

Greatest 291

Chapter 291 - To Liège, Belgium II

"I heard that you were once Zachary Bemba's coach!" The president said abruptly after a few more seconds of silence. "Is that right?"

"No, I have never gotten the pleasure of coaching Zachary," Coach Damata replied right away, shaking his head. "I was simply the coach who organized his trials when he caught the eyes of the scouts from Norway. However, I have always maintained a cordial relationship with him, ever since he left for Norway. I also have a close relationship with his immediate family in Lubumbashi."

"Oh, that's very good, then," the association president said, smiling and letting out a breath. "Coach Damata! You know that I'm a man who doesn't like beating around the bush. So, I'll get straight to the reason why I sought you out today. I don't want to waste your time on needless chatter since the match is about to commence."

"Go ahead, Mr. President," Coach Damata said, nodding. "I'm all ears. I'll help in whatever way I can." He already had some guesses but decided to wait for the president to make his request.

"Well," the association president said, pausing momentarily and folding his arms across his chest. "I have already watched several of Rosenberg's matches this season, and I'm really impressed by how rapidly Zachary Bemba is improving with every game he plays for the Norwegian giants. The boy really has what it takes to join the rankings of the best players on the planet if he continues developing at such a rate. So, we would like to invite him to join the senior national team, starting next year."

"However," the association president continued in a somber tone before Coach Damata could reply. "We're afraid that if we offer him an official call up, without showing any sincerity, he might ignore us and even opt to play for another country. Yet, this time around, we don't wish to end up losing another talented player to some other foreign country simply because we didn't show enough sincerity. Do you get my point, Coach Damata?"

"Yes, Mr. President," Coach Damata replied, nodding. "But why are you telling me all this?"

"Well," the association president said, glancing at Coach Damata squarely. "You're close to Zachary. So, we figured that you're the only coach in the association with the highest possibility of successfully inviting him to the national team."

Coach Damata couldn't help but crease his brows. "So, you want me to convince Zachary to commit to the DR Congo Leopards right away? Why not give him a direct invitation to the national team like the other players? The way I know Zachary, he'll most likely not refuse the invite."

"As I already said, we want to snuff out any possibility of him refusing our call," the president said with an audible sigh. "You can't blame us for taking such precautions. We've already lost a lot of talented players to other countries simply because we didn't take the time to have a heart-to-heart with them. This time around, we want to do everything right with Zachary. We really want to do our best to recruit him into the national team, especially before next year's AFCON qualifiers. And that's where we need you, Coach Damata. As a close acquaintance to Zachary, you have the best chance to carry out this mission successfully."

"Okay," Coach Damata said, nodding. "I'll inform him about the call-up to the national team during the Christmas break. But you guys really took your time inviting him to the national team. Let's hope that no other country has already made him an offer, especially with the way he has been playing over the previous few months."

"As long as he hasn't played an official FIFA game for any other country, then we can still bring him back home," the president said with a chuckle. "Just do your best to have a heart-to-heart with him and convince him to play for our national team."

"I'll see what I can do," Coach Damata said, nodding. "But, the match is about to start. So, let's hurry up to the activity room first. We can then continue our discussion there."

"Okay."

The Rosenborg players returned to the dressing room after a short pre-match dynamic warm-up session in the middle of the field. They then quickly donned their match attire in preparation for the commencement of the match a few minutes later.

"Guys, can I have your attention for a few minutes before we head into the pitch for the match?" Coach Johansen said as he slowly stepped forward into the center of the dressing room. "Let's hurry up as we don't have much time to spare."

The players, including Zachary, quickly settled down on the seats around the dressing rooms before fixing their eyes on the coach. At that moment, they were all radiating fierce auras as if they were a group of experienced predators about to pounce on some helpless prey. Anyone could tell that their fighting spirit was slowly inflating and almost soaring into the skies as the start of the match drew closer with every passing minute.

Zachary, on his part, was akin to the true embodiment of the word confidence at that moment. He'd already upgraded his body control attribute to the S-grading and, as a plus, also achieved initial mastery in the Zinedine-Touch-Magic Juju after going through the system's mental conditioning a few days prior.

He was an utterly different version of his previous self from a few days ago due to his heightened abilities. So, he was rearing to go on to the pitch and test out his abilities on the opponents. He could hardly contain his excitement and anticipation at that moment.

"Only fifteen minutes are remaining to the start of the game," Coach Johansen said, sweeping his gaze across the dressing room. "So, I won't say much as we have been discussing the tactics for a few days already. I believe everyone knows their roles by now in our new 4-4-2 formation. Is that right, guys?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied enthusiastically.

"I'm glad that we're on the same page." Coach Johansen nodded. "This is a very crucial match, and we can't afford to slip since a lot is at stake. We can't afford to falter at this stage. We've got to do everything in our power to win and grab the three points from our opponents today so that we can keep our Europa League dream alive. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

"Standard Liège has already obtained six points and is now second in our group," Coach Johansen continued in a somber tone after a moment. "They only require a draw against us today, and then they will qualify for the next stage while we'll be eliminated. Thus, if we wish to qualify for the knock-out

stages, we have to ruthlessly crush Standard Liège and knock them out of the tournament. That's our only way forward. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

Coach Johansen nodded and made a few more remarks to motivate the players before sending them to the pitch for the second last fixture of the 2013/14 Europa League group stages. He'd already instilled the tactics for the game into the players' minds. So, the rest was up to his field players.

Chapter 292 - Jaw-Dropping Performance I

Zachary could feel his blood pumping fast with excitement as he stood over the ball in the center circle, waiting for the kick-off whistle. He'd deactivated the system's miniaturized gravitational field a few hours before he'd set off from Trondheim. So, his body had already recovered to its optimum state. At that moment, he felt as if he was a bird about to soar into the skies.

His ears could still pick up the frenzied cheers of the Standard Liège fans that were so loud to the point of causing slight tremors across the stadium. However, he remained unperturbed since he'd already grown into a very calm and collected footballer after spending a whole year as part of Rosenborg's starting line-up.

Even if the fans went crazy and set up a fire in the stands, he wouldn't care in the slightest. As long as the playing field remained unaffected, he could continue performing at his best on the pitch and ignore the chaos around the stadium.

His entire focus at that moment was on the ball, the referee, and the opponents. Nothing else could distract him and break his concentration in those few minutes before kick-off. He was that steady as a professional player.

A few seconds later, Zachary started scrutinizing the setup of the Standard Liège players on the other side of the pitch. He could instantly tell that they'd arrayed themselves in a 4-4-2 double-6 starting formation. They appeared to be quite fierce and ready to tear Rosenborg apart as they stood there waiting for the kick-off.

However, Zachary was still not intimidated by their fierce stances. His overall football skills were at a level much higher than his previous week's self. So, he was sure that he could handle most of the defenses in most of Europe's low-tier leagues as long as his teammates didn't hold him back.

He was that confident.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee finally blew the whistle at exactly 7:00 PM and signaled for the kick-off.

As usual, Coach Johansen immediately shut out everything else and started following the proceedings on the pitch with a hundred percent concentration. He was a bit uneasy while watching the opening minutes since he'd employed a more dynamic 4-4-2 instead of the usual 4-2-3-1 formation for that game.

The strategy was a calculated risk as he'd wanted to fill up the gap left by Nicki Nielsen, his injured creative center forward. Particularly, he'd opted to play with two center forwards up front instead of the usual single point-man. As a result, his team for that match comprised four defenders, four midfielders (two central midfielders plus two wingers), and two central forwards.

On paper, it was a great team for sure. However, the coach was still worried since he'd taken a serious risk by taking Zachary out of the midfield in the new setup. So, Coach Johansen was waiting to see whether the young man could adapt to the new position as a second striker in the new 4-4-2 formation. Otherwise, Rosenborg would face plenty of problems and fail to sustain any bit of pressure on the much-more dynamic Standard Liège side.

The defenses of both sides continued doing their best on multiple occasions to stop their opponents from scoring. As a result, the score remained 0:0 with only a few half chances shared between the two sides as the game progressed into the fifteenth minute.

However, Coach Johansen was still not at ease despite the deadlock on the pitch. He was not in the best of moods since Standard Liège was slightly better overall than his team when on the attack during the first few minutes.

The Belgian giants were always dangerous while moving forward, with crosses continuously flying into the box like ballistic missiles from different angles. Their two strikers were even fiercer and almost scored with headers during the 10th and 12th minutes. Fortunately, the Rosenborg keeper was alert and managed to save the situation on both occasions.

All in all, Rosenborg's situation on the pitch was not looking optimistic since the players, especially the midfielders, had failed to grow into the game. They couldn't even hold on to possession for long, thus bringing about a situation whereby Rosenborg remained on the back foot from the very first minute.

"Don't you think that we should switch back to the 4-2-3-1 formation?" Trond Henriksen, his assistant, inquired from beside him after a few minutes. "If we pull Zachary back from striking and add him as a third man in the midfield, we'll be able to suppress the Standard Liège midfielders. We can then slowly build from there and start sustaining more pressure on the opponents."

Coach Johansen sighed, shaking his head after hearing his assistant's advice. He understood that midfielders were akin to the gears that kept the defensive and offensive lines connected and moving smoothly on the field. In most cases, a team had to control the midfield perfectly to win the game.

However, if a team lacked creative forwards, they would still fail to score and even lose even if they possessed a strong midfield. So, coach Johansen had prioritized strengthening the striking line instead of the midfield for that game. He wanted to get a goal first before thinking about anything else.

"Trond," he said, his eyes still following the proceedings on the field. "I do get your point. If we play with a 4-2-3-1 formation, we can achieve stability in the middle and at the back."

"However, you must not forget that our first and foremost priority in this game is to score. To qualify, we have to win. So, that's the reason I've changed our formation to a 4-4-2 and pushed Zachary forward. I want us to get more opportunities upfront to score instead of focusing on defending."

