

Legends 651

Chapter 651: Weakness II

Throughout the match, the players who had come up to mark him had maintained their distance and only came at him when he tried to get past them.

Additionally, instead of going for the ball, which would make it easier for him to dodge their tackles, they instead tried to insert themselves between him and the ball whenever he tried to push the ball past them.

While this could not completely stop him, it did slow him down... a lot.

Once he had been slowed down that much, the marker could then have a teammate join the press and steal the ball from Jason, or if there was no other choice, they would foul Jason instead.

All the goals scored had started with him, but they had all somehow ended up with him going down. In the first two, it wasn't clear as he had been fouled clearly, but on the third goal, it was very clear what his marker had done.

Thus, after that third goal, Jason had changed his playing style and had spent more time passing to a teammate and making decoy runs to waste his marker's energy instead of continuing to crack this tactic.

If he continued doing it ineffectively, other opponents would quickly notice this tactic and the games from today on would be very annoying.

'Not that they haven't already noticed,' he sighed again, covering his face with his palms, trying to stave off the fear that was rising in his heart.

He would never admit it audibly, but he was scared of becoming an average or a less than average player.

In his previous reality, he had become an injury prone player early on, which was why he avoided doing anything that could end up in a rough tackle.

If he was being honest, he was confident that whatever tactic was made to shut him out couldn't shut him out half the time.

If he went up against another player, fu*k whatever tactic the other guy was using, Jason could still find a way past, however, one can never predict human beings.

What if, in desperation, a defender made a very harsh tackle to take the ball and he ended up injuring Jason, opening the Pandora's box that was his injury proneness.

At worst, the defender would be given a red card and suffer a few match bans, but Jason's career could start a downward spiral from there.

Jason had experienced it once... he didn't want to experience it again.

'Never again,' he sighed.

{And Dybalaaaaaa!!!} The commentator's shouts threw Jason out of his thoughts.

{Dying minutes, game already in the bag, but he chooses to pile up the misery!}

{He makes it for Uventus!} the commentator said excitedly as Dybala ran down the sidelines in celebration.

At this point, the fans had had enough and some of them began to get up from their seats, making a beeline for the exit. They were done for the day and didn't want to wait any longer to see the game end even more unfavourably for them.

{The fans are getting up from their seats and beginning to leave. They think they've seen enough and I don't blame them}

{Udinese has been vastly below par today. After a quick triple within the first ten minutes of the game, the fans were expecting their players to at least get one back, but for the eighty minutes that followed, they saw absolutely nothing but half baked efforts and terrible shooting}

{The manager is going to have to go back to the drawing board after this because if his players keep putting out stinkers like this, they may very well be at the risk of relegation}

The Udinese manager winced at the commentator's words, after all, the man was right.

His team was mid-table, but they were in the bottom half, or more specifically, fourteenth on the table and thus were very much at the risk of relegation if they didn't hold on to their spot.

Before the match started, he was optimistic in holding Uventus to a draw or a narrow loss at worst. Never did he expect this kind of trashing after all the preparations he had made.

Annoyingly enough, his tactics definitely worked as he had been able to keep the Uventus team silent for most of the match. Out of the first three goals, two were set-pieces and one was a lucky rebound goal.

If not for the bad decisions made by his players at the beginning that ended with the red cad, things would have gone very differently... or so he believed.

Unfortunately, the situation was way gone past the talking stage and now he needed to find a way to ensure that his team could hold on to their position in the coming games.

Luckily for the Udinese manager, despite the Uventus team's attack coming back to life after Dybala's goal and a few attacks that just narrowly avoided the back of the net, the game ended at 4:0.

With the game over, the reporters quickly rushed out to prepare for the interviews and Jason soon found himself dragged into an interview.

"Uventus wins again today and quite easily at that. What are your thoughts about the game and what it means for Uventus's title run?" the reporter who was interviewing him asked.

"Uh, I wouldn't say it was easy, but it was definitely a comfortable win for us. They made a few costly mistakes that we managed to capitalize on pretty early, and the rest was well... history, as some would say," Jason replied the reporter.

"History indeed," the reporter nodded.

"Today was a bit of a quiet day for you on the scoreboard, Jason. You seemed to be struggling a bit going forward and some are even saying that Sanko had you in his pocket," the reporter said.

"Sanko? Sanko who?" Jason asked in confusion.

"The Udinese right back. His name is Sanko..." the reporter said hesitantly, clearly surprised that Jason didn't know the name of his marker.

"Oh, was that his name... I probably forgot, I'm not very good with names. Anyway... Uh, football is... see, I'm a human being. These kinds of things happen,"

"I wouldn't say he had me in my pocket, but yes he was definitely a tough opponent. All my markers are uh, they're professionals,"

"Today just happened to be one of those days when he was really on his groove and that was enough to keep me wary. If a door is shut very tight and I don't desperately need anything behind the door, then why keep banging on it, right?"

"With a our lead, what the team needed was control and if I kept going up against him and losing the ball, then things could get very ugly for us pretty quickly," Jason explained.

"Does that mean you're admitting that you couldn't get past Sanko?" the reporter asked immediately.

Chapter 652: Weakness III

A vein popped up on Jason's head at the reporter's question.

'Out of everything I said, that's what you want to take away? Like really?' annoyed thoughts filled his head, but what came out of his mouth was,

"No, what I said was, football is a team sport and the end point is to win by having more goals than the opponent,"

"Everyone has a part to play and today, mine didn't involve forcing a breakthrough on my flank by dribbling past my opponent," Jason gave a simple explanation, not bothering to waste any time explaining any more than that.

"Are we done here?" he asked after that, wanting to leave.

"Please, one more question," the reporter said hastily before Jason could turn away to leave.

"Despite not scoring or setting up your teammates today, you were involved in three of four goals scored by your team and those three were scored when you were on the pitch,"

"Before those goals were scored, you were fouled and the first time you were fouled, Jenkins was given a red card and sent off,"

"So what's your question?" Jason interjected, tired of the reporter's ramblings.

