

Greatest 451

Chapter 451 Full

451 Post-Match Analysis & Day Off

"Good evening, viewers," Emilia Vasquez said while facing the cameras within the ESPN Studios.

"Welcome back from that exciting match, where Juventus put up an impressive performance to defeat ChievoVerona by four goals to one in their first fixture of the season. With me here in the studio are three gentlemen, namely Alessandro Costacurta, Joshua Morales, and Charles Adams. They are our pundits today, who will help us analyze the just-concluded game. But before we delve into the analysis, let's start by watching an interesting video. We'll be right back."

No sooner had she completed the sentence than all the screens in the studio started playing the video. One glance was enough to tell all present that it was a replay of a studio debate between Emilia Vasquez and Charles Adams. The two of them were discussing the top transfers of the previous summer.

"Mark my words," Charles Adams' mellifluous voice reverberated around the place a moment later. "Zachary has a high chance of becoming a flop at Juventus." The pundit then went on to explain why Zachary would find it a challenging task to adapt to the highly intensive Italian Serie A football. He spoke with total conviction until the short video ended a minute later.

A numbing silence descended upon the studio after the cameras focused back on the pundits. A few seconds passed, and then just suddenly, the other pundits, aside from Charles Adams, started laughing. Their shoulders shook as they doubled over with hilarity for the next few seconds.

"That was quite interesting," Alessandro Costacurta said while stealing glances at Charles Adams.

"Emilia!" Joshua Morales was the next to speak as he tried to smother his laughter after a few more seconds. "I didn't know that you were such a ruthless lady. Always remind me not to offend you in the future."

In response, Emilia just smiled before turning towards the cameras. "That was a replay of Charles Adams, one of our very own pundits, declaring that Zachary would become a flop at Juventus. Regrettably, he couldn't have been more wrong, as Zachary was quite impressive during his debut game today. The young playmaker scored the third goal for Juventus before providing an assist that resulted in Carlos Tévez's late goal."

She paused for a moment and turned towards the pundits. "Charles!" She said. "Do you still believe that Zachary will become a flop at Juventus?"

Charles Adams maintained his poker face and replied, "I wonder why everyone is so excited. Zachary has only played well in a single game against a weaker team. But that doesn't prove anything in the long term. We must wait and see how he fares in Juventus' upcoming matches before judging whether he's a successful signing. If he can continue playing as he did today, I'll swallow my previous comments and apologize to all the viewers for my erroneous analysis of his potential."

Emilia nodded and turned towards another pundit in the studio. "Alessandro!" She said. "What was your take on the just-concluded game?"

"It was one-sided," Alessandro Costacurta replied. "From early on in the first half, Juventus was the better team. They controlled the game pretty well by relying on their fluid passing. As a result, they dominated the proceedings on the field of play and created many chances on goal. I'm really not surprised they won the match by four goals to one."

"According to you, who would you rate as your best players in Juventus' squad during today's game?" Emilia asked.

"Carlos Tévez is, of course, at the top of my list," Alessandro replied. "He was impressive on the striking line and scored a hat-trick today. In my books, he's the best player for Juventus. The second player on my list is Andrea Pirlo. The deep-lying playmaker was as impressive as ever against ChievoVerona. He was involved in three of Juventus' four goals on the night. The third and final player on my list is Zachary Bemba. The young playmaker made quite the impact after stepping onto the pitch late in the second half. He scored the third goal before setting up Carlos Tévez for another. I believe the Juventus executives must be smiling after witnessing his phenomenal debut today. Their 80 million Euros didn't go to waste."

Emilia beamed and nodded. "Let's talk about Juventus' fourth goal for the night. We all witnessed how Andrea Pirlo found Zachary with that well-timed pass over the midfield."

"That was quite the goal," Alessandro chimed in. "If you watch the replay, you will notice that Zachary started sprinting towards Chievo's box immediately after Pirlo received the ball. So, I'm sure that Zachary was aware that his teammate would spot him and link play with him as long as he made a well-timed run across the field. His trust paid off, and as expected, Andrea didn't disappoint. The Maestro's

long-range pass made its way to Zachary, who, in turn, set up Carlos for the fourth goal. The whole counterattack is a testament to Juventus' team chemistry on the pitch."

"Thanks for your analysis, Alessandro," Emilia said. "Juventus will have a two-week rest before facing off against Udinese Calcio on Saturday, 13th September. Then, three days after that, they will play their first Champions League game this season against the Swedish side - Malmö FF. And then, four days after their Champions League game, they will travel to the Lombardy region in Italy to face off against AC Milan in their third Serie A fixture. That's quite a busy schedule."

"Indeed, it's quite a busy schedule," Joshua Morales agreed. "But Juventus should be able to handle it since they have great depth in their squad. For instance, phenomenal players like Patrice Evra, Simone Pepe, Sebastian Giovinco, and Fernando Llorente didn't get a chance to step onto the pitch today. If Coach Allegri uses them well in some of the easier fixtures, then Juventus should be able to handle the schedule."

After the game, the Juventus squad immediately left Verona on the team bus and headed back to Turin. On arriving at the Juventus training center, the players and technical staff enjoyed a late team dinner while celebrating their victory against Chievo. They finished their victory meal in only thirty minutes and parted ways soon after to return to their respective homes for the night.

Zachary, on his part, returned to his room at the J Hotel as he didn't have a home in Turin yet. He was still full of energy since he had only played the last fifteen minutes of the game. So, he spent an hour or two in bliss, tangling with Camilla before descending into the sweet and welcoming slumberland.

The following morning, he woke up early, at six, and went through his morning exercise routine. He spent thirty minutes performing yoga poses to quicken his post-match recovery before washing up and enjoying an early breakfast with Camilla on his room's balcony. All the while, a smile never left his face while chugging down his food and drinks. His spirits were still flying high as his mind replayed some of the crucial moments of his performance during the previous day's game.

"You're smiling a lot today," Camilla remarked from across the table after taking a sip of her coffee. "You must be in a very jubilant mood."

Zachary smiled and said, "How can I not be when my gorgeous and charming girlfriend is having breakfast with me?"

Camilla beamed. "Liar! You must be recalling yesterday's game."

"I swear I'm not," Zachary lied through his teeth, without any change in expression. "It's just that I can't contain my emotions while looking at your pretty face. I always find myself smiling."

Camilla's smile brightened, but she didn't say anything in response.

"When is your flight?" Zachary asked.

"In the afternoon," Camilla responded. "It will depart from Turin International Airport at 3:00 PM."

"That means we still have a few hours together before you depart," Zachary remarked as he knifed and pierced a piece of bacon. He gracefully placed it into his mouth with his fork before lifting his head to face Camilla again. "Since today is my day off, we could spend the next few hours touring around Turin. What do you say?"

"A trip around Turin would surely be nice," Camilla responded with a smile. "Let's do that."

"Okay, a trip it is," Zachary said. "I'll get Angelo to act as our driver and guide on this trip. Let's see for ourselves what Turin has to offer."

Zachary spent the rest of the morning moving around historical sites in Turin with Camilla. While enjoying the company of one another, they visited several famous museums, cathedrals built during medieval times, and extravagant palaces, among other attractions. They didn't miss out on touring any fascinating sites since Angelo was quite a good guide.

Of course, a sizeable number of Juventus fans approached Zachary for autographs on several instances while he was on tour around the city. And since he couldn't just shrug them off, he was forced to take a few minutes to sign their keepsakes before returning his attention to Camilla. He was already experiencing how hard it was for footballers to enjoy private lives in Italian cities such as Turin. He even started entertaining the notion of hiring a few bodyguards to keep away the enthusiastic fans while

moving around Turin in the future. Otherwise, he might never get a moment of peace to enjoy himself while within the city.

The minutes quickly turned into hours as Zachary enjoyed his time with Camilla. They did everything that couples do together, including having meals, taking photographs, and even making out in an empty old building. They went all out to have a pretty good time until they said their goodbyes at the Turin International Airport at 3:00 PM. They could only cut their blissful time together since Camilla had to return to Norway that very afternoon.

Chapter 452: Fates of Former Teammates Zachary returned his entire focus to training after sending off Camilla. He spent most of his time in the gym, working on his physical fitness or partaking in the often-intensive team sessions. His work ethic over the following few days was exceptional as he wanted to make it into Coach Allegri's starting eleven as soon as possible.

Additionally, he didn't neglect his language classes. Every evening, after departing from the training ground, he would head to the L'Italiano Porticando language school and spend hours trying to master the Italian language. His newly-enhanced intelligence worked wonders, and he started speaking a few words in a short span of a few days. He could easily exchange greetings with his Italian colleagues or vocalize a few curse words after seven days of intensive study. He was obviously on a fast track to learning the new language.

A few days quickly passed, and Friday arrived. On the evening of that day, Zachary left the language school at around 9:00 PM and returned to the J Hotel. He cleaned up quickly before making himself comfortable in a chair on his room's balcony to enjoy a late-night snack. He was in a good mood as he took in the delightful view of the extensive J Hotel gardens while enjoying his meal.