"Moreover," the coach continued. "Coaches from other countries are now aware of the danger posed by Zachary in midfield. So, if we play him in the middle, as usual, the opponent will target him for sure. So, why not push him forward and catch the opponent unawares? Do you get my reasoning, Trond?"

"Yes, coach," the assistant said, nodding.

"You don't have to worry too much," Coach Johansen said in a mild tone while keeping his eyes fixed on the field of play. "We're still far from the worst-case scenario since the score is still 0:0. So, let's wait and see how the game progresses until half-time before we start thinking about making any changes."

"Okay."

On the pitch, Zachary stepped away from his opponent like the wind when he saw Thomas Partey, one of Rosenborg's two midfielders, control the ball in midfield. His steps were light on the green, and his running posture textbook perfect as he raced into space while anticipating the pass from his teammate.

"Thomas!" He yelled as he continued running into space while occasionally glancing around to take in the positioning of his opponents. He felt good as the breakthrough of his body control attribute to the S-grading had significantly improved his balance and coordination. He could change directions more fluidly, even at his peak velocity, and brake almost instantaneously.

"Thomas, the ball!" He yelled again. Then, without losing a moment, he altered his running course abruptly, once again, and started heading towards the right flank. With that virtually instantaneous change, he'd managed to lose an opponent that was tracking his run and was soon unmarked and ready to receive the ball.

His off-ball running was simply that lethal to the point that no opponent could easily keep up with him. Moreover, he'd already unconsciously entered a supersensitive state, and everything around him seemed to have slowed down. At that moment, his spatial awareness, boosted by his Zinedine-Pirlo Mental Juju, was extraordinarily out of this world. So, he could assess and react to the situations around him in the shortest time humanly possible. He felt almost invincible.

Zachary had linked up with Thomas Partey both in training and during matches on multiple occasions. For that reason, the young defensive midfielder spotted Zachary's run towards the right-wing in a matter of seconds. And without losing a second, he sent forth a lofted pass into space in front of Zachary, causing the traveling Rosenborg fans in the stands to explode into a wave of cheers.

"Zachary! *Clap*Clap* Zachary..."

Zachary could literally feel the cheers hitting a thunderous crescendo when he jumped up and controlled the ball from Thomas with his chest close to the touchline on the right flank. Needless to say, there were some boos from the opposing fans mixed in with the applause. However, Zachary didn't care in the slightest since his whole attention was on the opponents approaching him at that moment. So, he chested the ball down to the green and immediately turned around to face Standard Liège's goal.

He was in a complete state of calm at that moment.

Ibrahima Cissé, one of Standard Liège's central midfielders, soon came forward to close him down. He was radiating a fierce aura and approaching like a raging bull as if he wanted to beat up someone.

But Zachary was not intimidated. He calmly stepped forward slightly with the ball at his feet while tilting his center of gravity to the right. At that instant, his body was in a state similar to a constricted spring, seemingly as if he was about to set off immediately and explode forward along the touchline on the right flank.

And as expected, the fast-approaching Ibrahima Cissé reacted immediately by mirroring Zachary's movements in the lateral plane. The defender stepped forward like the wind before swooping in with an outstretched boot to tackle the ball off Zachary's feet. His reaction was super-fast, and his movements were well-timed. But it was a pity that there was a miscalculation in his approach.

Whoosh!!

Zachary changed directions almost instantaneously. Before the approaching defender could adapt, he shifted his weight from his right to left and then exploded forth with rocket-like speed. He was soon racing away from the helpless defender, his strides eating up yards of space like there was no tomorrow.

His heart was racing with excitement as he continued sprinting with the ball. He was finally experiencing the benefits of having a high-level body control attribute. He could effectively leave a defender in the dust with just a simple shift in his center of gravity and an almost instantaneous acceleration. The feeling was truly wondrous.

"Zachary! *Clap*Clap* Zachary..."

The cheers of the traveling Rosenborg fans rose to another level as Zachary continued bearing down on Standard Liège's goal like a raging Tsunami. But all that didn't affect him in the slightest. He was in the zone and didn't stop running for anything in the world. At one point, he even somehow shrugged off two simultaneous challenges from a pair of Standard Liège's defenders with a simple weave and turn — and then still emerged with the ball.

His burst speed caught all the opponents unawares as they looked both confused and mesmerized. He was simply as slippery as a snake in the jungle as he raced through the ranks of the defenders. And unbelievably, seconds after leaving the touchline on the right flank, he found himself bearing down on goal. When the angle opened up, he smashed the ball past the helpless keeper into the top of the net and then continued racing to the corner flag like mad.

At that moment, he could hardly contain his excitement.

He'd managed to score Rosenborg's first goal in the 25th minute, and the score was then 1:0. So, he slid on his knees for a good few yards as he approached the corner flag before jumping up to celebrate his goal by repeatedly punching the air.

Chapter 293 - Jaw-Dropping Performance II

The eyes of Olav Brusveen, the TV2 Sporten reporter, were wide open and glittering as he continued following the proceedings on the field of play. He'd once heard that there were occasional days when peak athletes would enter into the zone and put up incredible jaw-dropping performances. And it seemed like Zachary Bemba, Rosenborg's young number-33, was in a similar state during the match

against Standard Liège that Thursday evening. The boy prodigy was simply like a miracle worker on the pitch.

Firstly, he'd made that incredible mazy run from the right flank before dribbling past the entire opposing defense and scoring Rosenborg's first goal in the 25th minute. Then, he'd once again netted a second from a set-piece with his perfect signature curveball from right outside the box five minutes later.

At that juncture, he'd already wowed even the opposing fans with his two goals. With his individual brilliance, he'd become the only difference between the two teams and single-handedly sent Rosenborg into an almost unassailable position before halftime. Moreover, he'd achieved all those incredible feats when his team was still at a disadvantage in terms of ball possession and shots on target.

Olav Brusveen had at that time thought that the Standard Liège coach would do his utmost to contain the monstrous Zachary during the second half. He'd expected the Standard Liège tactics to totally suppress the boy prodigy and prevent him from scoring a hat-trick for Rosenborg during a crucial Europa League match. However, it was an oversight on Olav's part to judge the boy prodigy according to typical footballing standards.

Ten minutes into the second half, Zachary Bemba had managed to connect with a through-pass from Mike Jensen, the Rosenborg midfielder, in the final third. The young footballer had then turned and weaved through the defense like a true blue ball wizard before unleashing a missile from right outside the 18-yard box.

At that moment, Olav had watched with bated breath. He hadn't blinked even once as he followed the ball's trajectory as it soared over the defense before grazing off the post and homing into the back of the net.

With that brilliant effort, the boy prodigy had once again bagged yet another hat-trick of his career. Moreover, it was the second hat-trick in a span of a week as it had only been four days since he'd netted one in the Norwegian Cup finals. The feat was really unprecedented.

Olav Brusveen was still in a state of utter wonderment even when five minutes had already elapsed since Zachary scored Rosenborg's third goal. His brain was already heating up as he tried to formulate a few headlines in his head for the articles he would publish on his blog the following day.

"Maybe," he thought, "I should headline the article as - The Humble Beginnings of the Man who might become the GOAT. That should describe Zachary's present state perfectly."

Olav understood that it was an incredible feat for even great players to bag hat-tricks every once in a while. Any footballer who could score two or three hat-tricks in a season could be regarded as an extraordinary talent. However, Zachary, an 18-year-old young man playing in Norway, had gone ahead and netted back-to-back hat-tricks in just over a span of days. He was simply a monster as far as Olav was concerned.

"We're heading into the 61st minute," the commentator yelled in a deep booming voice at that moment. "Rosenborg is still leading by three goals to nil in this very crucial Group C fixture that could decide who qualifies for this season's Europa League knock-out stage."

"As I speak now," the commentator continued. "Red Bull Salzburg is at the top of the group with 12 points, while Rosenborg is now second with 6 points. On the other hand, Standard Liège, also with six points, has now dropped to the third position due to their inferior goal difference. And lastly, Elfsborg has just dropped to the bottom of the table after having already conceded two goals against Red Bull Salzburg in this evening's other Group C fixture."

"But even what is more interesting is that Zachary Bemba, Rosenborg's 18-year old playmaker, has scored all the three goals for his team during today's match. He has now taken his Europa League tally to five goals, thus joining the ranks of the tournament's top scorers for this season. He's simply an incredible young man."

Olav Brusveen nodded to himself after taking in the words of the commentator. Zachary had missed most of Rosenborg's Europa League matches due to injury. Be that as it may, he still managed to join the ranks of the Europa League top scorers with his five goals in two matches after his recovery. He'd scored two against Red Bull Salzburg, and he'd, against all odds, just added three against Standard Liège in that day's match. Thus, calling him an incredible young man was simply an understatement as far as Olav was concerned.

The match slowly progressed into the late stages of the second half. The Standard Liège players played with conviction and mounted a series of relentless attacks as the game headed into the 85th minute. They were using a perfect blend of short passes, wing play, and crosses into the box to pressure

Rosenborg into submission. Anyone could tell that they were trying their best to score since there was a visible sense of urgency in their style of play.

However, the Rosenborg players still held on and managed to deny the Belgian giants any chance to score even a single goal.

The Rosenborg defenders for that match, especially Eric Bailly and Yerry Mina, were particularly very impressive. They managed to put up incredible performances by making plenty of timely tackles and interceptions in the defensive third. For that reason, Standard Liège only had six shots on target even that late in the game.

FWEEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle and pointed to the corner flag a few seconds later. Michy Batshuayi, one of Standard Liège's center forwards, had just jumped up to meet yet another cross from the wing before planting a header towards the goal. However, Daniel Rønlund, Rosenborg's keeper, had been alert and managed to make an incredible diving save to push the ball out of play. As a result, the referee had just awarded Standard Liège a corner kick in the 87th minute of gameplay.