"Well apart from being a major decider of the game, the red card caused an outrage among the Udinese fans. There is also news that Udinese will be appealing for a removal of the ban as they said you fell too easily,"

"What are your thoughts about that?" the reporter laid out his question.

"... So... you're asking me if I dived?" Jason asked, his brow scrunched up in annoyed disbelief. He was about to open his mouth for a second time, but barely caught himself.

"... No comment," he finally said after a pause and then walked off.

It was expected that every so often, some reporters would try to get him to create a controversy as everyone knew that controversial news were what sold best in the media industry, but it was still annoying when it happened.

Someone trying to trick him into tripping up and saying something wrong was just a pain.

There was literally no question in what the reporter was asking, but rather it felt more like a ramble that was supposed to trigger him.

Unfortunately for the reporter, he wouldn't be getting any click bait from Jason today.

****3rd May 2021****

1:41 pm

The Uventus players had arrived back at Turin, but unlike usual when they would get a day off after their match, this time, they were back at the training center the day after their match against Udinese.

This was because of the Champions League semi finals second leg game against Madrid that was only two days away.

After the hard fought first leg that had ended with a draw, it was clear to Pirlo that there had to be some changes to the usual game plan if they wanted to secure a spot in the finals.

It was clear that Madrid was a tough opponent and even though the Uventus team had somehow managed to equalize the game in the dying minutes in the first leg, even securing the lead by away goal rule, it was not without excessive luck and effort.

Pirlo was not against putting in effort, but he could not afford to leave the game up to chance hence he had a lot of changes to make to the team's tactical setup and there was hardly enough time for the players to even prepare and get used to the new tactics he had come up with.

Hence why the players were at the training center instead of enjoying a day off.

In the cafeteria, Jason, Ronaldo, Mckennie, and Cuadrado sat at a table enjoying their lunch.

Mckennie and Cuadrado were talking about the charity dinner that was scheduled for later that week and Ronaldo was listening keenly while also saying a few words from time to time.

Jason however, seemed lost in thought and wasn't even aware of what they were talking about.

"Earth to Jason, hello?" Mckennie snapped his fingers in front of Jason's eyes after watching him play around in his food with his fork.

"Huh? Oh, uh, what?" Jason snapped back to reality with his thoughts interrupted.

"I was asking who your plus one to the event is man, what are you even thinking about anyway?" Mckennie asked.

"Oh, uh sorry, I was thinking about something else. I'm not sure about my plus one, haven't asked her," Jason shrugged.

"What are you thinking about anyway, you seem distracted since yesterday," Cuadrado noted.

"Yeah, even I noticed that," Ronaldo added.

"... Hah," Jason sighed.

"Well, I was just thinking about the last game," he said, sighing again.

"What about last game?" Ronaldo asked curiously, putting a spoonful of spinach into his mouth.

"Well, I didn't really perform well last game," Jason said, continuing to toy with his food.

"Man, whatchu talking about, you did okay last game," Mckennie rolled his eyes at Jason.

"Apart from not scoring any goals," Cuadrado added, unclear on what Jason meant by his words.

"Well, that is the word, I just did okay... kinda,"

"I couldn't do what I normally do, you know, breaking through on the flanks and all that," Jason said.

"Man, you know you can't go crazy in every game. You do that and you'll be like this man here... when he was in his prime," Mckennie laughed.

"Who is this kid, I'm still in my prime," Ronaldo scoffed confidently.

"Exactly," Cuadrado said and they all laughed.

"Don't worry, just keep working hard, you'll be okay," Ronaldo chuckled, putting another spoonful of spinach into his mouth.

"No man, that was against some... whatever that guy's name was,"

"If someone like him can keep me from doing what I normally do by just playing aggressively like that, what am I supposed to do when up against someone better,"

"We're up against Madrid next for god's sake!" Jason said, his voice rising a bit as he rubbed his brow.

"Okay woah, woah, woah, chill man, you sound like you're freaking out. Don't worry man, you've got the skills, you'll get over it," Mckennie chuckled.

Jason just rolled his eyes at Mckennie and turned back to his food.

'What did I even expect?' he scoffed at himself internally.

'He's right though, I need to calm down,' he thought as he realized that he seemed to be having a panic attack.

Chapter 653: Solution

'How pathetic, freaking out over something like this. I'm acting like a child,' Jason scoffed at himself.

"If you're having problems breaking through, then either you're doing it wrong or you have somewhere you need to improve," Ronaldo suddenly said.

"Huh?" Jason turned to Ronaldo.

"Which is it? Do you think you're doing it wrong or is there something you're not good enough at yet?" Ronaldo continued calmly.

"... Uh, well, I-uh... don't really know which one it is? I mean, I'm obviously not perfect, but I should be able to get past him in a different situation, but at the same time, I definitely have places I can improve in, like my playing style," Jason explained.

"Hmmm, okay, let's go back a little bit. What was the problem?" Ronaldo asked, his tone sounding nonchalant, but Jason wasn't paying attention to his tone.

"Okay, so, in that match, what my marker did was to maintain a distance close enough to hinder my movements, but far enough that I couldn't dash past him easily,"

"Literally pure zonal marking. If I tried to dash past him, he would just insert himself between me and the ball and hold me away. He never committed to a tackle unless I got too close myself and he was excessively aggressive as well,"

"Now, I don't mean to doubt his professionalism, but Udinese is a bottom mid-table team at best and a Serie B team at worst,"

"If I'm struggling because of this type of tactic when it is being used by someone playing for Udinese, what am I to do if I go up against a team that is way stronger than them?" Jason laid bare his troubles, explaining the problem.

"Hmm, okay. I see the problem," Ronaldo nodded thoughtfully.

"... To solve it, you'll need three things," Ronaldo continued after thinking for a while.

"Oh, this I want to hear," Mckennie reacted even faster than Jason. Even Cuadrado was all ears as advice from someone like Ronaldo was guaranteed to help any football player, even a goalkeeper.

"These guys," Ronaldo laughed.

"Anyway, three things. First one, watch the game, second, off the ball movements, third, use your teammates,"

"I'll explain each of them one by one," Ronaldo continued, noting the confusion on Jason's face.