At that moment, his mind fell into a period of self-introspection, and he felt like he was living in a blissful utopia. He had a career that many would only dare to consider pursuing within their dreams. Secondly, he had a beautiful girlfriend that could cause the downfall of nations with just a simple gesture. And lastly, he was rich, going by the standards of over 90% of all the people in the world. What else could he ask for from the world? He just had to remain consistent and work hard to refine his skills. Then, he would continue elevating his game with the passing of time while enjoying many more years of career contentment.

The corners of Zachary's lips quirked up a little as the refreshing evening breeze caressed his face. His mind achieved a blissful state of relaxation, and he quickly finished his meal. He picked up his Italian language textbook and began his daily pre-bedtime revision routine. But a few minutes later, just as he was starting to immerse himself in the act of learning new Italian words, his phone vibrated from a nearby table and broke him out of his state of concentration. He frowned as he placed his Italian textbook to the side before glancing at the screen. But the next moment, his face eased into a smile as he realized that the WhatsApp call was from Paul Kasongo, his friend and former teammate. He immediately pressed the accept button and positioned the phone next to his ear.

"Hello, Kasongo," he said, leaning back into his seat. "It has been long. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing okay," Kasongo replied from the other end of the line. "What about you? How is life taking you in Italy? Have you managed to learn Italian yet?"

Zachary chuckled, finding his friend quite amusing. "How can I learn a new language in just a month? Do you think I'm some brainiac out of a sci-fi movie?"

Kasongo laughed in response. "Anyways, jokes aside, how are you finding life in Turin? Have you managed to settle in?"

"I'm doing okay while trying to settle down. The only issue hindering me from fitting into the new culture is the language barrier. But I have already started taking Italian language classes to overcome the challenge."

"Good for you, my man," Kasongo said. "I'm confident that you'll achieve a lot at Juventus. Keep giving your all in everything you do, and everything will work out."

"That's my intent. Thank you." Zachary responded. "But enough about me. Are you still in Trondheim, or did you finally transfer to a new club?"

"I've already completed a move to a new club," Kasongo replied, his voice filled with a sense of pride. "Can you guess which club it is?"

"I'm sorry, I can't," Zachary admitted.

He hadn't followed the transfer news for a few days. He was totally ignorant in regards to the completed signings on the deadline of the transfer window. He didn't even know which ones among his former teammates had followed his example and transferred out of Rosenborg that summer.

"Can't you really guess?" Kasongo asked again.

"No, I can't."

"You're such a bore, man," Kasongo said, sighing. "Don't you watch the news? Anyways, I managed to complete a move to Tottenham on Monday evening, just a few hours before the closure of the transfer window. As I speak now, I'm already a Tottenham player."

"For real? You're now a Tottenham player?" Zachary's eyes widened as he almost couldn't believe his ears. It seemed that the future of football was changing fast and becoming more and more unfamiliar to him. Moreover, he was well aware that he was the spark that had set off all those changes simply because of interfering with the life of a young footballer while he was still in DR Congo and later encouraging Coach Johansen to sign a few talented players. He had a feeling that he might turn out to be the institutor of a mega butterfly effect that could send the football world into unpredictable future paths — totally different from those of his past life.

"I'm telling the truth, man," Kasongo responded. "If you don't believe me, you can check the transfer news."

"Then, congs, my man," Zachary said. "I'm really happy for you. Are you already in London, or are you still in Trondheim?"

"I'm in London," Kasongo replied. "I have even already trained with the team. That aside, a few of our other former teammates also completed moves out of Rosenborg successfully. Eric Bailly is with me here at Tottenham while Karl Toko Ekambi went to Lyon. As for Nicki, he joined Villarreal."

"Damn!" Zachary exclaimed. "All our teammates have left Rosenborg. Coach Johansen must be in a foul mood."

Kasongo chuckled and said, "I don't think so. From what I heard, management will use part of the money gained from the transfers to sign new players. There are rumors that Rosenborg could splash out around 50 million Euros to bring in new talent during the December-January transfer window. Such an amount of money can do wonders in the Norwegian League. Coach Johansen should be able to continue dominating the league after spending such an amount."

"True," Zachary said. "But they still have to put in place an excellent recruitment policy. They must sign players with potential if they are to continue dominating the Norwegian League. By the way, what's up with Yerry Mina, William Troost-Ekong, Thomas Partey, and Takumi Minamino? Are they still at Rosenborg?"

"Thomas Partey was close to joining Atlético Madrid during the last week of the transfer window," Kasongo responded. "But his move fell through after the Spanish side failed to meet Rosenborg's asking price of 25 million Euros. Yerry Mina was also about to join Barcelona. But his move also fell through after Barcelona refused to cough out the 28 million for the defender. As for Troost-Ekong and Takumi, they haven't thought about leaving Rosenborg. They seem to be enjoying their time in Trondheim."

"I think it's good that the four of them have remained at Rosenborg," Zachary remarked. "They should be able to help Coach Johansen win the trophy this year."

"Of course, they will," Kasongo confirmed. "Rosenborg is unstoppable in Norway at the moment. The club is very comfortable at the top of the league table. It's also ahead of the second-placed by twelve points."

"Oh, okay," Zachary said. "Then, they should be able to win the Norwegian league this season. That aside, how are you faring in London? Do you think you will be able to make the match squad within a short time?"

"Honestly," Kasongo replied, "I'm a bit intimidated by everything here. All the players are talented, and on top of that, they work hard on a daily basis to make the squad. I can't be sure when I'll make it into the starting eleven or even the match squad."

"Just keep on working hard," Zachary encouraged. "You'll eventually make the squad since I'm sure that Tottenham signed you because they saw potential in you. They can't just leave you on the bench after coughing out money to get you from Rosenborg."

"True." Kasongo chuckled. "It was nice talking to you again, Zachary. But for now, I have to say goodnight. I have to train early tomorrow."

"Okay," Zachary said. "Goodnight to you, too, and let's keep in touch."

"Let's keep in touch," Kasongo replied before ending the call.

Zachary smiled and returned his focus to cramming Italian words. He was, of course, happy that his former teammates were progressing well. But he also understood that he had to continue working hard and pull out all stops to continue improving himself as a footballer. Or else those former teammates might leave him in the dust in a few years if he slacked off.

A week quickly went by as Zachary toiled from morning to evening, each day, with the intent to refine his ball skills and improve his physical fitness. And soon it was Saturday, 13th September. It was finally the day when Juventus would face off against the Udinese Calcio.

For the game that day, Coach Allegri still chose to start with the midfield of Claudio Marchisio, Andre Pirlo, and Arturo Vidal. As for his other talented midfielders like Zachary Bemba and Roberto Pereyra, he chose to rest them in preparation for Juventus' opening fixture in the Champions League against Malmö FF. He asserted that rotating the squad would keep all the players fresh and free from injuries. As a result, they would find it easy to win more than one trophy in a single season.

Chapter 453 Juventus against Udinese

Saturday, September 13, 2014.

Juventus Stadium, Turin, Italy.

Once again, the Juventus starting eleven showcased another brilliant performance on the field of play as they faced off against Udinese Calcio in their second fixture of the 2014/14 Italian Serie A season. They controlled the game from the first minute by relying on consistent instances of individual brilliance plus the fluid passing abilities of their three midfielders. They soon built up enough momentum to tear apart Udinese's defensive shape and create their first clear chance on goal.

Stephan Lichtsteiner, the highly-agile wing-back, initiated the attack with a sudden and spirited acceleration on the right flank during the 11th minute. His speed was incredible, even going by the apex standards in modern football. He broke past Giovanni Pasquale, Udinese's left-winger, like a bullet train on the rails and continued racing along the touchline, heading towards the other half. A short while later, he cut into the pitch and started bearing down on Udinese's box like a raging Tsunami. He skipped past another opponent with another almost-instantaneous burst of speed before sending a curling cross towards the mouth of the goal.

Whoosh!

Stephan's cross was like a divine work of art in motion as it soared above the field of play. No opponent could intercept the ball as it curled and descended towards the box, on a teasing course that was barely beyond the reach of both the Udinese defenders and keeper. It soon plunged downwards, almost abruptly, and zoomed towards the sprinting path of Carlos Tévez.

"Carlos! Tévez! Carlos..."

The enthusiastic Juventus fans, seated in the stands behind Udinese's goal, began chanting Carlos Tévez's name as he sprinted into the box to connect with the cross. The Argentine's remarkably swift pace allowed him to inch past the center-backs, and he stretched his leg out to tap the ball into the back of the net. Without halting, he raced towards the sidelines to celebrate his fourth goal in just two matches of the recently-commenced Serie A season.

Juventus FC 1: Udinese Calcio 0

Paolo Favero, a staunch fan of Juventus, had been sitting comfortably within the stands of the Juventus stadium, watching the game with his two sons. When TÃ©vez scored Juventus' first goal for the night, he immediately rose up from his seat and started hopping around like an excited little girl. For the next few dozen seconds, he was like an eager madman, yelling at the top of his voice to let out his happiness.

But he wasn't alone in his state of crazed excitement. His two teenage sons were dancing while singing a famous Juventus chant spiritedly. Their voices blended together with those of the other supporters within the stands to institute a booming chorus that almost shook the entire Juventus Stadium to its very core. All the Juventus supporters were obviously having a blast as they witnessed their team's exceptional performance on the field of play.