At that moment, Zachary had already positioned himself right on the centerline as he waited for the opponents to take the corner kick. He was a striker during that match, and his only job was to score when he got an opportunity. So, he didn't need to defend the corner kick.

With Zachary on the centerline were two dutiful bodyguards that'd been shadowing his every move ever since he'd scored Rosenborg's third goal. They had been marking him tightly and hadn't allowed him even an inch of space since then. They were too annoying to the point that they would occasionally pull at his shirt or even step on his calf when the referee wasn't looking. As a result, Zachary hadn't made much of an impact during the late stages of the second half. He was very frustrated due to their continued harassment.

FWEEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle again right after he'd settled the chaos in Rosenborg's box. Paul-José Mpoku, Standard Liège's left-winger, immediately sent a teasing cross towards the area from the corner spot.

At that moment, Zachary couldn't help but hold his breath as he watched the ball descend into the crowded box. He reflexively clenched his fists when he noticed Ronnie Stam, Standard Liège's left-back, jump high to meet the incoming corner ball.

Without losing his composure, the Standard Liège man battled Yerry Mina, Rosenborg's center-back, for aerial superiority before planting a header towards the goal from around the penalty spot.

It was a tense moment for Rosenborg as the ball headed straight towards the top right corner like a bullet right out of a sniper muzzle. Nevertheless, Zachary forced himself to remain calm as he continued watching the ball's trajectory without blinking. And soon, his hardened features morphed into a smile as he noticed the ball swerving and dipping slightly before bouncing off the right post and rebounding back into the pitch.

TENSION!! PRESSURE!!

The Rosenborg box soon descended into a state of chaos as the players of both teams scrambled after the ball. For a few seconds, there was a whole lot of pushing and pulling in the area that pressed a great deal of pressure on Rosenborg's defense.

However, the referee still didn't blow the whistle, even with all the mayhem in the box. He just left the players to their own devices and kept on watching from the side.

Fortunately, Daniel ?rlund, Rosenborg's keeper, came to the rescue after a few seconds of the scuffle. In some magical way, he outmaneuvered the opponents before stepping forward and smashing the ball out of the box with a heavy punch.

"Hurry! Run back and defend!!"

Zachary could hear someone, probably the Standard Liège coach, shouting from the sidelines as the ball flew mid-air, darting towards the centerline on the left flank. However, that didn't stop him from reacting instantaneously and rushing towards the ball.

Zachary went from zero to peak velocity in just over a second and soon left his two bodyguards in the dust. Before anyone else could react, he controlled the ball on the left flank with an outstretched boot before turning around to face Standard Liège's goal.

He was ready to run with the ball and initiate another counterattack against Standard Liège at that moment. But he couldn't help but stop in his tracks the next instant, right after taking a peek at the other side of the pitch.

He'd just noticed that the keeper was way off his line, probably by half dozen or so yards from his goal. So, he decided to change his course of action immediately to make the best of the situation.

"Here goes nothing."

Without losing a moment, he flicked the ball forward with the tip of his boot while taking another glance at the other side of the pitch. And just before his two bodyguards could close him down, he stepped forward and smashed the ball towards Standard Liège's goal from around sixty-something yards.

He could feel his heart racing with both anxiety and anticipation as he raised his head and followed the ball's trajectory over the green. He just wasn't sure whether the ball would make it into the back of the net, especially since the keeper was already sprinting back towards his line.

However, the goddess of luck seemed to be with Rosenborg that evening. Right at the last moment, the keeper tripped and landed backward on his backside before he could make it back to his line. And without any surprise, the ball bounced once right behind him before ricocheting into the back of the net.

Chapter 294 - Match Ending And Interview

"WTF!"

Guy Luzon, the head coach of Standard Liège, could only place his hands at the back of his head after watching Zachary score once again from around sixty-four yards away from the goal.

"How could a player change so much within a short period of a few weeks?" Coach Guy Luzon could not help but wonder as he watched the Rosenborg players celebrating in front of the corner flag.

He'd always been a very meticulous coach. So, he'd researched Rosenborg quite thoroughly before the game that day and knew their strengths and weaknesses like the back of his hand. However, he'd still been caught off guard by Zachary Bemba's improvement as it was simply abnormal as far as he was concerned.

In just a few weeks, Zachary had managed to progress by leaps and bounds and turned into a phenomenal world-class talent. He could still fumble with the ball on a few occasions during previous matches. However, for that day's game against Standard Liège, his physical and tactical ability upfront was simply exceptional. As long as you allowed him an inch of space on the field, the boy prodigy would punish you.

Moreover, he was even more dangerous after switching to the striking position. His control, acceleration, and vision in the final third were extraordinarily out of this world to the point of terrorizing opposing defenses. He could drop from the penalty box to pick up the ball in midfield, switch to the flanks, and attract and disorientate the central defenders with his well-timed runs. Watching him was simply like watching a character out of a video game.

Coach Guy Luzon would have genuinely wanted to sign such a player as long as he was available during the upcoming transfer window. But he could only put a halt to his wishful thinking as he knew that the boy had already caught the eye of some of the top vultures in Europe, especially after that day's match.

The referee finally blew the whistle and brought an end to Standard Liège's misery after five minutes of added time. Rosenborg had managed to defeat the Belgian giants with a score of 4:0. As a result, they had taken their tally to six points and ascended to the second position in Group C.

As long as they could defeat their next opponents, IF Elfsborg, they would have the highest chance of qualifying for the round of thirty-two. That was why the Rosenborg players were extremely excited as they marched out of the Stade Maurice Dufrasne after hearing the final whistle.

Zachary, on his part, felt as if he was walking on clouds as he separated from his teammates and headed towards the referees to receive the match ball. He'd scored four goals during that match and thus helped his team take another crucial step towards qualifying for the next stage of the Europa League. So, he could hardly contain his happiness at that moment.

"Congratulations, young man," the referee said, shaking his hand as he held out the ball to Zachary with his other hand. "The match ball is rightfully yours since you managed to score a hat-trick plus one during today's game."

"Thanks, ref," Zachary replied in a polite tone as he received the ball from the referee. "And thanks again for doing a good job while refereeing today's game."

"You're welcome, young man," the referee said with a hearty chuckle. "You were also incredible today. Please keep on training hard so that we can witness more of your brilliance on the European stage. As long as you do that, the sky is the limit." The referee encouraged, patting Zachary's back.

"Thanks for your guidance, ref," Zachary said with a smile. "I'll take your advice to heart."

Zachary then exchanged a few extra polite words with the referee and his assistants before heading towards the press area for the post-match interview. He grinned from ear to ear when he found his old friend Olav Brusveen, the TV2 Sporten reporter, waiting for him there. The reporter had even traveled all the way to Liège to follow up on Rosenborg's performance. Zachary, of course, had a good feeling towards the passionate man of the press.

"Good evening, Zachary," Olav said with his signature professional smile as soon as he'd stepped before the cameras. "Thanks for hanging around to talk to us. First of all, congratulations! It's your first hat-trick on the European stage, Zachary. How does that feel?"

"I feel terrific, especially since I've just helped my team take another step forward in the Europa League," Zachary replied. "Scoring four goals during today's match is, of course, the icing on the cake."

Olav chuckled. "Zach! I have always regarded you as a pure attacking midfielder. However, today you managed to play strikingly so well upfront during a highly competitive Europa League match. You even made history and scored four goals to help your team crush Standard Liège. So, I need to ask. What's your favorite position? Do you prefer playing midfield or striking?"

"Well," Zachary said, caressing his chin. "I truly enjoy the feeling of playing as the control tower in midfield. That's because I can run at the defense, execute tackles, and even unleash deadly passes behind the backline, thus having a greater impact on the game."

"Oh!" Olav said, creasing his brows. "That's good to know, Zach. Please tell us what your next step is after winning today's game?"

"Of course, I'll continue training and trying my best to refine my skills so that I can put up much more dazzling performances in the upcoming games. Moreover, we'll face off against IF Elfsborg in our last group game scheduled for December 12th. That's just about two weeks from now. So, I can't relax in the slightest. I have to continue working hard so that I can put up a good performance during that game."

"So, can we expect another hat-trick from you during the match against Elfsborg?" Olav queried, creasing his brows.

"Do you think that scoring a hat-trick is as simple as eating?" Zachary replied with a chuckle. "Anyways, I can't promise that I'll score. But what you can expect is another good performance from Rosenborg. The whole team is brimming with boundless confidence at the moment. So, I'm hopeful that we'll be able to crush Elfsborg come December 12th. So, if you're a Rosenborg fan, you need to come and support us at Lerkendal on that day."

"Thanks again, Zachary, for staying back and talking to us," Olav said in a conclusive tone. "We wish you all the best as you prepare for the game against Elfsborg. Let's hope we'll see another commanding performance from Rosenborg on that day. Have a good night."

"Thank you too, Olav," Zachary said. "And good night to you too." He added before stepping away from the press area and heading towards the tunnel entrance. He was eager to join the rest of his teammates in the dressing room and continue the match victory celebrations. However, just as he was about to step into the tunnel, two Standard Liège players approached him.

"That was some incredible stuff from you, Zachary," Paul-José Mpoku, Standard Liège's attacking midfielder, said with a smile. He was pretty much friendly as he approached, probably because he was also from DR Congo like Zachary.

"You really disciplined us during the game," Michy Batshuayi, the other player who was also from Congo, chimed in. "Four goals in a single match! You're simply a monster."

Zachary laughed at that as he bumped fists with the two players. "It's great to see you here," he said. "How're you guys doing?"