"Starting with the first one, watching the game. I've noticed since a while ago that you don't watch the game, you watch the ball,"

"Only when the ball is coming forward and it seems like it's coming your way do you begin to move, other than that, you're mostly just standing there," he said.

"Well, what else am I supposed to do?" Jason asked, even more confused than before.

"Watch for opportunities and create them. Let me give you an example... would you say I'm a game changer? Someone who appears in the right places at the right time, or knows how to start and finish attacks in dire situations?" Ronaldo asked his audience.

"Yeah," Jason nodded.

"Definitely," Cuadrado echoed.

"That's for damn sure," McKennie replied as well.

"Next example, have you watched Messi play? I'm using him as an example because your playing style is more similar to his than mine," Ronaldo continued his explanation, speaking directly to Jason this time.

"Yes," Jason affirmed.

"Good, I'm guessing you've noticed not more than once that his eyes are always darting around the field. As long as the ball is far away from him, his head never stays in one place, but once the ball gets to him, he begins moving like a ghost,"

"You can't stop him and he moves himself and the ball around without so much as a glance in the direction he's moving the ball,"

"The reason he can do that is because he's already informed. He spends his time watching the game like he's an outsider, and in doing so, he sees a lot of things that others wouldn't see and with that he can create a chance using what he has seen,"

"So what you are going to learn is how to watch the game like that and then using what you've seen to create a situation where you wouldn't be stopped by your opponent," Ronaldo paused for a breather.

"I also do the same thing, but the way I use the information I have seen is a lot different from how a playmaker like Messi will use the information. You need to find a way to use the information for yourself,"

"The second thing you're going to have to work on is your off-the-ball movements. This is very important and is linked with the first thing I said. If your opponents have found a way to stop you when

you have the ball, you have to find the optimum position you have to be in when you want to receive the ball,"

"However, that's only part of it. With agility like yours, you can do something even better," Ronaldo's words got Jason at high alert.

"What?" he asked.

"You're American so you've watched those Americans play that thing they call football... even though they never actually kick the ball," Ronaldo asked Jason.

"Yes," Jason replied quickly, nodding.

"Then I'm sure you've seen how those receivers run and dodge their opponents before they receive the ball. You have a similar level of agility like those guys, so I was thinking that maybe you can find a way to make darting confusing runs like that that will make it very difficult for your markers to keep up with you when you start moving,"

"Actually it's just an idea. It will be very difficult to actually pull it off because not only will you have to perfectly time your runs so you avoid being offside, but you'll also have to have a very good teammate that understands your playing style and who can send the perfect passes you'll need. Also, running like that is very stamina draining, so like I said, it will be difficult," Ronaldo explained.

"Oh, that's a pretty interesting idea. Jason does have very high agility and can easily turn at high speeds," Mckennie said and Jason nodded his head, agreeing internally, after all, that was his only 'real' talent.

However, like Ronaldo had said, it would be terribly difficult to pull off and implement such a style of running into his gameplay.

Chapter 654: Discovery Requires Experimentation

"Finally, the third thing... Use your teammates," Ronaldo continued his explanation.

"Your teammates can do more than passing the ball to you and receiving the ball back. They can make decoy runs, provide screens to block your opponents, block your opponents' vision, and do many other things that can help you play better,"

"You'll have to find a way of being able to use them to escape any rough situations that can reduce your effectiveness,"

"In the end, football is a team game and you have to learn to play more as a team."

Ronaldo twisted open the cover of his water bottle and took a swig, but despite it being like he was done talking, Jason, Cuadrado, and Mckennie stayed quiet, waiting for something else and soon Ronaldo opened his mouth again.

"I've mentioned things I believe can help you to solve your problems, but like you can tell, this is a long-term fix,"

"These are not things you can instantly begin doing in the next game. How much you can develop in these things will affect your playing style and how far you can go,"

"You're still young, so now is the perfect time to start learning these things and I hope you can evolve into something better,"

"For now though, you either bulldoze your way through your marker or change how you play according to the manager's tactics," Ronaldo laughed and the others could not help joining in.

Despite laughing with the others, Jason was already in deep thought, his mind helping him to test out Ronaldo's advice and it didn't take him long to realize how much his playstyle could improve if he could improve in the aspects Ronaldo had pointed out.

"Thanks a lot man," Jason said after the laughter had quieted down.

"Okay. If you need any help with training, I'll help as well," Ronaldo nodded at him.

"I'll take you up on that," Jason smiled.

"We're already training together so we'll just add a few more training sessions," Ronaldo said, turning back to his food.

"Alright alright, enough of that. Let's get back to our original conversation," Mckennie butted in before Jason or Ronaldo could say anything else.

"Who's your plus one to the charity dinner man?" he asked Jason.

"Will it be that singer girl, Tems was that her name?" Cuadrado asked, curious.

"Or will it be some other girl you've been exchanging bedmatic skills with?" Mckennie smirked.

"Or maybe I have a girlfriend and will bring her along to the charity dinner," Jason chuckled, thinking about Adele.

'I'll have to call her to ask about this later,' he noted to himself silently.

"Or maybe I'm just single to stupor," he added and laughed.

"With that face, that would be more than disappointing," Mckennie scoffed.

"I'll do whatever I damn want with my face thank you very much," Jason scoffed right back at Mckennie.

"Don't mind the kid, he's just pained that his girl dumped him last month and now he's looking for his fellow broken hearted comrades," Cuadrado chimed in.

"Hey, you swore you wouldn't tell anyone!" Mckennie exclaimed, feeling betrayed.

"I did? What did I swear on?" Cuadrado smirked.

"... Man fu*k you," Mckennie scoffed and stood up from the table taking his empty food tray with him and storming off.

"Don't get your panties in a bunch man, I can introduce you to some fyn a** Colombian girls," Cuadrado called out to Mckennie.

Mckennie's footsteps halted immediately and he turned back,

"... You promise?" he asked, a leering smile beginning to appear on his face.

"Promise, I got hoes in different area codes my boy," Cuadrado said boisterously, smirking.

"My man!" Mckennie backtracked and dapped Cuadrado loudly, laughing.