"There you have it," the commentator's mellifluous voice reverberated around the stadium when the cheering started subsiding. "Carlos TÃ©vez is on target yet again this season. He connected with that sweet cross from Stephan Lichtsteiner to score an impressive first goal for Juventus during the 11th minute of the game. For sure, he's a man on fire."

"Indeed, Carlos TÃ©vez is on form," Federico Mancini, the co-commentator and in-game pundit, chimed in. "The Argentine bagged a hatrick against Chievo two weeks ago. Just now, he scored another goal against Udinese to take his season tally to four goals in two matches. He's looking more and more like Juventus' true number-10, even after losing his shirt to Zachary."

Davide Labate, the principal commentator, chuckled. "Why are you bringing up the shirt number issue again? Carlos stated in his interview hosted by Sky Italia that he was okay with giving the number-10 shirt to Zachary. Moreover, I think that his new number 32 suits him better. Maybe, that's why he's playing better than the version of himself last season."

"If you say so," Federico Mancini, the co-commentator, said with a chuckle. "But shirt number aside, Carlos is by far the best player for Juventus in this new Serie A season. I wonder how Zachary will compare to him when he finally steps onto the pitch."

"I think Zachary will do fine if he gets a chance to step on the pitch tonight," Davide Labate said as the cameras focused on Zachary, who was watching the game from the technical area. "Look at how his eyes are glittering with expectation. He's like a fierce warrior ready to head out to war. He seems like he can't wait to step onto the pitch."

Federico chuckled. "I'm sure he wishes to prove himself again during tonight's match. But the question is: Will he get some playing time today? Or has Coach Allegri decided to rest the young playmaker so as to use him in the Champions League game against Malmo on Tuesday? We can only wait before getting an answer to that question?"

The game continued after the goal celebrations. And without any surprises, Juventus continued dominating proceedings by relying on their impressive tactical prowess. The Old Lady players relied on their incredible ball skills and fluid passing abilities to overpower the weaker Udinese side. And it wasn't long before they created another chance to score the second goal.

That time around, it was Claudio Marchisio who executed the magic. The experienced midfielder tore through Udinese's midfield by relying on a series of one-two exchanges with his teammates. His well-timed run through the middle afforded him some yards of space right before the edge of the box, and he pulled the trigger before any of the opposing defenders could close him down.

Boom!

Claudio Marchisio's boot connected with the ball, and he unleashed a long-range effort towards Udinese's goal from just outside the box. His shooting technique was almost textbook perfect, and he easily beat the keeper with a curling shot into the top right corner. His hard work and quick thinking on the ball allowed him to score Juventus' second goal on the night during the 38th minute.

The game continued, and it soon became clear to all that Claudio's goal wouldn't be the last for the Old Lady that night. Nine minutes into the second half, Fernando Llorente struck again to compound Udinese's misery. He connected with a pinpoint cross from Patrice Evra to head home and score Juventus' third goal in the 54th minute.

He'd extended Juventus' lead to three goals with more than thirty minutes of regular playing time remaining on the clock. As a result, he almost couldn't contain his happiness as he raced off towards the sidelines to celebrate in front of the ever-vocal Juventus fans.

Juventus FC 3 : Udinese Calcio 0

Coach Allegri was all smiles as he followed the game from the sidelines. He was almost on cloud nine while witnessing his players wiping the floor with the Udinese side. He was under no pressure since he wasn't worried that his players would fail to hold on to the lead during the remaining thirty or so minutes of regular playing time.

"What is the plan for the final thirty minutes?" Maurizio Trombetta, the assistant coach in charge of the first team, asked from beside him. "Do we bring in a few substitutes and rest some starters like Andrea Pirlo and Carlos TÃ©vez? We need them fresh for the Champions League game on Tuesday."

Coach Allegri nodded on hearing his assistant's words. "We should indeed bring on a few substitutes. Tell Kingsley Coman, Simone Padoin, and Ãlvvaro Morata to start warming up. I need them on the pitch in ten minutes."

Coach Trombetta raised a brow. "What about Zachary?"

"What about him?" Coach Allegri fired back in response.

Coach Trombetta sighed and said, "He performed well during the previous game. He has also been exceptional during training over the previous two weeks. Shouldn't we reward all his hard work with a few minutes of playing time?"

Coach Trombetta shook his head while his eyes continued following the proceedings on the pitch. "We don't need Zachary in this match," he said with conviction. "The boy is just a nineteen-year-old player who's just starting to find his ground in the Serie A. We can't use him during every game as that will wear him out and make him prone to injuries."

"But..." Coach Trombetta tried to argue.

"No buts." Coach Allegri's tone was firm. "We have a long season ahead of us. We'll play matches in the Serie A, the Champions League, and the Coppa Italia. So, we've got to rest some of our crucial players when we can. For instance, I can't utilize Zachary in this game when we're already leading by three goals. That would be a waste of precious and rare human resources. It's better to keep him rested and start him on Tuesday against Malmö. Understood?"

"Yes, boss," Coach Trombetta said, nodding. "I understand."

"Good." Coach Trombetta nodded with a smile. "Go on and prepare the substitutes. I need them on the pitch in less than ten minutes."

"Understood," Coach Trombetta said before walking away and heading towards the substitute's bench.

Coach Allegri watched his colleague for a moment before sighing and returning his focus to the game. Of course, he had considered introducing Zachary as a substitute against Udinese that evening. But after recalling how the young playmaker was a specialist in European competitions, who even scored hattricks against several top clubs in the Europa League the previous season, Coach Allegri decided not to follow through with his initial intentions. He decided to leave the young Maestro on the bench so that he could be well rested and ready to start Juventus' Champions League game against Malmo

Chapter 454: Finally, In the Starting Eleven Fernando Llorente's 54th-minute goal was obviously not the last for Juventus on the night. Álvaro Morata, the newly-signed Spanish center-forward, connected with Andrea Pirlo's pass to score Juventus' fourth goal in the 66th minute. Twelve minutes later, during the 78th minute, Leonardo Bonucci, the center-back, outjumped all the other players in the box to connect with a corner ball and score Juventus' fifth and final goal for the night.

The rest of the game was pretty much all about game management. The Juventus players continued working tirelessly to dominate possession with their slow but steady passing. They kept the ball to themselves and ensured that the Udinese side would not get an opportunity to create any chances on goal during the final minutes of gameplay. As a result, the tenacious Old Lady players saw the game through and defeated the spiritless Udinese side by five goals to nil after four minutes of added time.

Zachary, on his part, could only watch from the bench as his teammates celebrated their massive win against Udinese Calcio. He felt slightly dejected and confused after failing to get an opportunity to step on the pitch that evening. He couldn't stomach the fact that the coaches had opted not to give him a chance to partake in the proceedings even after he put his all into training and performed impressively during the team sessions leading to the game against Udinese.

Were the coaches not watching him during training? Or had management passed a resolution to reduce his playing time so as to cut down on his lofty appearance bonuses? Zachary sighed and shook his head before rising up from his seat and walking down the tunnel with his jubilant teammates.

He was silent the entire time as he traversed the sparkling hallways of the Juventus Stadium while heading towards the home team's dressing room. He wasn't about to involve himself in bantering with his teammates, especially since he wasn't in the best of moods. He just wanted to quickly reach the dressing room and change out of his match gear before returning to his hotel room to rest and calm himself down.

"Zachary, a moment, please?" A familiar voice sounded behind him just as he was about to step into the corridor leading to the dressing room. He turned around and realized that Coach Trombetta, the assistant coach in charge of the first team, was the person that had called his name.

"Hello, coach," Zachary said, holding his position and facing the coach. Even though he was not in a good mood, he forced himself to smile and continued, "Do you need me for anything?"

"Come; let's talk for a minute." The coach immediately led Zachary by the arm into a nearby room without giving him a chance to reply. In a short while, the two men stood face to face in what seemed like a staffers' changing room.

"How are you?" Coach Trombetta immediately asked before Zachary could say a word. "I noticed you were quieter than usual while walking down the tunnel! Are you okay?"

"I'm okay," Zachary lied.

"Really?" Coach Trombetta asked again while studying Zachary's face with his penetrative gaze. He seemed skeptical.

"Of course, I'm okay," Zachary confirmed while maintaining his poker face. "Why wouldn't I be?"

Zachary wasn't about to express his dissatisfaction with the team selection to his new coaches. He had already resolved to bury his frustration deep within his heart and keep working hard during training. He

would win his rightful place on the Juventus starting eleven by showcasing his skills instead of complaining and sobbing to gain sympathy from his trainers.

Coach Trombetta nodded as a mysterious smile outlined his face. "Let me tell you a secret," he said, lowering his voice. "Coach Allegri only left you out of the proceedings today because he's considering you for a starting position in the Champions League game against Malmö on Tuesday night. So, don't let any negative feelings affect your sharpness during training on Monday. Continue working hard, and you might get your first start for Juventus on Tuesday night. Okay?"

"Okay." Zachary nodded as his mood lifted and soared high and beyond. His eyes glittered with a spark of anticipation, and he continued, "I'll obviously work hard during training on Monday. And as long as I get an opportunity to start the game on Tuesday, I'll do my utmost not to disappoint. I'll play my heart out when I'm on the field of play."