"We're doing fine," Paul -José Mpoku was quick to reply. "Our bosses at Standard Liège treat us quite well. Maybe, you should transfer and join us here in Liège. I'm sure that we would accomplish a lot of things."

"No, thank you," Zachary replied, shaking his head. "I'll only join one of the big leagues in Europe after leaving Rosenborg. Or maybe, you guys could join me at Rosenborg. We could become good partners there and achieve greater things together."

"You're really humorous, Zachary," Michy Batshuayi said, shaking his head. "Jokes aside, we wanted to ask you whether you'll be representing DR Congo in the near future? Do you plan to play for our home nation, or will you join another country at a later stage?"

Zachary couldn't help but crease his brows on hearing the question. "I haven't decided on whether to represent our home country as of yet. But I should be able to make a decision concerning the issue within the next six months."

"Is that so!?" Mitchy said, nodding. "If you do happen to make a decision soon, please inform us. I will immediately commit myself to the DR Congo national team if you happen to decide to represent the country."

"Oh!" Zachary's heart skipped a beat as his eyes widened in surprise. "Why would you make such a big decision based on my choice? Why can't you follow your heart?"

Mitchy smiled while shaking his head. "Most of us Congolese refuse to represent our country because there's simply no foreseeable hope for our national football team to achieve any accolades internationally. But, if a player as talented as yourself were to join the national team, then that hope could be rekindled. As a result, your presence on the team would even sway many football stars with Congolese heritage worldwide and even attract them back to their roots. Then, there would be hope for

us to build an exceptional squad that could even compete against the best teams in Africa and the world at large. Do you get my reasoning, Zachary?"

"Yes, I do," Zachary replied, nodding. "But I still won't make my decision regarding the issue as of yet. Please understand that this is a matter that I need to consider carefully. But if I happen to decide soon, I'll notify you immediately."

"That's good, then," Mitchy said. "We'll be looking forward to your decision. Thank you for your time, and have a good night."

"Goodnight to you, too!" Zachary replied.

Chapter 295 - Birthday And New Prospects

Tuesday, December 3, 2013.

Zachary woke up early as usual and headed out for his early morning run. The weather was cold enough to make his atoms shiver, yet he ran at a constant rhythm as his measured strides ate up yards of the frozen sidewalk.

It had been five days since Rosenborg had crashed Standard Liege in the Europa League group game. However, all the sports headlines in Norway were still about him since he'd managed to score four goals in that game. His phenomenal performance during that match had even pushed him to the top of trending topics on most of the social media platforms in Norway.

Moreover, an article by Olav Brusveen, a famous TV2 Sporten sports journalist in Norway, had even described him as one of the young talents with the potential to become the G.O.A.T in the future. As a result, his fame, both in Norway and entire Europe, had exploded due to the added media attention.

On top of that, more teams in Europe continued approaching Emily, his agent, to inquire about his availability during the upcoming transfer window. Some clubs like Tottenham and Red Bull Leipzig had even hinted about triggering his release clause as long as he nodded to their offers. They were clearly willing to offer him over-the-top lucrative personal terms if he could transfer out of Rosenborg during the January transfer window.

Be that as it may, Zachary still stuck to his plan of staying in Rosenborg until the following year. He remained silent about his future and left all the negotiations and dealings with the interested clubs to Emily, his agent.

As a player living his second life, he understood his priorities. Thus, he'd only focused on training and ignored all the other happenings around him for the past five days.

He was well aware that he could only attract the most lucrative deals from top clubs in Europe by putting up more consistent and phenomenal displays during important matches. As long as he could play like Ronaldinho, Zidane, or Messi, club offers would find him at his doorstep even if he wasn't searching for them.

That was a simple truth.

Zachary ran with conviction and purpose as he winded corner after corner in the early morning darkness. His breathing got more labored as beads of sweat continued flooding his undershirt with every passing minute. However, he persisted with his iron will until he completed his early morning six-kilometer run thirty minutes later.

He then returned to his apartment and stretched a bit before taking a hot shower to lighten the burden on his muscles. After that, he settled on one of the sofas in his living room and started feasting on his breakfast.

Eating was a way to nurture himself, to show his body that it was worth the effort of good nutrition. So, he was in an unusual state of concentration as he gorged himself with food while listening to some soft rock music in the background.

To achieve more from his training, he'd recently started following a strict diet recommended by a sports nutritionist. For instance, his breakfast that day included one large bowl of cereal with milk, two slices of

white toast with jam, 300ml of fresh orange juice, and lots of fresh fruit. It was a well-balanced breakfast that included all the nutrients that could support the energy demands of a professional athlete during the day. As a result, he was confident to do his best in the team training sessions after following such a diet.

"Bzzt Bzzzt! Bzzt Bzzzt!"

His phone started vibrating like an angry rattlesnake right after he'd finished feasting on his breakfast. He couldn't help but smile after picking it up from a nearby table and glancing at the screen.

"Good morning, Camilla," he spoke into the phone after placing it next to his ear. "How's your morning?"

"My morning is fine, dear," she replied, her voice filled with a vibrancy colored by her exotic accent. "Ta?da! I just called to wish you a happy birthday! I am sending you an ocean of love. I really do hope that your birthday is as cool as you are. Enjoy the day, and put your happy face on."

"Oh, thank you for the birthday wishes," he replied, a bit surprised. For the past five days, he'd been living like a hermit. He'd only focused on his training, day in, day out, and ignored everything else. As a result, he'd pushed his birthday out of his mind. So, he was a bit startled when Camilla mentioned it.

Unknowingly, he'd already spent close to a year as part of Rosenberg's senior team. He'd already achieved so much as a footballer even though he'd just made nineteen years in his second life. He couldn't help but feel like his life was like a dream out of the best of fantasies.

"So, what are your plans?" Camilla continued, her voice laced with a tinge of excitement. "Party, or should I take you out, just the two of us, to celebrate? You decide!"

"I won't be making any parties just for a birthday," Zachary was quick to reply. "About going out, let's see if we can get time later."

"Oh!" Camilla said from the other end of the line, seeming disappointed. "Okay, then. But don't forget. You only get a single day in a year to celebrate your birthday. So, you better cherish it."

"I do get your point, Camilla. Thank you!" Zachary replied and immediately decided to change the topic. "Are you still in Oslo?"

"Nope! I just returned to Trondheim today morning. I'm even still at the airport at the moment."

"Oh! You're quite early," Zachary said, a bit surprised. He couldn't help but steal a glance at the wall clock on the opposite wall. It was just coming to seven o'clock in the morning. So, Camilla should have woken up before 4:00 AM to catch the flight from Oslo to Trondheim that morning.

"I had to be early," Camilla said from the other end of the line. "Remember, we have that Audi photo shoot with you today. So, I've to be in Trondheim to make sure that everything is in order before the photo session."

"Oh, the photo shoot!" Zachary said, nodding. "It's late in the afternoon. Right?"

"Yes! The session is scheduled for 4:00 PM today evening. Please try to arrive by 3:30 PM so that we can start on time and finish early. You can contact your agent for more specifics."

"Okay. I'll contact my agent right away. Let me say goodbye for now. Talk to you later."

"Talk to you later! Have a good day, my dear!"

"Good day to you, too!" Zachary responded before hanging up the phone. Without further ado, he decided to call Emily right away to find out the specifics of the photo session with Audi that day.

"Zachary, I was just about to call you," Emily said immediately after picking up the phone. "Cheers to you for another trip around the sun! Happy birthday to you!"

"Thanks for the birthday wishes, Emily! How's everything on your side?"

"All is fine, and I'm having a wonderful morning," Emily replied. "I guess you should be calling me about the details of the Audi photo session. Right?"

"Yes," Zachary responded.

"Then, I have all the details with me here. The session will be at 4:00 PM today afternoon. Audi Norway has promised to pay you an additional 100,000 NOK as a sort of per diem for the session. Additionally, you will get a chance to pick a new ride from the latest stock of the new Audi car models."

"Great," Zachary said, his heartbeat speeding up. Of course, he was delighted by the prospect of owning a brand new car in the Audi series. "Then, let's meet up at Lerkendal so that we can head to the Audi showroom together."

"That's okay," Emily replied. "One more thing! Audi has also sent over a revised contract extension. They've promised to raise your annual income from 7.5 to 11 million Norwegian Kroners per year if you extend your contract with them from three to five years. As long as you agree, the contract will come into effect starting January 2014."

"11 million Kroner!"

Zachary was quite startled. Eleven million Norwegian Kroner was just over one million Euros. The amount was enough to push him onto the list of the highest-paid athletes in Norway. So, he was surprised that Audi was willing to offer him such terms in his second year as their ambassador in Norway.

"Don't be surprised," Emily said, seemingly reading his mind. "You deserve such an offer based on the way you have been playing over the past few weeks. The professionals of companies like Audi should be able to discern that you'll be quite a valuable player in the near future. So, that's why they're rushing to secure your signature before their competitors can make any offers to you."

Zachary nodded. "By the way, how are the negotiations with those companies that were interested in my services? Is there any progress yet?"

"That's the other issue I wanted to discuss with you. I have already held a couple of meetings with the representatives of Nike, EA Sports, and Pepsi, and all I can say is that everything is going well. All three companies are willing to offer you endorsement deals if you continue putting up phenomenal

performances, especially in the Europa League. However, I can't give you any specifics since we're still ironing out the details."

"That's great," Zachary said. "As long as there's progress, then all is fine. I have to go now since I have to prep for today's training. So, talk to you later, I guess."

"Just one more thing," Emily quickly interjected before Zachary could hang up. "The investment consultant friend of mine communicated that she has made plans to come to Norway next week. So, if you're interested in meeting her then, I can go ahead and confirm an appointment with her."

"Just go ahead and confirm the appointment," Zachary replied immediately. "If possible, we can meet on Monday afternoon next week. Has she compiled the list of companies that I could invest in yet?"