Jason nudged Ronald and whispered, "That right there is a pimp and his customer,"

"Pfttttt- *cough!* *cough!*" The sudden laughter sent the water Ronaldo was drinking down the rough path.

"Why is this old man laughing? He's an even more legendary player than I am," Mckennie rolled his eyes at the coughing Ronaldo.

"*Cough!* Retired, Gio is the only one for me now," Ronaldo wheezed.

"Now that's a damn shame, but with a woman like that, it'd be criminal to look for something else," Cuadrado nodded to himself, full of respect and even Mckennie agreed.

Despite them having a penchant for playing around with girls, they only hung out with women who were also into that kind of lifestyle.

While not being blatant prostitution, the girls would get to enjoy a lot of things that they could normally not access and the guy would get to hit home base.

It was fun up to a point, but every player was always waiting for that one girl who could get him wrapped around her finger so tightly he couldn't get loose. Problem was they could never meet these kinds of girls with the company they kept and even if they did meet them, the kind of life they had lived so far would make them an insecure wreck.

There was almost no way out, they were already too far down the rabbit hole.

However, despite their situation, they were very aware... even more aware than the normal guys of when a girl was a "bad bit*h".

Their insecurities just didn't let them settle for a single teammate.

"Can we stop talking about girls and focus on how we're going to survive Madrid the day after tomorrow," Jason said as he stood up from the bench, his plate empty and his muscles twitching, eager to get on the grass and improve himself.

Ronaldo had given him the theoretical answer to his problem and now it was time for him to start working, after all... Discovery requires Experimentation.

"Let's go!" Ronaldo clapped his hands as he also stood up.

Dropping their trays on the counter, the four of them marched out to the field where some of their other teammates had already arrived and had begun training.

The training sessions scheduled for the players who had played against Udinese were a few light sessions as their muscles were still exhausted, but after a few hours of light training, all the players were called to the meeting room for a briefing by the manager.

It was time for manager to share his tactical adjustments for the game against Madrid with his players.

Chapter 655: Ticket to UCL Finals 2021

****5 May 2021****

7:07 pm

At the Allianz stadium in Turin, the stadium was slowly filling up as the players of Uventus and Madrid warmed up for the game.

Tactical meetings had taken place, preparations had taken place, and the time up to the game was quickly running out.

The two sets of players looked especially serious as they prepared for the 90 minutes that were to come.

Whichever one of them ended on top in this game would book their ticket to the Champions League finals, the most important match in all of Europe at the club level.

Neither team wanted to be the losing side after coming so far, especially the Uventus team, who were very hungry for the continental championship.

As the Uventus players warmed up, Cuadrado stealthily pulled out some gum and unwrapped it before popping it in his mouth.

"I don't even want to know where you kept that," McKennie chuckled as he watched Cuadrado begin to enjoy the gum.

"It was in my waistband, I'm not that disgusting," Cuadrado rolled his eyes at McKennie.

"You got another one?" Jason asked, passing a ball to Ronaldo.

"Yeah, catch," Cuadrado replied as he pulled out another stick of gum and threw it towards Jason, but his throw was off.

Unable to catch the gum with his hand, Jason's leg reflexively shot out to catch the gum before it hit the ground.

Just barely managing to catch it on his leg, Jason tried to flick it upwards and catch it with his hand, but once again he missed and kneed it upward instead, continuing to juggle the gum.

After juggling it a few more times, He flicked it upward again, and this time, he caught it, but with his teeth and not his hands.

Catching the gum, he suddenly noticed that a camera was trained on him from a little distance away.

Winking at the camera, he turned away and picked the gum from between his teeth, tore off the wrapping and popped it back into his mouth, ignoring the exaggerated exclamations from his teammates.

Meanwhile, the cameraman behind the camera was already thinking of what caption to use when he posted this 'aura moment' video of Jason.

Jason didn't know, nor did he care about the cameraman's thoughts and dutifully continued his warmup at high intensity.

He wasn't going to be starting the game so he could afford to be a bit more intense than the starters in his warm-up.

Of course, he wasn't exactly too happy about not starting such an important match, but the manager seemed to think that playing Chiesa over him was a much better fit for the tactic he had selected and Jason couldn't argue with the manager so he could only swallow his discontent and warmup silently.

"Warm up's over boys, gather around," one of the Uventus assistant managers called out to the players, putting an end to their warm-up.

As the players walked off the field and ran down the tunnel, the trainers began to gather the equipment they used for the warm-ups.

In the Uventus locker room, Pirlo entered with his players, calling out immediately,

"Alright guys, you already know the plan,"

"We stay compact, preserve our shape and force them out to the flanks,"

"We have the height advantage at the back and we need to use it. We force them to send high crosses in and we block it,"

"If we get a chance, we hit them hard, we hit them fast, and above all, we never ever allow them to catch us on the counter attack," Pirlo fired off a string of instructions which were a shortened form of the tactics he had spent the last two days grilling into his players.

"Tonight is a big night. An important night and it is in front of tens of thousands of our home fans. More fans are at their home in front of their screens, watching, waiting," he began again, trying to motivate his players.

"It's another chance for us to get into the Champions League Finals and we have waited for this moment for way too long,"

"Don't let it slip away,"

7:50 pm

As the players began heading back out to the tunnels to wait for their cue to march out onto the field, Jason was passing by Chiesa when he decided to call out.

"Good luck out there man, do this one for the team," Jason said holding out a hand for a fist bump.

"I'll do what I want man, what's it got to do with you," Chiesa snapped and ignored Jason.

'What's this dude's problem?' Jason wondered to himself.

He was simply wishing Chiesa luck while also trying to remind him not to be too selfish with the ball as he had a penchant for doing lately, but this guy was acting up on an important day like this?

"Were you trying to give the competition advice?" Dybala laughed at Jason, seeing the dumbfounded look on Jason's face.

"The competition?" Jason raised an eyebrow as he continued walking out of the tunnel.

"He's starting and look at the two of us? Sitting on the bench, aren't we?" Dybala said, chuckling.