"Good. I like your conviction." Coach Trombetta nodded and smiled. Without saying anything else, he turned around and walked out of the room.

After taking a day off to recover from post-match fatigue, the Juventus players were back on the training ground on Monday morning. They immediately commenced their preparations for their opening Champions League group game against Malmo, scheduled to be played on the evening of the following day.

First and foremost, the players attended a team meeting chaired by Coach Allegri at 9:00 AM, just after arriving at the training ground. Most of them listened attentively as Coach Allegri explained the tactics for the game against Malmo. As for those like Zachary, Evra, and Morata, who couldn't understand Italian, they just had to swallow their frustration and continue pretending to comprehend the coach's words throughout the session.

Fortunately, the coach's address ended after just an hour and thus saved the non-Italian speakers from their long spell of boredom. Like the rest of their teammates, they were also excited as they waited for the coach to read out the match squad for the following day's game.

"These will be our starting eleven for the game against Malmo tomorrow night," the coach stated with a smile as the big screen behind him lit up to display the names of the players that had made his match squad. "Gianluigi Buffon will be in goal. In defense, we'll utilize three defenders. They are Giorgio

Chiellini, Leonardo Bonucci, and Martín Cáceres. Our three central midfielders will be Claudio Marchisio, Arturo Vidal, and Zachary Bemba. Then, on the flanks, we'll go with Patrice Evra and Stephan Lichtsteiner to complete our midfield of five."

"Lastly," the coach continued after a slight pause, "Fernando Llorente and Carlos Tévez will play on our striking line to complete our 3-5-2 formation. That's it for the starting eleven. Any questions?" He glanced around.

The players remained silent in response.

"Moving on," the coach said, "On the bench, we'll have Marco Storari, Angelo Ogbonna, Rômulo, Andrea Pirlo, Kingsley Coman, Sebastian Giovinco, and Álvaro Morata. That's it for the match squad. Any questions?"

"None at all, coach," the players replied almost in unison.

Coach Allegri nodded. "Since we're all on the same page, let's head out onto the training turfs and start our practice. We all have to do our best as we only have a few hours to go through the drills to prepare us for tomorrow night's game. Clear?"

"Clear," the players replied.

"Then, let's move immediately." The coach clapped his hands to emphasize his words. "I want you on the training ground, ready for training in ten minutes. We don't have time to waste."

Chapter 455: Coach Trombetta's Advice
Zachary's spirits were flying high for the rest of the day. He was ecstatic after making Coach Allegri's starting eleven for the following day's Champion's League against Malmo. His energy and motivation levels were at the best they had ever been as he went through the intensive team drills on the training ground that day.

He was more hardworking than ever and didn't stop running during the sessions to prepare for the game. He rushed at the defenders like a maniac, executed sliding tackles like a reincarnation of Sergio Ramos, and even leaped high on several occasions to win aerial duels in midfield. His intent was to show and convince the coaches that they hadn't made a wrong decision by including him in the match squad.

"Zachary! Come here for a moment." Coach Trombetta yelled from the sidelines right after Zachary executed another sliding tackle to win the ball from Sebastian Giovinco on the training ground.

Zachary's heartbeat accelerated as he turned to face the coaches watching him from the touchline. His thoughts raced at the speed of light as he wondered whether he had committed any mistake during the six-vs-six team drill. Otherwise, why would the coaches go out of their way to call him to the sidelines? He was confused and even forgot to jog to the sidelines after hearing the summon by the coaches.

"Zachary! Why are you just standing there?" Coach Trombetta yelled again. "Come here, and let's talk for a minute."

Zachary didn't dare dilly-dally any longer. He raced towards the sidelines with all the haste he could muster and stood before the coaches in a matter of seconds.

Coach Trombetta exchanged a meaningful glance with Coach Allegri before placing his hand on Zachary's shoulder. "Zachary!" He said as his tone softened. "We need you to understand that you'll play as an attacking midfielder behind the strikers in the game tomorrow night. You'll be the pivot that links up play from the midfield to our two forwards. Do you know what that means?"

Zachary nodded and said, "It means I must constantly receive passes from my fellow teammates and supply them to the strikers as quickly as possible. I must also remain creative on the field of play to spot perfect opportunities to create clear goal-scoring chances for the strikers. That's my role as an attacking midfielder on the field of play."

"Good." Coach Trombetta nodded as a smile outlined his face. "I'm glad you have a good grasp of your roles on the pitch. But I still have to bring to your attention that there's one dimension still missing from your playing style."

Zachary raised a brow as he locked gazes with the assistant coach. "What is it?" He asked.

"Efficiency," Coach Trombetta replied with a smile.

"Efficiency!" Zachary raised a brow as he couldn't comprehend the assistant coach's words. His passing was fluid, and he could easily find his teammates during crucial game moments. How could he not be efficient?

Coach Trombetta chuckled after noticing his expression. "Let me explain," he said. "You'll play as an advanced playmaker against Malmo tomorrow night. That means you will essentially serve as the offensive pivot of the team in charge of reading the opposing defense in order to deliver defense-splitting passes to the strikers. You only have to create good shooting and goal-scoring opportunities by utilizing your superior vision, control, and technical skill. Isn't that so, Zachary?"

"Yes," Zachary replied.

"Now, let me explain why we find your playing style inefficient," the assistant coach continued. "For instance, you have been all over the pitch, executing sliding tackles and winning aerial duels during today's training. But I want you to ask yourself: Do you really need to do all that work on the field?" The coach glanced at Zachary intently.

In turn, Zachary didn't know how to respond. He remained silent and waited for the assistant coach's ensuing words.

Coach Trombetta sighed and continued, "In truth, you don't need to do all the hard work of tackling and winning aerial duels if you're the attacking pivot of the team. You even don't need to run constantly off the ball. Instead, you can choose to conserve energy and remain alert by observing and analyzing everything around you. You remain patient and choose a strategic position for yourself on the pitch. Then, you wait and continue observing and assessing. And when you finally spot the right opportunity, you unleash your burst of skills onto the opponents. You create a perfect goal-scoring chance with a pass, a cross, or a well-timed dribble. That's the way of an effective attacking pivot. Do you get what I'm saying, Zachary?"

"Yes, I do," Zachary responded. "So, I should limit my running in the game tomorrow and only aim to create opportunities for the team. Is that it?"

"That's basically the gist of it," Coach Trombetta replied. "I know that you were used to playing in a weaker team, where you had to do most of the work to help your teammates win. But we don't require you to continue playing like that here at Juventus. We have world-class defensive midfielders and defenders to handle the defensive side of the game here at the club. They have all the qualities to win the ball by executing tackles or leaping high to win aerial duels. They can handle defensive tasks pretty well to ensure we don't concede goals. As for you, an attacking pivot, you don't have to involve yourself in their business unless the coach tells you otherwise. On most occasions, you only have to receive the ball from them and create opportunities at just the right moment. That's all we need from you. Understand?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary replied, nodding. "I'll follow your instructions during the game tomorrow. Thank you for your advice."

"Good," Coach Trombetta said, smiling. "If you get time, you can watch some videos of Lionel Messi or Zinedine Zidane in action. Try to analyze how they behave when they are not on the ball, and you'll be able to understand our advice better. Okay?"

"Okay, I'll do that later today, after training," Zachary responded.

"Great," Coach Trombetta said. "You can return to training now. But keep in mind what I have just said as you train with your teammates."

"Aye, coach," Zachary responded before jogging back onto the pitch to recommence his training with his teammates. He was ready to incorporate the coach's advice into his playing style, starting right then.

Chapter 456: The 2014–15 UEFA Champions League Serial Challenge

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After training that day, Zachary boarded Angelo's Citroen and quickly returned to his room at the J Hotel for the night. He was eager to wash up and head to bed early so he could be fresh for the game the following day. But just after he closed the door behind him and stepped into his comfy living quarters, a system notification immediately rang within his mind.

"DING"

"The system has detected that the user is now a part of Juventus' 2014–15 UEFA Champions League squad," the system AI's apathetic voice sounded in his mind. "Conditions for the 2014–15 UEFA

Champions League long-term serial challenge have been met, and the respective system mission initiated successfully."

"Does the user wish to view the details of the mission right away?"

"Yes, please," Zachary replied almost instantaneously. "Bring up the details of the mission right away."

"Command received," said the system AI as the all-familiar translucent crystal-like display manifested before Zachary. "Mission details have been displayed on the interface."

"Great," Zachary said as he tossed the gym bag containing his training gear to the side. Without further ado, he settled on the cozy and wide bed in the hotel room and began perusing the information displayed on the system interface.

GOAT MISSIONS

#NEW MISSION: 2014–15 UEFA Champions League Serial Challenge

->The system has detected that the user is part of Juventus' 2014–15 UEFA Champions League squad. The system has designed an associated mission for the tournament.

->The user needs to accept the mission first to stand a chance of winning rewards after completing the milestones below.

*Milestone 1: Play over 75% of the fixtures of the 2014–15 UEFA Champions League for Juventus.

*Milestone 2: Help Juventus qualify as number one (team with most points) from the group to the round-of-sixteen stage of the 2014–15 UEFA Champions League tournament.

