled and this time, even Madrid, famous for riding chaos could not ride the Catalan chaos.

BAM!

Raphinha struck in the 74th minute, sending a powerful volleyed shot into Courtois' near post. The towering Belgian would catch that shot any other day but the chaos already spiraled, and today, he made a blunder, letting the ball in.

Courtois cursed as Raphinha ran away in celebration.

Lamine Yamal provided the assist after another crazy dribble from the right and cross. Today was simply the Yamal show.

And to solidify his claim to the game, Yamal struck again.

This time, from a corner kick.

As soon as the corner was played in by Raphinha, a scramble started in the Real Madrid 18-yard box and amid the chaos, Lamine Yamal thrived as soon as the ball fell to his feet.

With his ball control and tight-space dribbling, he passed through 2 Real Madrid players like they were not there, suddenly one on one with the goalkeeper.

And then, he simply rolled it to the bottom corner past Thibaut Courtois.

BOOM!

The Spotify Camp Nou erupted again.

If Lamine Yamal was a caterpillar still growing in his cocoon before, after that goal, he blossomed, becoming a butterfly.

Lamine Yamal scored the first hatrick of his career.