"Still, acting like that on an important day like this is just petty isn't it?" Jason stated.

"I don't know if you noticed, but since you got here, even though it's a loan deal, he's seen the bench more times than usual. You kind of relegated him from a crucial starter to an important sub,"

"He's not really felt it because of the injuries that still allowed him to start games, but with everyone back, he's back to competing with you,"

"Anything you say to him at this point might very well sound like an insult, especially looking at the difference in your performances lately," Dybala explained.

"Surely there's no way he can be that narrow minded?" Jason asked, surprised.

"You'd be surprised," Dybala chuckled.

"For this match, the manager selected a 4-4-2 diamond formation to make us more compact in the middle, but because the manager also wants there to still be capability on the wing, he put Chiesa in the attacking midfield position and Kulusevski in a center midfield position,"

"The two of them can play those places, but they can also fan out to the left and the right respectively, when the situation calls for it,"

"You and I can also play the attacking midfield position, but we're no good in the center midfield, so there's no way the two of us can be on the field together with this formation unless I'm playing as a striker,"

"Chiesa must also know that which cements the fact that he's only playing because of this particular formation and only because I'm not playing as a striker, which means, he's still the second choice in the manager's mind... or so he thinks,"

"There's no way he has any goodwill towards you apart from the professionalism of a teammate," Dybala said calmly as they sat on the bench.

"Oh wow," Jason mouthed, his mouth in an 'O' shape.

"Forget about that for now though, the match is starting," Dybala changed the topic as the starting lineup of the two teams began marching out of the tunnel.

The two of them quickly diverted their attention to the players coming out of the tunnels as the commentator began announcing the lineups, but Jason didn't need to hear the commentators words to know the lineups.

For the Uventus side, the four defenders were Cuadrado, Chiellini, Bonucci, and Alex Sandro.

Mckennie was playing as the defensive midfielder, Ramsey and Kulusevski were both center midfielders and Chiesa was the attacking midfielder.

The two strikers were Ronaldo and Morata.

On the Madrid team, Sergio Ramos and Nacho were the two center backs, Carvajal and Marcelo were the two wing backs, Modric, Kroos, and Isco were the three center backs while Jovic, Vinicius and Asensio were the three forwards.

Benzema was still injured from the last game against Uventus while Hazard got injured over the weekend, handing Uventus a much needed boost.

After a few minutes of the formalities, the two sides stood against each other, arranged on their sides of the pitch and waiting for the referee's whistle to battle it out for the last ticket to the finals.

Bayern already claimed a spot in the finals by beating Chelsea and now it was up to Uventus and Madrid to decide who would be taking a step forward and who would settle for a third place match against Chelsea.

Fweeeeeeeee!

{The referee has blown his whistle to kick off the second leg of this Champions League semi-final tie}

{Who will come out on top, we'll find out in the ninety minutes to come!} the commentator shouted boisterously as Uventus kicked off the game with Ronaldo passing the ball back to Kulusevski and Kulusevski immediately laying the ball off to Cuadrado.

The players of the two teams swiftly began surging into each other's half of the field, the Uventus players running forward to get into dangerous areas while the Madrid players moving to intercept the ball and steal possession.

Chapter 656: Ticket to UCL Finals 2021 II

Like the stellar team that they were, the Uventus team patiently passed the ball around exchanging the ball carefully among themselves and avoiding their opponents' tackles, slowly working their way forward, but the Madrid team was no soft persimmon and fought back hard by closing up the space and blocking the passing lanes, cooling off Uventus's initial attack.

The Uventus players were not ones to give up though and the ball was soon passed forward to Chiesa, who tried to break away from his marker with a dribble, but under the combined pressure of Isco and Modric, he lost the ball and the Madrid team, causing a turnover.

Kroos immediately got the ball under control and tried to kickstart a Madrid attack with a splitting pass forward that almost made it all the way behind the Uventus defense line but was intercepted by Bonucci at the last minute, who cleared the ball back up the field.

The ball soared into the air back into the Madrid half of the field, and as luck would have it, it flew towards Chiesa who had not gone far from where he lost the ball deep inside Madrid's half of the field.

{What do we have here!?!} the commentator exclaimed as Chiesa somehow managed to control the ball and dodge away from Nacho's tackle, darting down the left into the open space behind Carvajal.

After running past Nacho, Chiesa immediately began cutting back inside while Ronaldo and Morata started running forward into the open space in front of the goal.

{Unexpected chance! Can Uventus open up the game here!}

Due to the sudden attack, only Nacho and Sergio Ramos were left behind to defend, but Nacho was chasing after Chiesa and trying to stop the ball from coming in, leaving only Sergio Ramos to block Ronaldo and Morata.

Marcelo and Carvajal were already darting back to defend, but it was already too late and as long as Chiesa could escape Nacho on time, then it would be a three-on-one situation.

Turning to face Nacho, Chiesa faked a pass before moving to dart past Nacho's left, stunning the defender, but the Spanish man quickly recovered and tried to block Chiesa's, however he quickly realized that Chiesa's move to go by his left was a feint and could only watch Chiesa's back disappear from view.

With Chiesa freeing himself, Ronaldo shot Morata a look and after receiving a knowing glance, the two of them suddenly changed their running direction and ran into each other's path, confusing Ramos and

while Morata drew along the defender, Ronaldo had freed himself for the pass, however the ball never came his way.

{Chiesaaaaa!!!} the commentator screamed as Chiesa hit the ball at the goal, deciding to go it alone instead of sharing the spoils.

Courtois immediately lunged for the ball that seemed to be homing towards the bottom left of his goal, but he missed the ball, however, the ball also missed the goal and slammed onto the outside of the sidenet.

{Wasted away!} the commentator's voice was followed by loud groans of exasperation and disappointment from the Uventus fans in the stands who thought they had taken the lead there.

{What a chance! What a chance!}

{His teammates are giving him the stink eye and the excessive gesturing from Ronaldo is making his disapproval of that shot clear} The commentator chuckled.

{Ronaldo is clearly shouting, "I was open, you should have passed!" and frankly, everyone agrees with that statement} the co-commentator added, glancing at the Uventus's bench on the sidelines where Pirlo still had his head in his hands, clearly fuming.