*Milestone 3: Help Juventus qualify for the quarter-finals stage of the 2014–15 UEFA Champions League tournament.

*Milestone 4: Help Juventus qualify for the semi-finals stage of the 2014–15 UEFA Champions League tournament.

*Milestone 5: Help Juventus qualify for the 2014–15 UEFA Champions League finals.

*Milestone 6: Help Juventus overcome all odds and become the champions of the 2014–15 UEFA Champions League tournament.

*Milestone 7: Provide the most assists in the 2014–15 UEFA Champions League tournament while playing for Juventus.

*Milestone 8: Become the top scorer of the 2014–15 UEFA Champions League tournament while playing for Juventus.

*Milestone 9: Score eighteen or more goals to break the individual goal-scoring record in a single UEFA Champions League season convincingly (The system will not consider penalties converted as part of the user's overall goal tally at the end of the tournament for this specific milestone).

*Rewards:

->Milestone 1 completion reward: 2,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 2 completion reward: 5,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 3 completion reward: 10,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 4 completion reward: 30,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 5 completion reward: 40,000 Juju Points

->Milestone 6 completion reward: 200,000 Juju Points

->Milestone 7 completion reward: 70,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 8 completion reward: 100,000 Juju-points

->Milestone 9 completion reward: A dosage of an SS-grade vitality-enhancing elixir.

NB: There will be additional rewards if the user realizes any other milestones that can unlock hidden missions.

->The user can choose not to accept the mission.

*Accept *Reject

*Punishment if the user doesn't realize any of the milestones at the end of the tournament: Minus 150,000 Juju points.

*After accepting the mission, the user has to complete at least one milestone before the tournament ends to escape the penalty.

*Remarks: Consistency, coupled with the occasional breaking of records, is the straight way to the zenith of greatness in any sport. Additionally, the user must understand that a champion is one who is remembered by a generation, but a legend or a GOAT is one who is never forgotten across generations.

Zachary breathed in deeply to calm himself down after perusing the contents displayed on the interface. He was in a bit of an agitated mood, especially after his eyes took in the SS-grade vitality-enhancing elixir that was the reward for the ninth mission milestone. He was well aware that he would be able to elevate his attributes by a level or two within a short period if he could obtain such a prize from the system.

But the crucial point to consider was: Could he overcome all odds and score more than seventeen goals to break Cristiano Ronaldo's goal-scoring record in a single season? Could he achieve such a feat without including penalties into his goal tally at the end of the tournament?

After a few moments of introspection, Zachary realized that he would have to play like a freak of nature and, at the same time, become lucky on several occasions to score such a number of goals in a single UEFA Champions League season. He would have to bag at least two goals for Juventus in most Champions League fixtures if he wished to stand a chance to achieve such a lofty objective. That was the only way he would be sure to create history and break Cristiano Ronaldo's single-season goal-scoring record.

"I can only take things slow," Zachary resolved. "I must focus on achieving results in individual matches rather than setting almost impossible goals."

All that mattered for Zachary at the moment was to establish himself and seal his place within the Juventus starting eleven. He wished to play his heart out on the field and convince the coaches and the fans of his ability. He yearned to become a star — a household name in the whole of Turin as soon as possible. And only then would he begin focusing on battling it out with the other generational greats in the football world.

"Bzzt Bzzzt! Bzzt Bzzzt!"

Zachary's phone vibrated from within his trouser pocket just as he was still musing about the new system mission. He immediately fished it out and glanced at the screen. The next moment, his spirits lifted as he realized the call was from Emily, his considerate and ever-caring agent.

"Hello, Emily," he spoke into the phone after pressing the accept button. "It has been long since we talked. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing okay," Emily replied from the other end of the line. "How's life at Juventus? Are you settling in well?"

"I'm doing fine at the club," Zachary replied, his tone laced with a tinge of unconcealable pride. "I'm in the starting eleven for Juventus' Champions League game against Malmo tomorrow."

"Oh, my!" Emily exclaimed, her voice rising up a notch. "Congrats. I'm happy for you. We should maybe meet up and celebrate."

"Not a chance," Zachary responded without mincing words. "I have to go to bed early today. I don't wish to doze off during the game tomorrow."

Emily chuckled. "There's no need to get all serious. I was only joking. By the way, I'm already here in Turin with Kristin, John Hansen - a cameraman and video editor I hired, Coach Bjørn Peters, and his wife. They have completed all necessary procedures and are ready to join your team and start working."

"Oh, finally," Zachary remarked. "Say hi to them for me."

There was a few seconds of silence at the other end of the line before Emily spoke again. "How should I arrange them?"

"Arrange them in a hotel for the moment," Zachary instructed. "We can slowly sort out their living provisions after my schedule opens up."

"Okay," Emily readily agreed. "That aside, can you get us tickets for the game tomorrow? Or should we go ahead and buy for ourselves?"

"Of course, I'll get you the tickets for the game," Zachary responded. "I have ten with me here. Angelo can deliver them to you tomorrow morning."

"That's great," Emily said. "Thanks."

"You're welcome," Zachary replied. "By the way, Camilla alerted me that Audi wants to renew my endorsement contract. Have you had from them yet?"

"Yes, I have. The Audi representatives contacted me last week, wanting to renew your contract as soon as possible. But I decided to ignore them for the time being as I'm aware that you're busy settling into your new team. Moreover, they were not the only ones. The Nike people also contacted me about a contract extension, while the Puma representatives want to hijack the endorsement deal and bring you over to their side. But, as I said, I'll continue turning a blind eye to all their offers until I'm sure you've settled down in Turin."

"I think that's a great plan," Zachary commended. "We can wait until I start performing well in the Serie A before negotiating with them. That should elevate our bargaining power by at least a level or two during negotiations."

"Exactly, my plan," Emily confirmed. "I want to get better deals for you this time around. You only need to perform on the pitch to ease the tasks on my side."

Zachary chuckled and continued chatting with Emily for a few more minutes. They talked about several issues concerning his career, including endorsement deals, training plans, personal trainers, and the

salary structure of employees, among other things. After exhausting all topics, they said their goodbyes and ended their long phone conversation.

Zachary immediately rose from the bed, undressed, and entered the shower. He spent a few minutes cleaning up before settling on his reading table to watch match videos and highlights on his laptop.

He put extra emphasis on studying how famous playmakers, including Zinedine Zidane and Lionel Messi, behaved while off the ball. He meticulously analyzed their playing styles for an hour or two before jumping into bed and entering the sweet and welcoming slumberland. He had done all he could to prepare for the game against Malmo. What remained was for him to step onto the pitch and play his heart out for Juventus.

Chapter 457 Champions League Match Day

Tuesday, September 16, 2014.

Juventus Stadium, Turin, Italy.

The sunset on the western horizon of Turin wasn't as captivating as usual that day. Tumultuous, dark, and ragged clouds quickly closed in and filled the sky above to blanket the brilliance of the setting sun. Before long, they assembled over the city and formed a thick, grey canopy that released a sudden shower that caught many of the folks in Turin by surprise.

The most affected by the weather were the thousands of fans queuing at the gates of the Juventus Stadium. Their clothes were soon soaking wet as they braved the rain with the intent of quickly entering the stadium to watch their football club's first Champions League match that season.

"Damn it! This rain is going to mess things up big time." John Hansen cursed out as he joined the long queue at the gates of the Juventus stadium. Accompanying him were Zachary's acquaintances, including Angelo Mattiello, Emily, Kristin, Coach Bjørn Peters, and his wife. They had all decided to watch the match together as a group after receiving the rare match tickets from Zachary.

"Honestly, I don't mind this slight drizzle," Emily remarked from her position behind John Hansen in the queue. "I wish it continues raining the entire night." For that match, the agent had gone all out to support her client by donning a Juventus number 10 jersey with Zachary's name on the back. She had even painted the Juventus flag on one side of her face to look like the most enthusiastic fan girl, heading into the stadium to watch Juventus' Champions League game against Malmo football club.

"Emily!" Kristin, Zachary's publicity secretary, chimed in after hearing Emily's remark. "Care to share why you don't mind the rain? For me, I find it quite annoying during matches." She was also in a Juventus number 10 shirt that matched her tight denim jeans to emphasize her gorgeous and lithe figure.

Emily smiled mysteriously after hearing Kristin's question. "Have you all forgotten that Zachary tends to perform well during the rain? He is always unstoppable during rainy weather."

"Ohhh, you're totally right," John Hansen agreed. "I remember Rosenborg's Europa League home game against Lyon last season. It was literally raining cats and dogs on that day, with limited visibility on the pitch. Other players struggled to find their rhythm, but Zachary was not affected and played like a force of nature during that game. He was all over the pitch, dribbling and executing tackles. He even scored twice."

"That was surely a night to remember," Coach Bjørn Peters supplied with a chuckle. "During that game, I thought Zachary could even compete with the best footballers in the world. His creativity, versatility, and work ethic were all out of this world. He did everything possible to ensure that Rosenborg won the game, and I think that was the day the fans in Trondheim gave him the nickname - the Nemesis of Lyon."

"Now, do you get my point?" Emily asked. "Rain is always good for Zachary. I have a gut feeling that he will surprise us tonight."