"That, I don't know," Emily said from the other end of the line. "But, don't worry. She's very good at her work. She'll be able to compile the list and all the associated statistics within a few days after you finish negotiating a working contract with her."

"Then, that's okay," Zachary said. "I'm looking forward to meeting her next Monday. Otherwise, I've got to go now as it's getting late. I have to prep for training."

"Okay, okay," Emily said. "Have a good day."

"Have a good day, too," Zachary replied before hanging up.

Chapter 296 - The Intentions Of The Club Management

Zachary didn't dare dilly dally after ending his call with Emily. He dressed up quickly and then headed to Lerkendal to attend Rosenborg's official team training for that day.

He was among the first players to arrive at the training ground. So, he spent some time stretching and going through some agilities alone as he waited for his teammates to arrive at the stadium.

As it was already December, the weather was quite cold in Trondheim. The morning air was like frozen lace on Zachary's skin, delicate and chilling, like winter waves on shallow sand. Moreover, the sky above was a dull grey, with the occasional watery light illuminating thin patches to brilliance.

Be that as it may, Zachary continued training with a hundred percent focus even in such extreme weather. He went through various cone drills without a break and only stopped when his teammates and coaches started arriving a few minutes later. By then, his jersey was already dripping with sweat, depicting how hard he'd been working for the previous few minutes.

Since he had already elevated his body-control attribute to the S- grading, improving his agility to the next level as soon as possible was the priority. Thus, he'd recently started to focus on drills tailored to improving just his agility attribute.

Zachary understood that he could only learn the Robinho step-over juju after elevating his agility to the next level. So, he'd been extra hardworking even outside of official team training for the past five days. He didn't let all the fame he'd just gained disrupt his focus — but continued honing his skills day in, day out, like an exercising maniac.

He just wanted to reach the skill levels of players like the young Ronaldo and the young Messi before he made twenty years of age. Only then would he have the qualifications to make it on the list of the greatest players of the current generation.

"Zachary!" A loud yell sounded from the sidelines just as he was about to end his post-exercising stretching routine. He turned around and then noticed Rolf Aas, the assistant coach in charge of fitness, calling out to him. "Could you please come here for a moment?" The assistant coach added.

Zachary didn't dare dilly dally. He immediately put a full stop to his stretching routine, then chugged down some water before rushing towards the fitness coach on the sidelines.

"Good morning, Zachary," the assistant coach said when Zachary stepped in front of him.

"Good morning to you too, coach," Zachary replied, smiling. "How're you?"

"I'm good," Rolf Aas, the assistant coach, said, nodding. "The head coach would like to see you before the start of today's training. You can find him in his office."

"Okay," Zachary said, a bit surprised. "I'll head over to his office right away. Thanks for informing me."

"Better hurry since we're about to start the dynamic fitness session," the assistant coach added. "Off you go."

"Okay, okay. I'll be back as soon as possible. See you in a bit."

When Zachary arrived at Coach Johansen's office, he found him hunched over his desk, looking over a few game tactical charts. Most seemed to be for previous games, while a few depicted the tactics for Rosenborg's upcoming Europa League match against IF Elfsborg. Potential formations and player movements could be seen on the cards lying around the table. By just looking at the game cards, Zachary could tell that the coach was trying his best to design an appropriate game strategy for that game.

"Have a seat, Zachary," the coach said, looking up from his desk after a short while. "How're you?"

"I'm okay, coach," Zachary replied before making himself comfortable on one of the comfy chairs beside the coach's L-shaped office desk. "How's your morning, coach?"

"My morning is fine, Zachary," the coach said with a smile. "I can see that you're already sweating! I'm glad that you're still putting in a lot of effort to improve yourself. Keep it up. As long as you focus and continue training as before, the sky will be your limit."

"Thanks, coach, for your advice," Zachary responded, nodding. "I'll keep on doing my best during training and, of course, during official matches."

"That puts my heart at ease," the coach said, leaning back in his seat. "I called you in here today to discuss your future. For better organization, I would like to know your plans. Are you still with us here at Rosenborg, or would you like to transfer to a bigger league?"

"Oh!" Zachary said, a bit startled. "Why're you asking me this now, coach? Of course, I'm still a member of the Rosenborg squad. I won't make any decisions about my future until, at least, mid-next year."

"Then, I'm glad," Coach Johansen said, grinning. "A few teams, including Red Bull Leipzig and Tottenham, have already contacted management with the intent to trigger your release clause. So, I was starting to get worried that you might be planning on transferring out of the team."

"You don't have to worry about that, coach," Zachary said in a poised tone. "I'm still a member of Rosenborg in and out. Moreover, how can I run away from the team when we still have to contest in the Europa League? That would be irresponsible of me."

"Great," Coach Johansen said, his grin becoming more pronounced. "But if you ever decide to transfer out of Rosenborg, please try to give me at least a month's notice. Okay?"

"If I ever come to such a decision, you'll be among the first to know. So, don't worry, coach."

"Good," the coach said, nodding. "I also wanted to talk to you about your role in the team's new formation before announcing it to the rest of the squad. You really performed beyond all expectations in our match against Standard Liège. So, I plan on playing you in a forward position in the upcoming match against IF Elfsborg."

"I understand that you prefer playing in midfield as opposed to striking," the coach continued while locking eyes with Zachary. "However, to qualify for the later stages of the Europa League, we've got to keep on scoring many goals. And, that's where you come in, Zachary. With your skills, you'll be able to keep opposing defenders on tenterhooks, thus giving the rest of the team breathing space to play better football. That's the only way we can keep on winning and advance further in the Europa League. Do you get my point, Zachary?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, nodding. "As long as I can increase the chances of my team winning, then I'm okay with playing in a forward position for a short while. But, I still prefer to play behind the main striker rather than playing at the forefront of the formation."

"You don't have to worry about that, Zachary," Coach Johansen said, placing one of the tactical charts before Zachary. "You'll be playing as both an advanced playmaker and a false number-10 in our upcoming game against IF Elfsborg." He paused as he pointed to the position on the tactical chart.

"In such an advanced forward position, you'll serve as the offensive pivot of the team with your superior technical abilities. You can choose to unleash defense-splitting passes like usual or score when an angle opens up in such a position. Additionally, you'll have to occasionally drift wide when in possession of the ball to help the wingers and fullbacks overload the flanks. So, in essence, you'll still be playing as a midfielder but in a more advanced forward position. Are we together, Zachary?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary said, nodding. "I've no problem playing such a role on the team."

"Great," Coach Johansen said with a smile. "We'll refine the new tactics, including your new position, starting today. So, be prepared. You can head back for training for now."

"Thanks, coach," Zachary said, getting up from his chair. "I'm always ready to do my best when it concerns football. So, you don't have to worry about me."

Coach Johansen couldn't help but sigh when he watched Zachary's back as he stepped out of his office. He'd called the boy prodigy to gauge whether he was still committed to staying with Rosenborg. That was because several teams had constantly been inquiring about his availability during the upcoming transfer window over the past few days.

It was like Zachary had attracted all the vultures around Europe when he put up that phenomenal performance and scored four goals against Standard Liège. As a result, the Rosenborg management was starting to get tempted to sell him off to the highest bidder since the money involved was quite a lot. Only the club chairman and himself, as the head coach, were still in favor of keeping him at Rosenborg, at least, until the end of the upcoming season.

"Bzzt Bzzzt! Bzzt Bzzzt!"

The sound of the phone vibrating on the table soon broke Coach Johansen out of his reverie. Without any further ado, he picked it up, then glanced at the screen before accepting the call and placing it next to his ear.

"Good morning, Mr. Chairman," he spoke into the phone in a polite tone. "I was just about to call you."

"Good morning to you too, coach," Mr. Ivar Koteng, the Rosenborg club chairman, replied from the other end of the line. "So, did you manage to talk to him? What is your take on his commitment to Rosenborg?"

"He is still with us in both heart and mind," Coach Johansen replied immediately. "He assured me that he hasn't thought about making any decisions to transfer out of Rosenborg, at least until mid-next year. So, I really think that we don't have to rush off selling him to the highest bidder."

"Oh, okay, then," the chairman said. "If he's still committed to playing for us, then we can throw away all those offers made by those teams. But, try to keep him comfortable in the team for the moment. Okay?"

"Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'll do my best."

"Good," the chairman said. "I have to go now. And, please keep up the good work. I'm really looking forward to Rosenborg qualifying for the knock-out stages of the Europa League."

"Don't worry, Mr. Chairman. I'll do my best to prepare the team for the last Europa League group game. We really do have a high chance of winning."

"Okay, then," the chairman said in a conclusive tone. "I have to go now. So, have a good day." He added before hanging up.

In the afternoon, Zachary attended the Audi photo session as planned. He just posed in front of some of the newest Audi Models the entire time and let the photographers do the rest of the work. After that,

Zachary received his 100,000 NOK cheque from the Audi finance Department and an additional promise of selecting a car from the newest stock as remuneration for his services. So, he was in a good mood when he departed from the Audi showroom later that evening.

He then went out with Camilla to celebrate his birthday. Together, they feasted on a sumptuous Nordic dinner at the Clarion Hotel in Trondheim while listening to the catchy tunes in the background. They only ended their celebrations at around eleven in the night before heading back home for the night.

Chapter 297 - Setting A Foundation For Investments

Zachary met the investment consultant recommended by Emily the following Monday afternoon at the Scandic Lerkendal Hotel's restaurant. She was a very graceful and charming lady, not so beautiful like Camilla, but with the sort of soft facial features that could elicit tender feelings in any male specimen. She was dressed in a dark blue suit that brought out the color of her eyes peeking from behind a pair of stylish spectacles. At first sight, she was the picture of a delicate yet true-blue successful businesswoman in every sense.