#14th minute...

It had been almost a quarter of an hour and the game was slowly setting into an exciting one with goal scoring attempts continuously made by the two teams.

The Uventus team was a bit more conservative as they had the advantage and were not against defending their advantage till the end of the game, but the Madrid team was ensuring that they never had a dull moment and they were continuously kept on their toes, ensuring that the match didn't settle into a boring back and forth exchange of the ball.

{Vini, Vini,Viiiiii!} the commentator shouted repeatedly as Vinicius cut in from the left, dribbling past Kulusevski and Cuadrado with Brazilian flair, making it look easy and it looked like he would go all the way when Chellini came in roughly, kicking the ball away from his feet, not forgetting to stealthily shove him away.

Crashing to the floor, Vini instantly rolled over to call out to the referee, arguing for a penalty, but the referee had seen Chiellini cleanly tackle the ball away, hence Vinicius's cries fell on deaf ears and Madrid only got a corner kick for their troubles.

{He's not happy about that. But unfortunately, he's disadvantaged physically against most defenders and with the pedigree of the Italian defenders in this game, he's vastly outmatched} the commentator said.

{Well, he has talent and if he keeps developing, it wouldn't be too difficult for him to run circles around them. It's too early right now though} the co-commentator added expert analysis to the commentary.

{Speaking of young talent, Jason, a fan-favorite of the Uventus team is sitting on the bench. What do you think could be the cause for the manager telling him to sit this one out} the commentator began to make small talk while the Madrid players got ready to take the corner.

{I think it definitely has to do with the tactical arrangement for this match as he is clearly not injured and he has been in especially blistering form of late}

{I don't know why Pirlo chose Chiesa over him for this match, but the Uventus fans just have to hope the manager had good reasons and so far, they are not satisfied with Chiesa's performance in this game} the co-commentator replied.

{I don't blame them for their doubts. The two players have quite similar attributes, but with Jason's form of late, the earlier chance would have ended in a goal whether Jason hit it himself or chose to pass, though knowing him, he would have passed the ball to the open Cristiano} the commentator said, watching the replay of the clearest goal scoring chance of the game so far.

{There's still a lot of time in the game and Chiesa will have time to prove himself and prove that the manager's decision to play him was the correct one}

{Oh, in comes the corner!} the commentary was interrupted by Kroos sending a curling ball in towards the awaiting head of the Madrid players.

Chapter 657: Ticket to UCL Finals 2021 III

The ball curled in a wide arc from the left side of the pitch and flew towards the center of the penalty box, where the players of the two teams were waiting.

Timing his jump, Sergio Ramos leaped above everyone and caught the ball with his head, directing it toward the bottom right of the goal.

Buffon stood rooted to the spot because of the unexpected angle of the ball, but McKennie who happened to be standing in the ball's path, quickly reacted and jumped up to catch the ball just slightly on his head, deflecting it upwards and sending it flying against the crossbar instead of into the back of the net.

The ball bounced powerfully off the bar and back into play and Cuadrado was the lucky man who got his head to the ball next, heading it forward slightly and bringing it under control, his eyes darting across the field as he looked for who to send the ball to.

This was a clear counterattacking chance and he was not going to let the chance slip by without attempting anything.

Luckily, Kulusevski was already darting forward down the right flank, having caught the scent of a goal-scoring chance even earlier than Cuadrado.

Not one to disappoint, Cuadrado launched the ball up into Kulusevski's path as he ran forward, but at this point, everyone was already moving.

The Madrid players, having recognised the danger, had already begun to race back towards their own goal, intending to stop the counter while the Juventus attackers were also hurling themselves forward, eating up the space as they raced to get into danger zones and support the attack.

Kulusevski had already caught hold of the ball and had begun battling with Isco and Marcelo as he tried to continue his run down the flank.

His strong physique allowed him to hold on, but he couldn't escape those two players easily, however he was not alone and had managed to buy enough time for Ronaldo to catch up.

Chipping the ball over Marcelo, Kulusevski saw Ronaldo run down the flank swiftly, chasing after the ball and finally managing to catch the ball just before it rolled out for a throw-in.

With the ball back under control, Ronaldo began cutting in from the right, but Marcelo had recovered and was already hot on his heels.

As Ronaldo neared the right corner of the penalty box, Marcelo finally caught up, but at that moment, Ronaldo did his signature back chop, dodging the racing Marcelo who slid out of view.

With the backchop having set up the ball perfectly for the shot, Ronaldo was already moving to shoot the ball when he noticed Morata appearing from behind into the center of the penalty box.

Instantly calculating that his chances to score from his position with his weak foot weren't too high, Ronaldo changed his mind and sent a pass into the path of the arriving Morata.

The ball rolled across the box, rolling behind Sergio Ramos who had jumped into Ronaldo's shooting path, but just before it reached Morata, Chiesa appeared behind the ball, body angled, poised to shoot but while he was moving to hit the ball, he put his supporting foot down wrong.

With his shooting position wrong, Chiesa couldn't hit the ball well and barely touched it with his instep, and instead hit it with his heel, and sending the ball dramatically wide of the goal.

{Atrocious touch! Another goal-scoring chance butchered by this same man!}

The groans of exasperation and disappointment from the Uventus fans this time had a few touches of annoyed curses at Chiesa who seemed to be out of his element today.

{He should have buried that! He has no excuse for hitting that ball like that. It was nowhere near the goal!} The commentator was also quite annoyed at seeing another goal-scoring chance wasted away.

Giving Chiesa the stink eye, Morata didn't even bother trying to pull up Chiesa who had fallen to the ground after missing the ball.

Ronaldo was even more annoyed and it was taking all he could not to shout angrily.

Chiesa was in an even worse emotional state and was now anxious and panicking internally. He hadn't meant to miss the goal, but no one cared for excuses like that at the professional level.

If the team lost the game today, he could not escape a huge part of the blame and he was also angry with himself for missing the goal.

Getting up, he dusted himself off, steeling himself to do better from that moment, but he could not completely wipe away the anxiety that was coursing through his mind.