John Hansen nodded and returned his focus to his surroundings. His heart raced with anticipation as his eyes feasted on the enthusiastic crowd of football supporters donning Juventus' black and white colors. They seemed not to mind the drizzle as they moved forward in the messy queue of humans before gradually disappearing into the stadium gates.

At that moment, he realized that Turin's football community was overly enthusiastic and supportive of their local football club. The Italian supporters were willing to turn up in droves even when their team was facing off against a relatively small club like Malmo. They were, without a doubt, much better supporters than the Norwegians he was used to in Trondheim.

"Thank God that Zachary got us tickets," John Hansen remarked, turning his attention back to his colleagues. "Otherwise, we might not have found any tickets for sale on the market yesterday evening."

"That's true," Angelo Mattiello, Zachary's interpreter, confirmed. "I highly doubt that you guys would have found any tickets on the open market. You would have had better hope trying to freeze hell instead."

officials and gained the right of access to the stadium without much hustle. They 16:46

soon went through the metal detectors and other rigorous security checks before John chuckled and asked, "Do you think the players of both teams have already arrived?"

"I think they are already inside the stadium, going through their pre-match warm-

ups," Angelo answered as he moved forward in the line and approached the gates. "They should have arrived like thirty minutes ago. It's almost our turn to enter, guys. Prepare your tickets."

The rest nodded and fished their tickets out of their pockets. When their group finally arrived before the busy gates a short while later, they presented them to the officials and gained the right of access to the stadium without much hustle. They soon went through the metal detectors and other rigorous security checks before finally setting foot into the famous stadium.

"The atmosphere around here is quite electrifying." John Hansen remarked as he followed his colleagues, heading further into the stands. He was already in love with the ever-vocal crowd that seemed to give life to the stadium.

"You haven't seen anything yet," Angelo said, grinning. "Wait for Juventus to reach the semi-final or the final of the Coppa Italia. You'll be surprised by the enthusiasm of Italian football fans."

Hansen smiled and continued observing everything around him while moving towards his seat in the stands. His eyes automatically took in the singing group of fans behind one of the goals before his gaze settled on the players of both teams warming up on the field. At that moment, he finally noticed the visage of Zachary, who was going through a shuttle run routine with the rest of his teammates.

The young playmaker didn't seem to mind the slight drizzle as he followed the coach's instructions to warm up his body. He was the pure definition of a focused player as he cut through the rain repeatedly on one side of the pitch.

"You said that Zachary is on the starting line-up?" He asked Emily, who was walking a step ahead of him.

"Yes, he is," Emily replied, raising her voice to make herself heard over the din in the stadium.

"Excellent!" Hansen grinned. "I can't wait to watch him perform his magic on the pitch. Hopefully, he won't disappoint us this time around."

"He won't," Emily replied confidently. "Have you forgotten that the rain hasn't stopped yet?"

Hansen chuckled and took his seat in the stands along with the rest of the members of their group. They soon blended well into the rest of the crowd as they waited for the game to commence.

Zachary was almost in autopilot mode as he went through the motions of the pre-

match dynamic warm-up. He completed all the routines without committing a single error before returning to the dressing room to put on his match gear.

He quickly changed into his striped white and black number 10 Juventus jersey before donning his stockings and stepping into his sleek and green Nike Mercurial Superfly boots. He tied his shoelaces and then rose up from his seat, finally ready to step onto the field of play for the game.

"Zachary!" Maurizio Trombetta, the assistant coach in charge of the first team, called out while approaching his position. "How are you feeling today?"

"I feel fine," Zachary responded.

"Are you ready to show those boys from Sweden how we do it here in Turin?"

"Yes, of course. I can't wait for the match to begin."

"I like your confidence." Coach Trombetta nodded and patted Zachary's shoulder. "Do you still recall our advice to you during training yesterday?"

Zachary nodded and said, "I'm to limit my running off the ball and only focus on creating goal-scoring chances for the team. In other words, I have to conserve my energy expenditure and utilize my burst of skills at the most opportune moment."

"Good." Coach Trombetta smiled, patting Zachary's back again. "Try your best to follow that advice during the game today, and you'll soon realize how easy football can be. Okay?"

"Okay," Zachary confirmed.

Coach Trombetta smiled and said, "I'm looking forward to your performance today. Do your best so that you won't have any regrets after stepping off the pitch." Without saying any more needless words, he stepped away to join the rest of the coaches in the far corner of the dressing room.

Zachary remained standing in one spot as his anticipation for the match rose above and beyond the skies of Turin within seconds. He immediately reminded himself to stay calm and soon ignored all the chatter from his teammates around him. He regulated his breathing and emptied his mind to achieve a peak state of extreme focus with familiar ease.

"Ragazzi!" A shout from Coach Allegri soon broke him out of his meditative state. "Il momento è adesso..."

Zachary didn't understand the coach's last-minute address before the game. But he still followed the example of his teammates after the head coach finished vocalizing the rapid monologue of Italian words.

He exchanged high fives with his coaches before stepping out of the dressing room and heading into the tunnel leading towards the field of play. His face was a pure portrayal of focus as he quietly traversed the already-familiar hallways of the Juventus Stadium. A short while later, he stood in the line of Juventus' starting eleven, ready to head into the pitch for the game.

At that moment, he was akin to a raging volcano, ready to erupt anytime. He could hardly contain his anticipation and desire to perform as he waited for the referees to give the go-ahead for the teams to march onto the field of play. He'd already resolved to play his heart out on the field or die trying since he didn't wish to continue wasting away on the substitutes bench during Juventus' upcoming matches.

Chapter 458: Evolving I*FWEEEEEEE*

Without minding the rain that had just increased in intensity over the past half an hour, the referee blew the whistle at exactly 8:45 PM. And without wasting time, he signaled the Juventus players to kick off the game.

Carlos Tévez immediately went into action. He raised his leg and unleashed a simple pass from the center spot back into his midfield. He found Zachary Bemba to kick-start Juventus' Champions League opening game against Malmö that evening.

Zachary controlled the ball with ease at the edge of the center circle. He didn't dilly-dally and immediately flicked it back to Claudio Marchisio, his counterpart, positioned just a few yards behind him in midfield. And without losing a moment, he sprinted into space towards the other side of the pitch in search of a strategic position within Malmö's half.

Marchisio, on his part, easily connected with Zachary's pass at the border of the middle third. Before any opponents could close him down, he kicked it towards Arturo Vidal, his other counterpart in central midfield, to kick-start a long period of slow but steady possessive football for Juventus.

For the next few minutes, the Old Lady players arrayed themselves into a 3-5-2 formation that afforded them considerable numerical and tactical advantages within the midfield and on the flanks. By the 10th minute, they were already in control of the game, showcasing their much more refined tactical prowess and organization as a unit. They were far more creative as they went against the Malmö players arrayed in a 5-3-2 formation.

In particular, Claudio Marchisio and Arturo Vidal, the two central midfielders, coordinated well with the three defenders to dominate possession on the field of play. The two midfielders were constantly in motion within the middle and defensive thirds, forming strategic triangles while anticipating, receiving, and releasing passes. Their off-ball runs were well-timed and distinctively confusing, allowing them to catch the seemingly helpless Malmö midfielders off guard on several occasions. Additionally, their vision while on the ball was the best of the best. Whenever there was an opportunity, they would release the two wing-backs with pinpoint passes to initiate waves of attacks on Malmö's defense through the flanks. And in such a manner, they managed to create the first goal-scoring chance for Juventus in the 11th minute.

After sliding in wholesale to win the ball from an opposing midfielder, Arturo Vidal quickly picked himself from the ground before squaring a pass to Claudio Marchisio, his counterpart in central midfield. The latter chose not to waste time on the ball and immediately unleashed a lofted pass to find Patrice Evra on the left flank.

Patrice Evra was as sharp as ever. He accelerated and hit top speed within seconds. He raced towards the other half like a bullet just-fired out of a sniper muzzle and easily beat an opposing wing-back by exchanging a couple of one-twos with Zachary, who had made himself available in the midfield. The wing-back then continued his mad dash along the touchline and soon approached the border of the final third. Before the opponents could close him down, he unleashed a lofted and teasing cross towards the box.

Whoosh!

Both Fernando Llorente and Carlos Tévez, the two Juventus strikers, immediately went into action and raced into the box. They timed their runs to perfection and soon battled the Malmö center-backs for aerial superiority. They elicited a wave of cheering around the stadium as they leaped high to connect with the incoming cross.

Unfortunately, Erik Berg, Malmö's tall center back, managed to get to the ball first and cleared it out of play for a corner kick. The Swedish defender's efforts allowed his team to avoid conceding a goal during the 12th minute, thus eliciting a round of applause from the visiting Malmö supporters.

FWEEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle and pointed toward the corner flag. On cue, the players of both teams began flooding into Malmö's box while Patrice Evra headed towards the corner spot to take the corner

kick. A short while later, the referee finished organizing the players and blew the whistle to signal the taking of the corner kick.

Patrice Evra immediately went into action. He blasted the ball with his left boot and sent it on a lofted trajectory towards the box. His technique was almost textbook perfect, and the corner ball found one of his teammates in the box. Unsurprisingly, that teammate was one of the tallest players on the pitch, named Zachary Bemba.