"So, first things first," Emily said as soon as they'd settled down in seats opposite hers on a corner table in the Scandic Lerkendal Hotel's restaurant. "Let's start with introductions. I guess I don't need to introduce myself as both of you are well-acquainted with me. So, let's start with ladies, first." She added, fixing her gaze on the lady across the table.

The lady smiled and reached out with her hand towards Zachary for a handshake. "Hello, Zachary," she said. "I'm Heather Miller, an investment consultant based in London UK. Nice to finally meet you, Zachary! I've heard a lot about you, and I'm really looking forward to working with you."

"Nice to meet you, too, Miss Miller," Zachary replied, taking her hand for a firm handshake. "I'm Zachary Bemba, and I'm a pro footballer, playing for Rosenborg here in Trondheim."

Miss Miller chuckled. "No need to be so formal, Zachary. I think that I'm not much older than you. So, calling me Heather instead of Miss Miller is quite fine."

"Okay, Heather," Zachary replied, grinning. "I guess I'll call you Heather from now on."

"So, Heather!" Emily chipped in with a smile. "Zachary is a good client of mine. He has plans to invest in stocks at an international level. So, that's why we contacted you."

"Oh, okay," Miller Heather nodded, leaning back in her seat and inclining her face to lock eyes with Zachary. "Emily should have already told you that I'm the person-to-go-to if you need any advice concerning international business matters. Be it buying and selling stocks, international business registration and entity setup, and even real estate across Europe — I'm an expert. So, as long as we can agree on a few terms, then I'll be able to guide you when you're investing in stocks or any other businesses on an international level."

"That's what I'm hoping for," Zachary said, planting his elbows on the table. "Basically, I need a list of companies where I can invest by buying shares. I need companies that show promise and are based mainly in Europe, North America, and Asia. As you can guess, my main aim for seeking your services is to reduce the risk involved when trading stocks. So, are you able to compile for me such a list as soon as possible?"

"That's quite a simple matter," Heather replied in a poised tone. "However, as a professional, I would advise you to avoid investing in stocks if you're looking for low-risk investments. Instead, you could try investing in real estate or acquiring corporate bonds. You won't lose money as long as you take some degree of care. However, trading in stocks is like gambling to some extent. So, you'll face varying degrees of risk depending on the nature of investments you wish to make."

"I still want to try investing in stocks," Zachary said, leaning back in his seat. Of course, he understood that some risks were always involved in any stock-related investments. However, he was confident that he could avoid most of the pitfalls involved with his knowledge from the future."

"As long as you understand that there's some risk involved, then all is okay," Heather replied with a smile. "How much do you wish to invest at the moment?"

"Around 700,000 Euros for a start."

"Oh, that's quite a sizeable amount." Heather nodded as a smile outlined her facial features. "It would be my pleasure to aid you as you begin your journey of buying and selling stocks. But, first things first, we need to agree on my consultancy fees before we move on to the actual business."

Zachary nodded. "That's okay. So, how much do you charge for your services?"

"First, let me explain the nature of my work so that you can understand the associated costs later on," Heather said, fishing out a document from her handbag beside her. "You've got to understand that we'll have to work together for more than a year if your target is to invest in stocks in the long term."

"We'll start by opening a brokerage account, which is the key to buying and selling securities, like stocks, mutual funds, and exchange-traded funds for any investor. After that, we have to spend days assessing the stock market so that we can compile a list of companies where to invest your money at relatively low risk."

"If you do decide to invest, then we'll have to track your investment from day one," Heather continued. "That way, we can gain a steady flow of information about your investment and be able to make decisions quickly in case of unexpected situations."

"You've got to know that we need a steady inflow of information about the companies you've invested in so that we can keep your money safe. For instance, if a company you invested in is close to going bankrupt, we can react beforehand and save a fraction of your money. On the other hand, if there is an unexpected monumental increase in the price of shares you previously bought, we can decide to sell immediately, depending on the available information."

"So, as you can see, I'll have to put in quite a lot of hours to aid you when you begin investing in stocks. And that's why I'll have to charge you a flat annual fee of 55,000 Euros only. This price includes all the fees for my services, including my travel allowances and hotel fees."

"Oh!" Zachary said, inclining his head to glance at Emily, his agent seated beside him. "What do you think?"

"The price is quite okay since it's an annual fee," Emily responded with a smile. "But since we're going to be long-term partners, then she can deduct for us at least 5,000 Euros from the fee. What say you, Heather?"

"5,000 Euros!" Heather mumbled in response, creasing her brows. "I'll be making quite a loss if I deduct 5,000 Euros from the total cost. Let's do it like this. I will deduct 3,000 Euros. So, you only have to pay

me 52,000 Euros per year. That's the least I can go. If you can't afford that, then I'm sorry. I won't be able to work for you at a cost lower than that."

"Okay, then," Emily said, her face blossoming into a smile. "52,000 Euros is quite a good fee, I guess."

"Then, 52,000 Euros it is," Zachary chimed in, grinning and reaching out with his hand towards the investment consultant from across the table. "Let's have a pleasant time working together."

"Let's have a pleasant cooperation," Heather replied, taking his hand. "I'll draft the contract of our work agreement and have it ready for your perusal by tomorrow."

"That's okay," Zachary said, nodding. "You can consult with Emily while drafting the contract. She usually handles most of my legal matters."

"Fair enough!" Heather nodded. "I'll do that. Now, let's talk about the actual business. Do you have any companies in mind that you wish to invest in?"

"Well," Zachary said, caressing his chin. "I'm new to the world of stock investments. But I still do have a company in mind. I think it's called Tesla Inc. and specializes in manufacturing electric vehicles plus their accessories. This company will most likely make it big in the future since the world trend is slowly tilting towards using cleaner energy over fossil fuels. So, I really wish to buy a good number of Tesla shares as soon as possible."

"Tesla is already a big company!" Heather laughed. "Their price per share is already around 35 to 42 US Dollars."

"Don't mind that," Zachary said confidently. "Just go ahead and try to help me purchase a good number of shares from Tesla. I'm willing to invest 500,000 Euros in just Tesla for the start since I'm sure that the company will be quite successful in the future."

"You're that confident? Don't you even want me to do a financial analysis on this potential investment?"

"There's no need as I've already decided on this. Just focus on helping me acquire the shares at the best price possible."

Zachary, of course, was certain that the price per share of Tesla Inc. would at one time even hit a year high of more than 1,000 US Dollars in the future. That was more than twenty-five times the current share price of around 35 - 42 US Dollars.

So, Zachary would stand to gain more than 12 Million Euros about seven years from then if he could invest 500,000 Euros at that moment. Thus, there was no reason for him to hesitate when buying Tesla Inc. shares.

"Okay, then," Heather replied, letting out a breath. "I'll move quickly to help you purchase the Tesla shares after setting up a brokerage account for you."

"That's good," Zachary said, nodding. "I also need you to compile a list of companies worldwide that I can invest in at relatively low risk. Aside from Tesla Inc., you'll, of course, have to conduct rigorous financial analyses before I can invest in any of the other companies."

"That's okay with me," Heather replied. "I'll be able to compile a list of suitable companies and their associated financial data within two weeks."

"That's good then," Zachary said, stealing a peek at his watch. "I'm sorry. But, I have to attend a training session with my fitness instructor in about thirty minutes. So, I really have to go now. But you can iron out all the details of the contract with Emily."

"It's okay," Heather replied with a smile. "You can go for your training without any worries. I'll start drafting the contract right away. And, of course, I'll be sure to seek Emily's input throughout the entire process. Isn't that right, Emily?"

"Yes, that's okay," Emily chimed in. "You can go for your training without worry, Zachary. I'll handle everything here in the meantime."

"Okay, great," Zachary said, standing up from his seat and extending his hand towards the investment consultant. "It was nice meeting you, Heather."

"It was nice meeting you, too, Zachary," she replied, taking the hand for a handshake. "Thank you for hiring me. I promise that you won't regret hiring me as your investment consultant."

"Then, that puts my heart at ease. You can discuss everything else with Emily as I have to go now. And thanks for your time."

"You're welcome."

Chapter 298 - Against IF Elfsborg I

Thursday, December 12, 2013.

The dark curtain of the night had already enveloped Trondheim City, bringing with it a frostiness that was typical of the famed Nordic winters. It was the sort of cold weather that would freeze the blood of those who didn't take sufficient care to be warm in heart and core.

Yet on such an evening, there was a hubbub of activity going on at Lerkendal Stadion, the home ground of Rosenborg Ballklub. That was because it was the day when the Troll Kids would face off against IF Elfsborg, the team from Sweden, in the highly-anticipated Europa League Group C's game.

The excitement was high in the air as the local fans, dressed in Rosenborg's traditional black and white colors, kept on flooding into the stadium. Among them were Kristin and Emily, who arrived at the stadium gates a few minutes to six with more than an hour to spare before kick-off.

However, the two of them were quite surprised to find out that the overly-enthusiastic Rosenborg fans had already taken up almost each and every available seat in the stands. Most were even already singing Rosenborg's popular chants at the top of their voices as they waited for the kick-off time. A few others had even lit firecrackers and were already waving them high up in the air.

Their zeal when supporting their club was beyond compare as far as Kristin was concerned. Yet, it was such fanfare that made Kristin fall in love with the game of football from a very young age. She'd always loved the passion and the intensity in the entire stadium when her team was on the pitch. And that's why she always felt most relaxed whenever she watched a match live at Lerkendal Stadium.

"This is crazy," Emily commented from beside her as they took their seats in the middle section of the stands. "The levels of excitement here today are off the charts. It's as if Rosenborg is playing a final instead of a Europa League group game!"