#27th minute...

{Isco}

{He's moving calmly between the opposition players, almost like he's dancing, but they can't stop him}

{Lays it off to Modric} The commentator was giving a play-by-play commentary when suddenly Modric hit the ball with the outside of his right foot, sending a trivela pass into the Uventus's penalty box.

Asensio, keeping his eyes on the ball as it curled into his path, made a cutting run from the right, holding off Alex and managing to get to the ball just as it arrived in his path.

Jumping forward, Asensio caught the ball on his head and sent it at the Uventus goal, but Buffon was alert and jumped at the ball, blocking it, but the ball bounced towards the left, landing in the path of Jovic.

{Saved!}

Jovic immediately rushed at the ball and hit it, sending it at goal again, but Buffon was quick off his feet and appeared in the ball's path again, catching it with the tip of his gloves and pushing the ball towards the left.

{Another fantastic save!}

Cheellini and Bonucci had arrived to clear the ball but they couldn't reach the ball and could only watch it fall into the path of Vinicius who quickly caught the ball with his leg, bringing it under control.

Pushed by the adrenaline coursing through his veins, Buffon had already jumped to his feet once again and rushed to cover the left side of his goal, but Vinicius seemed to have been waiting for that and tried to curl the ball around Buffon towards the right.

Once again, Buffon spread himself wide and this time, he managed to stretch his leg apart enough that he could block the ball.

Bouncing off his leg, the ball flew up and began coming back downward, about to drop into the goal.

Chapter 658: Ticket to UCL Finals 2021 IV

Clang!

The ball bounced on top of the bar and flew out of play, rolling onto the top of the net.

{Magnificent, just magnificent goalkeeping!}

{He didn't let it pass him the first time, he said no the second time, and the third time, his refusal only got louder!}

{The Madrid fans must be tearing their hair out, thinking about how their players will be able to get a goal past this man today. Especially with the kind of form he is in!}

{He's taking it in stride, a calm look on his face, but his teammates aren't doing the same and several compliments are flying his way}

Even the players on the bench were on their feet and staring with surprise and awe as the oldest man on the team turned back the clock and proved that he still had it in him to outshine his competition.

The Madrid side were even more flabbergasted, but they had no time to stand around as the referee was already calling for a corner kick.

Kroos jogged over to the right corner of the field while the players quickly arranged themselves in the box, readying themselves for the corner.

Fweeeeeeee!

At the referee's whistle, Kroos sent the ball flying into the penalty box, but unlike the last time when Sergio Ramos had been able to get to the ball, this time he was tightly marked by the Italian defender duo of Chiellini and Bonucci.

Bonucci held Ramos down long enough to give Chiellini the advantage in the air and Chiellini headed the ball clear of the penalty box, sending the ball towards the right side of the field.

{It's cleared out of the danger area and the players are racing to get to it} the commentator began when he saw Marcelo racing towards the ball to catch up to it, but just before he reached the ball, a figure dashing at blinding pace suddenly appeared and kicked the ball forward powerfully, chasing after it.

{It's Uventus again on the counter and once again, it's Kulusevski racing down the flank! They've not been able to keep this man silent today!} the commentator exclaimed as he watched Kulusevski dash across the field.

Marcelo wasn't just standing around and was already giving chase, but he could barely catch up and even when he managed to, a strong elbow kept him at arm's length and prevented him from making a clean tackle.

Holding off Marcelo, Kulusevski finally made it to the right side of Madrid's box and without wasting any time, he sent the ball across.

{Ball in to the center!?!}

{Ronaldo leaps up to catch it!} the commentator screamed as Ronaldo caught it with his head and sent it toward the top right corner of the goal.

CLANG!

The ball slammed against the right edge of the crossbar.

Ronaldo's efforts to send it to the top corner ended up backfiring on him with the ball bouncing off the bar, but before the ball could even reach the floor, the commentator screamed again.

{Chiesa is there!}

{It's in!!!} he screamed with gusto and Chiesa had begun to dash toward the sidelines when the referee's whistle blew sharply and everyone realised that the assistant referee's flag was up.

{What do we have here? The assistant is making a call for offside!}

{Celebrations come to a halt and the players go over to argue the legitimacy of their goal} the commentator was saying, but a replay of the goal was already showing on the screens and it showed that when Ronaldo caught the ball on his head, Chiesa had a leg behind Ramos, the last Madrid defender behind the ball.

{That's clearly offside, wouldn't you say, Arnold?} the commentator asked his co-commentator.

{Most definitely! Chiesa's run was carefully timed and when the ball came in from Kulusevski, he was behind the line, but when he realized that the ball wasn't coming his way, he tried to come back from behind the line after running past Ramos}

{He was just a second too slow there. I would argue though, he probably did not expect the ball to come back at him}

{Normally, Ronaldo would put that away, but it seems luck was not on their side for this one} The co-commentator gave expert analysis to what he had seen from the replay.

{Right you are. We thought Chiesa would finally redeem himself after his wastefulness earlier, but it was not to be} the commentator said as he watched the referee give the offside call and cancel the goal.

{It's confirmed. The goal is not going to stand. Uventus will have to try again, but not from zero}

{They may have not seemed like the stronger side, but they have been very solid, both with the ball and without it}

{If they continue in this vein, a victory for them today is not off the cards} the commentator continued as the match resumed with a goal kick from Courtois, who sent the ball flying into the air and down into the Uventus's half of the field.

After an aerial tussle to compete for possession, Madrid took possession of the ball and began passing the ball around calmly, but there seemed to be a growing threat every time the ball moved from one Madrid player to the other.

#43rd minute...

After many attempts from the two teams that failed to register a goal, the Madrid players were once again trying their luck at the Uventus end of the field with an attack they suddenly began after passing the ball around for half a minute.

One second they seemed to be passing the ball aimlessly, but when the ball reached, Asensio on the right flank, he calmly nutmegged Alex Sandro like it were nothing serious and suddenly began to drive forward, cutting in from the right.