Chance!

It was the perfect chance for Juventus to test Malmö's goalkeeper, and Zachary reacted immediately. He leaped high and utilized his tall physique to outwit Filip Helander, one of Malmö's three center-backs, in an aerial battle close to the far post. He towered high above the opponent and angled his head to direct the ball towards the goal.

His heading technique was without fault, but his efforts didn't bear fruit. Robin Olsen, Malmö's keeper, was alert. The number one reacted instinctively and threw himself at the incoming ball. He blocked it with his fists to send it out of play for another Juventus corner kick. His acrobatic efforts had managed to save his team from conceding an opening goal in the 14th minute.

"Damn it," Zachary could not help but mutter a curse under his breath after failing to score. He could only place his hands at the back of his head as he watched the ball bouncing out of play.

In the stands: Angelo Mattiello almost couldn't believe his eyes after witnessing the save made by Malmö's keeper. His mouth was agape as he couldn't understand how the ball had failed to make its way into the back of the net. He was just as confused as the rest of the Juventus fans after failing to understand how the keeper could save the ball headed from almost point-blank range.

"That was a perfect save from Robin Olsen, Malmö's keeper," Angelo heard the commentator say in Italian. "Zachary Bemba had done everything perfectly to beat his marker and direct the corner ball towards the inside of the post. But Olsen's almost inhuman reactions allowed him to deny Juventus another chance to bag the opening goal during the 14th minute of this Champions League fixture for Juventus. In my books, the number one already qualifies to become Malmö's best player during the game's opening minutes."

"Indeed, Olsen was quite impressive on that occasion," the co-commentator chimed in. "But let's discuss Zachary Bemba, the man who was very close to scoring just now. How do you rate his performance so far?"

"Just so-so," the principal commentator replied. "He hasn't been hardworking as usual during the opening ten minutes, and he has barely been on the ball. He has been almost invisible on the field of play and hasn't impacted the game, except a minute ago when he was about to score from the corner kick. He's like a pedestrian on the field, and in my books, he's by far Juventus' worst player in the opening minutes."

"That's a harsh judgment," the co-commentator said. "But I have to agree with you. I also haven't seen the Zachary of last season during this game. And I'm guessing that Coach Allegri might take him off the field if he doesn't start working hard off the ball to improve his impact on the game within the next few minutes."

"True," the principal commentator concurred. "Let's return our focus to the field of play where Juventus is about to take another corner kick. The referee has finished arranging the players in the box, and Patrice Evra takes the corner. He sends a powerful cross towards the far post. But alas, Robin Olsen, Malmö's goalkeeper, reads the situation well and leaps high to snatch the ball out of the air. His teammates can take a breather as it's a goal kick for Malmö."

Chapter 459: Evolving II Zachary positioned himself strategically close to the center circle while waiting for the opposing keeper to take the goal kick. Even in the rain, his breathing was steady as he hadn't made a lot of runs during the opening fifteen minutes.

Obviously, he'd followed Coach Trombetta's advice and remained quiet and almost inconspicuous on the field of play. He had chosen to conserve energy while assessing and studying the opponents in a bid to uncover their weaknesses. He was also busy strategizing how to break them when an opportune moment presented itself. He was just like an assassin, waiting in the dark for the perfect opportunity to unleash his burst of skills and destroy the enemy.

A few seconds passed, and the Malmö goalkeeper took the goal kick. He smashed the ball, sending it far away, towards Juventus' half. He was obviously hoping to find one of his forwards or attacking midfielders to initiate a rare wave of attack for Malmö. But his efforts were rendered fruitless by Arturo Vidal, Juventus' aggressive and highly gifted defensive-minded midfielder.

Vidal outmuscled an opposing midfielder and pushed off the ground to intercept the ball with his head. He won the aerial duel and directed the ball towards the right flank, where Stephan Lichtsteiner, the wing-back dubbed the Swiss Express, was lurking.

Whoosh!

Zachary immediately ran into an unmarked pocket of space close to the centerline on the right flank as Stephan Lichtsteiner connected with the ball from Vidal. His almost-instantaneous run allowed him to escape from the opposing midfielders marking him, and he used his body language to reveal that he wanted the ball. He didn't call out his teammate's name but just made himself available, hoping for a quick pass from Stephan Lichtsteiner.

Stephan Lichtsteiner's vision and technical abilities were as impressive as ever. He skipped past an opponent with his first touch on the ball before threading the ball through the gaps in-between the opponents to find Zachary.

Zachary, on his part, had already resolved that it was the perfect moment to attack when he connected with the ball from Stephan. He had finished his analysis and was ready to unleash his skills and beat the opponents.

He spun around with the ball glued to his left boot and raced towards the other side of the pitch. In the meantime, his impressive spatial awareness worked wonders, and his sharp mind mapped out the positions of nearby teammates as he dribbled the ball forward.

A series of observations and assessments were initiated and completed in a flash within Zachary's enhanced mind. He noted that Carlos Tévez was running ahead on his right, whereas Fernando Llorente, the other striker, had opened himself up by sprinting into a pocket of space toward the left side of Malmö's box. Zachary's eyes continued darting around, and he also spotted the two wing-backs - Patrice Evra and Stephan Lichtsteiner, dashing along the touchline, heading deeper into Malmö's half.

It was surprising to Zachary when he realized that most of his teammates had come alive when he was on the ball. All their runs were well-timed — and if one happened to observe the field from above, one would notice that all the attacking players for Juventus had already reacted to Zachary moving the ball forward. But the realization didn't stop Zachary from focusing on the task at hand. He skipped past another opponent with swift and tricky side steps and continued bearing down on Malmö box like a predator on the hunt.

He was waiting for the right moment to pass to his teammates and release them towards the goal. He was holding on to the ball, hoping to draw the defenders out of their position so that he could free up space upfront and make it easy for the strikers to score.

But surprisingly, the opposing center backs held their positions and kept an eye on Fernando Llorente and Carlos Tévez. As for the two Malmö defensive wing-backs — they also stood their ground within their defensive shape to guard against Patrice Evra and Stephan Lichtsteiner, the two Juventus men sprinting towards the box from the sidelines.

It was as if all the Malmö players had forgotten that Zachary was a good dribbler. They only delegated Emil Forsberg, one of their defensive midfielders, to check his run through the middle.

"Here goes nothing."

Zachary smiled after assessing the situation ahead of him. He slowed down slightly while approaching the box to draw in the opponent. Then, he stepped over the ball once and leaned towards one side, seemingly as if he was about to break past Emil Forsberg on the right. But just suddenly, Zachary altered his center of gravity and exploded with speed on the left. He inched past the helpless defensive midfielder with his instantaneous acceleration and afforded himself a few yards of space to work with the ball.

He remained composed and prodded the ball forward with the tip of his boot while assessing the situation in the box. And when he judged that the angle was right, he pulled the trigger. The missile launcher juju worked its magic, and he blasted the ball from the edge of the 18-yard arc, sending it on a curling trajectory around the defenders and towards the goal. His powerful and well-placed shot found the top right corner and easily allowed him to beat the keeper and score Juventus' 1st goal for the night during the 17th minute.

"GOAL!" Zachary yelled at the top of his voice when he saw the ball nestle into the back of the net. He had done it. He had delivered and scored during his first Champions League appearance for Juventus.

It was as if he'd just unloaded a heavy weight off his shoulders, and he couldn't help but feel that the loud cheering of the Juventus fans was like music to his ears. He immediately tore through the rain, heading towards the touchline before sliding on his knees for a few yards to express his bubbly feelings.

He was almost on cloud nine as he had not disappointed his teammates and coaches when it mattered the most.

"Oh my goodness me!" The commentator's mellifluous voice boomed around the stadium as Zachary celebrated his goal with his teammates close to the corner flag. "What have I just witnessed? Zachary is back. He's back in the flesh and has just cut through Malmö's entire midfield and defense to score an outside-of-the-eighteen stunner for Juventus. What class! What composure! The goal is surely one for the record books."

"Indeed, that was one hell of a goal," the co-commentator remarked, trying his best to make himself heard over the din in the stadium. "The keeper couldn't do anything to save the situation due to the power and impressive curl on Zachary's shot. He could only watch on helplessly as the ball flashed by him and homed into the back of the net."

"I was also impressed by Juventus' teamwork during the attack leading to the goal," the co-commentator continued. "Both Fernando Llorente and Carlos Tévez, the two strikers, timed their runs well to draw most of the opposing defenders away from Zachary. They utilized their off-ball runs perfectly to confuse the defense and create space for Zachary to shoot."

"And don't forget Patrice Evra and Stephan Lichtsteiner," the principal commentator reminded. "The two wing backs were also rushing in from the flanks. Their runs also confused the defenders and created more time for Zachary on the ball. All in all, this was Juventus' attacking football at its best."

"Indeed," the co-commentator agreed. "But let's not forget to give credit where it's due. Zachary's skills were quite impressive during the attack. He easily dribbled past three opponents before smashing the ball into the back of the net to score Juventus' 1st goal for the night. That takes world-class ability and a spark of genius that nine out of ten professional players in the world today can't ignite. And I'm sure the Juventus executives must be grinning while watching this game. They didn't waste the 80 million they splashed out to acquire Zachary from Rosenborg."