"No need to be surprised," Kristin replied, looking around. "This match is obviously like a final to us Rosenborg supporters since Europa League football is at stake. So, that's why the Rosenborg die-hard fans have gone the extra mile to support the team."

"I do hope Rosenborg comes out on top at the end of the night," Emily said with a sigh. "Otherwise, all these fans will have to go back home disappointed."

"Let's hope so," Kristin said, her tone pensive. "Otherwise, we would have to say goodbye to this season's Europa League football if it so happens that we lose."

Kristin was well aware that her team, Rosenborg, was in a sort of precarious situation. With six points from four matches, they were only second on the table in Group C at the moment. However, they were still tied with the third-placed Standard Liège, based on points. They were just barely ahead due to their superior goal difference.

Thus, if Standard Liège won against Red Bull Salzburg and then Rosenborg lost or drew against IF Elfsborg, everything would be over for the Norwegian giants. They would immediately drop to the third position and fail to qualify for the knock-out stage of the Europa League. So, they'd to win by hook or by crook in order to cement their position as second in the highly competitive Group C. For that was the only way they would keep their Europa League dreams alive.

Zachary could feel the tensions running high when he stepped onto the pitch with his teammates for the pre-match dynamic warm-up. He was once again surprised by the zeal of the Rosenborg fans when

supporting their team at home. But above all, he greatly appreciated them since the team needed their cheers if they were to outmaneuver IF Elfsborg and then qualify for the next stage of the Europa League.

"Line up quickly so that we can start the dynamic warm-up," Rolf Aas, the assistant coach in charge of fitness, shouted abruptly. "We don't have much time as kick-off is at exactly 7:00 PM."

The players lined up immediately on hearing the yell from the assistant coach. Without further ado, they started the dynamic warm-up under the close supervision of the fitness coach.

They began with a light jog before diving into upper body stretches a few minutes later. They didn't just go through the motions — but went through an arduous routine involving neck stretches, arm circles, and plenty of body twists while moving through a set-up of cones.

After a few more minutes, they switched to the lower body stretches. While jogging, they went through several exercises, including high knee raises, lunges, quad stretches, and calf stretches, among others. By the end of the session, most were already sweating slightly, indicating how hard they'd been working.

However, they didn't dare rest on the pitch after the warm-up session since they only had about thirty minutes to kick-off. So, they didn't even waste a minute before returning to the dressing room to dress up and listen to the coach's address.

"Can I have your attention, guys," Coach Johansen said immediately after the Rosenborg players had finished dressing up. "Hurry up and settle down. We only have a few minutes to the start of the game."

All the Rosenborg players immediately settled down on the benches around the dressing before fixing their sights on the coach. In a matter of seconds, they turned from a rowdy group of men into a group of attentive athletes, waiting for their coach's pre-match address.

"We'll be playing against IF Elfsborg in a few minutes," the coach began in a somber tone after all the players had quietened down. "This is both our last game in our Europa League group stage and also our last game of the year. After today, we'll all be going on vacation, at least until February, when the Europa League resumes. So, you don't have to pace yourself or play conservatively in today's game."

"Just let loose and play your best football today. Play as if today is a final — as if the Europa League trophy is close at hand. That's the only way to outclass our opponents and safely qualify for the next round. Are we together, guys?" The coach ended his little speech with a below.

"Yes, coach," all the players replied with zest, with some of them even raising their fists into the air. Anyone could tell that their energy levels were off the charts as they sat there in the dressing room. They were clearly looking forwards to thrashing IF Elfsborg in a few minutes.

"I'm glad that we're on the same page," Coach Johansen said, nodding. "Let's go through the tactics one more time before we head into the pitch for the game." He added, stepping towards the whiteboard arranged on a stand in front of the dressing room.

"We'll play with a 4-4-1-1 formation for this game," the coach said while inscribing the player arrangement on the whiteboard. "That means that we'll assemble four defenders, four midfielders, one supporting attacking player, and one primary striker on the field today."

"For the defensive and midfield positions, everything should be straightforward by now. The defenders and midfielders only need to pass the ball around creatively before feeding the strikers. As long as you maintain a constant supply of balls to the strikers and defend well, then everything will be okay. We might even be up by a goal or two before halftime. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

"Good," Coach Johansen said, nodding. "What I would like to emphasize before the game-start is the positioning of the two forward attacking players. As you can see, our central striker is Nicki Nielsen, as usual. But right behind him, we have Zachary as a false number-10." He added, pointing to the position on the board.

"Zachary will act as the offensive pivot of the whole team in our formation," the coach continued. "The midfielders will always have to take note of Zachary's position on the pitch. As long as he's unmarked, you can feed Zachary the ball. Then, it will be up to you, Zachary, to choose whether to run at the defenders or pass the ball."

"Are we together, Zachary?" The coach queried as he fixed his gaze on him.

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied confidently.

"Great," Coach Johansen said with a smile. "However, don't get used to passing when in an advanced position. When an angle opens up, just shoot and try your luck at the goal. You never know. You might be able to score. Okay?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, nodding.

The coach nodded. "Moving on," the coach said, turning to one side of the dressing room. "Mike and Thomas, you'll act as our central midfielders in today's game. Try to close down the opposing midfielders as soon as possible whenever we lose possession. Stay on your toes and make it hard for the opponents to pass the ball around. If you do that, we'll surely dictate this game's tempo. Are we together, Mike and Thomas?"

"Yes, coach."

Coach Johansen nodded. "I also expect you to do your best to supply quick balls to Zachary, Nicki, and our two wingers. Don't dilly-dally on the ball, but play simple football. When a player is open, feed him the ball. If you do that, I can promise you guys that we'll outperform IF Elfsborg from the very first minute until the final whistle. Okay?"

"Yes, coach."

"Okay, guys," Coach Johansen said. "I won't say anymore since we've been going over the game plan for the past twelve days. I believe that all the field players know their roles on the pitch in today's game by now. As long as you follow the game plan and give your all, then we'll be victorious at the end of the night. So, if there are no questions, let's prepare and move out. Are there any questions?" The coach queried, glancing around.

However, none of the players, including Zachary, raised their hands. They had all committed the game plan to mind and were only waiting to march onto the pitch.

"Okay, okay," Coach Johansen said, grinning. "It seems you're all ready and impatient to move out for the game. So, let's move out and play like the Norwegian giants we are. Let's show the IF Elfsborg

players how it's done here in Trondheim. Let's destroy them and send them back to Sweden packing!" The coach bellowed.

"Destroy them! Destroy them! Destroy them! For we're Rosenborg, the champions of Norway..." The players yelled back in response and soon started chanting Rosenborg's name at the top of their voices. They were more than ready to destroy IF Elfsborg in the last Europa League Group C game.

Chapter 299 - Against IF Elfsborg II

The referee blew the whistle at exactly 7:00 PM and signaled the Rosenborg players to kick off the game. Nicki Nielsen, Rosenborg's center-forward, immediately raised his leg high and passed the ball back into the midfield.

Mike Jensen, one of Rosenborg's two central midfielders, received the ball close to the boundary of the defensive third. The midfielder only took a single touch on the ball before flicking it back to Tore Reginiussen, Rosenborg's center-back, who was in the backline at that moment. The Rosenborg players then started passing the ball around in the backfield.

The game had officially begun. Rosenborg had started with its strongest line-up. Daniel ?rlund was in goal, while Mikael Dorsin, Yerry Mina, Tore Reginiussen, and Eric Bailly were in defense. Tobias Mikkelsen and Jonas Svensson were playing as the right and left-wingers, respectively — while Mike Jensen and Thomas Partey held down the fort in midfield. And finally, Zachary was playing as the false number-10 behind Nicki Nielsen, the center-forward, who'd just returned from injury, to complete a 4-4-1-1 formation.

On the other hand, IF Elfsborg had fielded players in a 4-3-3 defensive formation consisting of four defenders, three midfielders in a triangular shape, plus three forwards. They had quite the defensive depth in their squad. They were compact in the middle and at the back and thus managed to keep Rosenborg at bay for most of the first half.

However, the Rosenborg players weren't discouraged by the defensive prowess of the Swedish giants. They continued pushing and knocking on IF Elfsborg's door while being urged on by the thunderous cheers of the home crowd. And finally, in the 43rd minute, a goal-scoring opportunity appeared.

Zachary Bemba, the young Rosenborg number-33, who'd remained silent throughout most of the first half, suddenly dropped away from the middle and overloaded the wing on the right flank. He soon received a through pass from Mike Jensen, one of Rosenborg's midfielders, before racing towards IF Elfsborg's goal like mad.

He just exploded with speed, without any fancy movements, as he cut across the pitch towards the opponent's goal like a whirlwind. His approach was straightforward as he merely utilized his newly-gained S-grade body control to weave through a couple of defenders like a snake navigating the jungle.

Before long, he found himself at the edge of the box with only a couple of defenders in yellow jerseys between him and the goal. Without losing his composure, he unleashed a curling shot towards the inside of the far post, hoping to chip the keeper.

However, just after the ball had left his foot, it met an obstruction in the form of a defender's arm. Sebastian Holmén, IF Elfsborg's center-back, had just tried his utmost to block Zachary's shot but, instead, ended up handling the ball.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle right away and pointed to the penalty spot, thereby sending the entire Lerkendal Stadium into a wave of thunderous cheers. He then showed Sebastian a yellow card since he'd committed a direct handball offense within the boundaries of the 18-yard box.

It was finally the chance for Rosenborg to make something out of their dominant ball possession for the night. And, of course, it was Zachary Bemba, the on-form Rosenborg young number-33, who stepped forward to take the penalty.

Zachary didn't lose his composure in the slightest. He activated the Dead-ball Specialist Juju and carefully placed the ball on the penalty spot. After ensuring that there wasn't even a single strand of grass in front of the ball, he stepped back and waited while shutting out everything else.