"This goal changes the entire debate about Zachary," the principal commentator observed. "If he can score a few more like this one, we should start discussing whether he can make it into the list of top players in the world this year instead of wondering whether he'll be a flop at Juventus."

"Only that guy from ESPN thought that Zachary would become a flop," the co-commentator remarked. "What was his name again?"

"Charles Adams," the principal commentator replied with a chuckle. "Mark my words, Zachary will become a flop at Juventus. People won't stop laughing whenever they recall what he said. What was he thinking?"

"Who knows?"

The two commentators chuckled at that before returning their focus to the game. They were ready to provide commentary for the proceedings on the field of play after the restart of the game.

Chapter 460: Evolving III
The game continued after the goal celebrations. And without any surprise, the Juventus players continued dominating the proceedings on the pitch by relying on their steady and fluid passing. Their hard work and tactical abilities allowed them to hoard over 70% of ball possession while remaining solid and compact to deny Malmö any chance of launching a counterattack. Anyone watching the game could tell that the Old Lady was slowly sealing Malmö's fate of losing the game on that rainy night.

The players at the center of all Juventus' actions were the three central midfielders - Claudio Marchisio, Arturo Vidal, and Zachary Bemba. They all continued linking up play with the three defenders and the two wing-backs to execute Coach Allegri's game plan. Their creativity and tactical acuteness were obviously at the zenith of footballing standards whenever it mattered. And although their off-ball runs lacked any sense of urgency, they still managed to outplay Malmö in the midfield.

Zachary, on his part, was growing more and more comfortable within Juventus' tactical system as the game progressed. He started having more touches on the ball while executing more successful dribbles to beat the opponents within the middle and final thirds. The young playmaker soon became the true-blue attacking pivot for Juventus, and it didn't take long for him to create another clear goal-scoring chance for Juventus.

That time around, the attack began with Gianluigi Buffon's short goal-kick to Stephan Lichtsteiner, Juventus' right wing-back, during the 40th minute. After receiving the ball, Stephan acted with all the haste he could muster and passed into the midfield to find Claudio Marchisio. Claudio, in turn, worked quickly to skip past an opponent with a deft touch before finding Arturo Vidal on his left. Vidal also didn't waste a second controlling the ball before looking up once and threading the ball in-between two Malmö midfielders to find Zachary.

Juventus had upped the tempo within seconds, and of course, Zachary reacted with the same urgency while connecting with Vidal's pass. The young playmaker looped the ball over Enoch Kofi Adu, one of Malmö's two defensive midfielders, with his first touch to create a few yards for himself to work his magic. Then, he accelerated away from the beaten opponent and hit top speed within a few seconds.

He'd been conserving energy by remaining quiet and reserved in his style of play for a good fraction of the game. As a result, his stamina reserves were ample enough to support his monstrous burst of speed at that moment. He cut through the rain like a racing cheetah and continued bearing down on Malmö's half. He soon stepped into the final third, where he met a roadblock in the form of Emil Forsberg, Malmö's other defensive midfielder.

Emil Forsberg, on his part, was careful as he stepped forward to check Zachary's mad dash through the middle. He constantly reminded himself not to react to Zachary's fancy footwork and side-stepping feints as he closed down the young number-10. Obviously, Forsberg was highly focused on his role as a defensive midfielder and determined to stop the playmaker from beating him again. He was going all out to stop Zachary from initiating another deadly attack against his side.

But, of course, the determination to succeed at something was one thing, while the ability to achieve a purpose was a different factor. It wasn't a guarantee that every determined person would always realize their objectives. And that was what sealed Emil Forsberg's fate at that moment as he faced off against Zachary.

Zachary slowed down and stepped over the ball with his left leg, forcing Forsberg to lean slightly to the right. Then, Zachary abruptly switched his center of gravity and stepped over the ball with his right leg to compel the opponent to react and tilt to the left. His footwork was as smooth as moving clouds and flowing water, and he confused the defensive midfielder.

Forsberg, in turn, was out of options and could only react instinctively to the crisis. His posture was already a mess due to the lightning-fast left-to-right feints executed by the young playmaker. Thus, he

could only try his best to save the situation by stretching his leg to tackle the ball off the approaching Zachary's feet. And that was what further sealed his fate.

Whoosh!

Zachary fed the ball through Forsberg's legs to complete a stunning nutmeg before exploding with pace in anything but an instant. He circumvented the dazed and muddled defensive midfielder from the left and was soon accelerating towards the box like a bolt of lightning through the rain. He was on a straight course towards Malmö's goal.

Forsberg, on his part, didn't give up. He muttered a curse under his breath as he immediately tried to turn around and chase after Zachary. But Forsberg's abrupt 180-degree turn caused some more disorientation to his sense of balance, and the midfielder tumbled face-first to the ground. He was soon lying prone in the wet grass, watching Zachary speeding away from him. He was demoralized and defeated as he had failed to stop the cunning opponent.

"Zachary! Bemba! Zachary..."

The cheers around the Juventus stadium hit a thunderous zenith as Zachary approached Malmö's box at breakneck speed. He had already noticed his teammates, including the two strikers - Fernando Llorente and Carlos Tévez, running ahead of him. But that didn't stop him from holding on to the ball longer.

He had matured as a player and already developed into a lethal attacking midfielder. He understood that remaining composed and patient during crucial moments was vital when creating a goal-scoring chance. He knew he could draw the opposing defenders out of their positions if he didn't panic and held onto the ball longer. And if the opposing defenders chose not to bite and close him down, he could also go at it alone and fire at the goal as he had done when he scored the 1st goal. There were just that many options for him as long as he remained composed.

All considerations instantly flashed through Zachary's mind as he continued bearing down on Malmö's box. But just as he was about to consider going at it alone and trying his chances on goal, one of the Malmö center-backs closed him down.

Filip Helander was the man in question. He raced away from his position in Malmö's back-five and ran at Zachary like a raging bull. The center-back's face was contorted into a grotesque expression as if he wanted to murder Zachary on the field.

Zachary, of course, wasn't intimidated by the defender's aggressive approach. He assessed and analyzed his options within a flash as he slowed down before the arc of the 18-yard-box. His mind went into overdrive mode, and he considered unleashing a through-pass to Carlos Tévez. But Zachary dropped the notion the next moment after realizing that the striker was already in an offside position.

But that slight indecisiveness cost Zachary a lot of time on the ball. And before he could come up with a solution, Filip Helander was on him, trying to tackle the ball. The center-back executed an aggressive sliding tackle over the wet surface and went at Zachary like a deadly snake in the green grass. He seemed not to mind the risk of conceding a free kick and was only hell-bent on stopping Zachary from proceeding forward.

"Damn it!" Zachary mouthed a silent curse as he watched the dangerous tackle approaching him. His heartbeat accelerated as his instincts took over control of his body. He dug his boot under the ball and immediately leaped high and above the tackle.

Whoosh!

He could almost hear the wheels in his brain turning and churning as he descended back to the ground with the ball glued to his left boot. Before the other defenders could react and close him down, he accelerated and ran through the gap left by Filip Helander in Malmö's defensive line. He twisted and turned while making his way into the box, and in some uncanny way, he was soon one-on-one with the goalkeeper.

Robin Olsen, Malmö's keeper, did as any experienced goalie would do and ran out of goal to stop him. But Zachary remained composed and unleashed a simple chip over the approaching goalkeeper. His well-timed release allowed him to loop the ball over the keeper, and he found the back of the net again to score Juventus' second goal in the 41st minute.

"Oh my goodness me!" The Italian commentator shouted as Zachary raced towards the sidelines to celebrate the goal. "Zachary Bemba is on fire today. He has once again destroyed Malmö's entire defense and scored Juventus' second goal in the 41st minute. His dribbling skills are at an entirely different level when compared to the version of himself last season. What can I say? He's like a totally evolved player, and it's as if I'm watching a prime Ronaldinho on the field of play."

The co-commentator chuckled. "I'm sure Malmö didn't expect this version of Zachary while preparing for the game today. He is tearing them apart, and they can't do anything to retaliate. Look at what happened when Forsberg tried to stop him. The midfielder ended up on the ground, eating mud as he watched Zachary speeding away to score Juventus' 2nd goal."

"But I have to say that his play was a bit selfish during the attack," the commentator pointed out. "One has to wonder why he didn't pass to either Fernando Llorente or Carlos Tévez, who were obviously anticipating a pass from him. If he had failed to score, I'm sure Coach Allegri would have been on his case for failing to release the strikers on time."

"True," the co-commentator agreed. "But that's only an if. Zachary delivered once again and scored Juventus' second goal for the night. So, his selfishness is a non-factor so far."

"But, I'm sure that Llorente and Tévez must be fuming on the inside," the commentator said. "It's the second time he has chosen to go at it alone and score instead of passing to them."

"We don't know that," the co-commentator argued. "The strikers should also be glad that their team is winning. Remember that results are what matter in football. Had he not scored, they would have had a right to complain about him. But the point is that he managed to deliver. So, they can only choose to bury their frustrations within their hearts."