Not even the thunderous cheers of the fans could disrupt him at that moment. He was that focused as he faced off against the IF Elfsborg Keeper in those few seconds.

FWEEEEEEEE

The referee finally blew the whistle after ensuring that all the other players, except the IF Elfsborg keeper and Zachary (the penalty taker), were out of the box. At that moment, an abnormal wave of silence descended upon the entire stadium as the fans waited with bated breath for Zachary to take the penalty.

It was the moment of truth, and Zachary didn't disappoint. He made an angled run towards the ball before sending the keeper the wrong way and riffling in a right-footed shot into the top left corner. With that well-timed snapshot, he'd rendered the keeper helpless and managed to score Rosenberg's first goal for the night.

After having pressurized the opponents for the entire first half, Rosenberg had managed to take the lead in the 44th minute, with less than a minute remaining to halftime. It was a fantastic ending of the first half for the Rosenberg players. Thus, they all ran to the corner flag and celebrated in front of the Rosenberg fans.

By then, the cheers all around the stadium had already exploded into a thunderous drawn-out crescendo. The fans were yelling Rosenberg's chants at the top of their voices, causing the entire Lerkendal to quake as if it was experiencing an earthquake. The noise levels were off the charts at that moment as the home crowd celebrated Rosenberg's first goal.

"It's Rosenberg one, and IF Elfsborg nil," Kristin heard the commentator yell out loud after the cheers had died down. "Zachary Bemba, Rosenberg's young midfielder, has done it again. This time around, he has scored from the penalty spot to give Rosenberg the lead. He has managed to take his tally to seven goals in just three games and is now the leading top scorer of the Europa League. What a player!"

"What a player, indeed!" The other commentator chipped in. "He has been quiet throughout most of the first half. However, with just a single run, he has managed to create a goal almost out of nothing. His skills are truly incredible."

"His goal has taken Rosenberg to nine points," the first commentator spoke once again. "They've taken the first step to cement their position as second on the table. Moreover, the word going around is that

Standard Liège is trailing by a goal to nil against Red Bull Salzburg. Thus, Rosenborg will surely qualify for the knockout stages of the Europa League if they can maintain their lead throughout the second half. Let's wait and see how the game progresses."

Chapter 300 - Against IF Elfsborg III

The IF Elfsborg players were quite depressed during the half-time break. They'd done their utmost to keep the Rosenborg players at bay even when they were playing at an away ground. However, one moment of brilliance from Zachary Bemba, Rosenborg's young number-33, had rendered all their efforts fruitless. With a single run, he'd cut through their defense like a sharp knife through vegetables before forcing a penalty out of Sebastian Holmén, their center-back. That penalty was what resulted in the goal that'd put their team in quite a disadvantageous situation.

A more depressing fact was that the Norwegian giants were miles ahead of them in terms of ball possession — a scenario that led to IF Elfsborg's center-forward being isolated. As a result, they hadn't created any clear goal-scoring opportunities throughout the first half.

"Okay, guys, cheer up," Klas Ingesson, the head coach of IF Elfsborg, said while clapping his hands to rouse his players back to full attention. "The game is not over yet as we still have 45 minutes of the second half. As long as we focus and do our best in those 45 minutes, we'll obviously create chances to score and bring the proceedings back to level terms. Are you with me, guys? If you're with me, let me hear you reply, 'Yes, coach.'" The coach ended his speech with a drawn-out bellow.

There was an awkward and out-of-sync reply of "Yes, coach" from the audience. The players' motivation levels seemed to have already sunk to the abyss after facing a hard time against a well-organized Rosenborg during the first half.

Coach Klas Ingesson narrowed his eyes slightly and glanced around. "I couldn't hear you," he said, clapping his hands rhythmically once again. "Let me hear you yell out loud, 'Yes, coach.'"

"Yes, coach!" The IF Elfsborg players did a little better job replying in sync that time around.

"Good," Coach Klas Ingesson said, nodding. "That's the sort of energy I expect from you as professionals playing in the Europa League. We can't give up when we're just one goal down. Are we together?"

"Yes, coach."

"Good," the coach said, sweeping his gaze across some of his players. "For the second half, I want you to continue prioritizing our defense. We can't concede another goal as that will seal our fate. So, we've to stay on our toes and prevent Rosenborg from scoring another goal."

"Anders Svensson!" The coach continued after turning his gaze to the captain of IF Elfsborg. "I want you to move back from the midfield a bit so that you can keep your eyes on that Zachary Bemba. Mark him man-to-man, and prevent him from doing whatever he wants in our final third. I don't want to see him cut through our defense again as if we're a bunch of nobodies. Are you with me, Anders?"

"Yes, coach."

The coach nodded as a slight smile outlined his facial features. "Moving on. We'll only use counters, wing play, and a few long balls to negate Rosenborg's dominance in the midfield. As long as we properly utilize our counterattacking opportunities, I can assure you guys that we'll be able to score before the end of the second half."

"However, I must warn you not to be impatient, especially during the second stages of the first half. Just concentrate on remaining solid and make sure we don't concede. The goal will come eventually as long as we stay true to our game plan. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach."

After a short while, the second half began.

Anders Svensson, IF Elfsborg's captain, followed the coach's instructions to the letter. He dropped from midfield and started man-marking Zachary — who was still playing as a false number-10 for Rosenborg.

The IF Elfsborg wingers then pinched into the middle spaces to fill the gap he'd left in midfield. In so doing, they'd compacted the formation and denied the Rosenborg players any chance to break through the middle. In such a way, they cut down Rosenborg's dominance and stabilized the game.

However, the Rosenborg players were not to be outdone. They soon switched to wing play and rendered IF Elfsborg's strategy fruitless.

Tobias Mikkelsen and Jonas Svensson, the Rosenborg wingers, constantly made runs through the flanks before floating in teasing crosses towards the box where Zachary and Nicki were lurking.

The Swedish giants were once in a dire situation.

However, the IF Elfsborg players didn't buckle under the continued pressure. They remained solid and denied Rosenborg any chance to score a second goal.

In particular, Anders Svensson, the IF Elfsborg captain, was quite impressive. He stuck to Zachary like superglue throughout the entire early stages of the second half and tracked his every run. In so doing, he denied the young midfielder any chances to make any meaningful plays.

For the following few minutes, the game's tempo slowed down considerably. Neither team showed any signs of scoring until the 80th minute when Zachary abruptly lost his marker and made a run towards the left flank. With that well-timed run, he'd once again overloaded the wing.

He was soon playing a couple of one-twos with Jonas Svensson, the Rosenborg left-winger, as the two of them broke through IF Elfsborg's formation. They were clearly on a straight course towards IF Elfsborg's goal.

For a moment, Anders Svensson, The IF Elfsborg captain, felt ashamed for failing to live up to the coach's expectations. He'd let Zachary get away from him and run to the wings where he could pose a significant threat to IF Elfsborg's defense.

"No, I can't let him do as he pleases in our half," he decided.

He took off like a bullet out of a muzzle and covered a distance of more than ten yards in a matter of seconds. He was like the wind and managed to get to Zachary when he'd just received a return pass from Svensson.

The stage had been set. Another showdown between Rosenborg's young number-33 and IF Elfsborg's experienced captain was just around the corner.

The next moment, Zachary lowered his center of gravity slightly before exploding with speed and breaking through the left. With a well-timed elastico dribble, he'd managed to lose the Swede for a moment.

Anders Svensson was beaten but didn't surrender. "Block him! Don't allow him to cut back into the pitch," he shouted to a nearby teammate before turning around and following after Zachary's footsteps.

Zachary raised his eyes ever so slightly when he noticed three IF Elfsborg players corner him close to the touchline on the left. Two were barring his path forward while Anders, his bodyguard for the second half, was fast approaching from behind.

"Damn!"

Zachary couldn't help but slow down a little as he looked around, searching for a teammate as an outlet for the ball.

However, all the players around him were tightly marked by the aggressive IF Elfsborg defensive players. He was in dire straits and would lose the ball if he couldn't come up with an immediate solution.

"Here goes nothing!"

Zachary stepped on the ball and raised it slightly from the green. He followed that up by flicking it further upward until it was at his knee level.

As expected, the defenders barring his path reacted accordingly. They rushed in for the kill, probably thinking that he'd lost control for the moment.

But who was Zachary? He was a player with an almost textbook skill of controlling the ball. So, how could he ever make such a mistake?

Zachary grinned fiendishly. Without further ado, he tapped the ball slightly and looped it over one of the defenders who'd stretched out a leg to tackle the ball from his feet. He then exploded with speed and spun around the defender before the other two opponents could react and close him down.

With that well-timed move, he'd managed to escape the encirclement and was soon fast on his way towards the goal like a whirlwind. He was surprised to find that he had made himself several yards of space after beating the three opponents. But, that didn't slow down his actions in the slightest.

Soon, he managed to make it to the edge of the box, where he was again cornered by one of the IF Elfsborg center-backs. But he still didn't lose his composure.

He slowed down slightly to draw in the defender while assessing his options. When the angle opened up, he raised his foot high and unleashed a curling shot around the defender from the edge of the box.

"BANG!"

The sound of the ball smashing off the post was soon clearly audible in the almost silent stadium. The keeper had managed to brush the ball with his fingertips, thus sending it off its intended trajectory. It had veered off its course to some extent before pounding off the post and bouncing back into the area.

Zachary felt his heart sink to the bottom. He was disappointed with himself after working so hard to create the opportunity but failing to score in the very end. However, his heartbeat started speeding up again when he noticed a silhouette, dressed in Rosenborg's black and white colors, rushing towards the descending ball.

It was Nicki Nielsen, Rosenborg's center-forward, who'd been silent for most of the match. He sprang forward like an assassin in the night and placed a diving header inside of the right post.