The Uventus players swiftly responded defensively, swarming at him in defensive positions, but as soon as he drew away all attention away from the right flank by cutting in, he suddenly sent a pass outside toward the right edge of the penalty box, setting up a perfect pass for the marauding wing back, Carvajal.

Chapter 659: Ticket to UCL Finals 2021 V

Rushing at the ball that rolled into his path, Carvajal quickly glanced into the penalty box, picked a teammate, and then sent a swift, low cross from the right side of the penalty box.

The ball rolled powerfully into the Uventus 18-yard box and appeared in front of Jovic who immediately put his foot through with it, sending a powerful drive at the goal from 10 yards in front of the goal.

Buffon jumped at the ball, stretching himself wide and luckily, his decision to do so came with good results as the ball bounced off his right hand and flew up and over the goal.

{Another fantastic save from Buffon! You'd think he can get to anything today!} the commentator exclaimed, expressing his admiration and shock.

The Uventus players nearby quickly went to give their goalkeeper a pat on the back as they knew that only because of this man's top form today had they not conceded once again.

The manager had made a good defensive plan and it was mostly working, but against Madrid, all they had managed to do was reduce the number of very clear goal-scoring chances. They could not completely stop them.

Even with that, it was not too far-fetched for Madrid to still manage to put one or two goals past them. They were that strong of a team and it was clear to see why, however, Buffon had steadily kept on saving their behinds with save after save.

The man already had six saves in the first half, and any of those six saves could have been goals... beautiful goals.

Buffon, however, didn't think too much of it.

He knew he was in peak form. He would be a fool not to notice it, but that didn't count for much more other than how it would help him do his job better,

He was a goalkeeper and his duty was to stop the ball from getting past him. Because the number of balls coming his way increased and he could still stop them, wasn't necessarily a good thing.

Even the best goalkeeper in the world couldn't confidently say he could save ten out of ten shots from a team like Madrid, so right now, Buffon was more preoccupied with ensuring that his defenders performed better and stopped the Madrid team from getting behind them as often as they had so far.

Calling out defensive orders to the players, Buffon took his position at the corner of the goal, watching Kroos carefully as the German put the ball down, ready to take the corner kick.

"Giorgio! Stay on Ramos!"

"Leo! Mark that Jokic guy!"

"Weston, keep that Nacho guy away!" Buffon barked out orders while watching the situation in his penalty box and glancing over at Kroos from time to time.

When the referee finally blew his whistle and sent the ball flying in, Buffon's orders to his defenders allowed everyone to perfectly keep their opponents in check, allowing Buffon to easily catch the ball that came flying in.

{And that one ends up in the arms of the goalkeeper}

{Will he try to start a counter? No, he's waving to his teammates to calm down while waiting for the Madrid players to leave his penalty box} The commentator spoke calmly.

{Amazing leadership display from the legendary Italian goalkeeper. He's not only shown his skills, making it clear why he has earned his legendary status, he's now showing his knowledge of the game accumulated from sheer experience}

{This is the time to calm down his teammates and make them take the pressure off as often times, the numbers on the clock can cause urgency in players, especially in games like these where the stakes are high}

{If Uventus tries to force attacks right now, they could very well end up on the back foot as their opposition knows well how to counter} the co-commentator analyzed.

{They know too well how to counter. The Uventus players must keep their heads on their shoulders. They have the advantage, there is no need to try and force a goal at this time} The commentator agreed, but while they were talking,

The Uventus team that seemed to be calmly playing the ball around suddenly had the ball end up at the legs of Ronaldo and without much of a surprise, Ronaldo turned at Madrid's goal and suddenly started driving the ball forward, using a burst of pace to dribble between the three midfielders.

Moving swiftly, Ronaldo moved the ball from leg to leg, sharply dodging their tackles with quick touches whenever any of them was near enough to tackle him.

{Ronaldo, dashing forward here, could he be trying to get the last laugh?} The commentator exclaimed, surprised when he watched Ronaldo push forward.

The Madrid defenders quickly responded to the threat and rushed to block Ronaldo, but Ronaldo held onto the ball long enough to buy time for Morata to free himself before cleverly flicking the ball to him on the right with his outside foot.

{Now its with Morata, will he have a go?}

{He does!} the commentator exclaimed as Morata swung at the ball, hitting it from the edge of the 18-yard box.

Courtois lunged at the ball in response, getting enough hand on it to deflect it and push it against the bar.

Bouncing off the bar, the ball bounced back off the field and Carvajal who was near the ball as it landed kicked it out of the penalty box, clearing it upfield.

{Cleared!}

{What a last ditch attempt from Uventus!}

{The one minute of injury time added by the referee is almost over and the referee is putting his whistle to his mouth} the commentator was saying when the ball that had been cleared up the field was headed back into Madrid's half by Chiellini who beat Jovic in the aerial contest for the ball.

Receiving the ball, Ramsey once again turned in the direction of Madrid's goal and saw Ronaldo who had dropped back.

With Ronaldo all alone, Ramsey did not hesitate to pass the ball to him and on receiving the ball, Ronaldo did not waste a single second or movement and turned smoothly with the ball, and faced the goal.

Pushing the ball a meter forward, Ronaldo put his head down, ran at the ball and swung at it with righteous fury.

Thwack!

The sound of the ball being hit could be clearly heard as the ball took off like a rocket that had reached peak speed in an instant, thundering towards Madrid goal.

Courtois instantly reacted and jumped at the ball's path, but before the ball reached him, Courtois could clearly tell that he wouldn't be able to reach it.

Chapter 660: Ticket to UCL Finals 2021 VI

{It's Christiano Ronaldooooo!!!} the commentator screamed as the ball thundered towards goal.

It looked like the ball was slowly flying towards the goal, inevitably homing towards the back of the net, however in reality it took just a second for the ball to arrive within a meter of the goal.

Unable to reach it, Courtois' eyes followed the ball as it flew past him and then,

CLANG!!!

The ball slammed against the crossbar and flew over the goal and out of play.

{{Ohhhhhh!!!!}} in accompaniment with the commentators shout, all the Uventus fans in the stadium and in their homes screamed in disappointment as they watched the ball fly out of play.

{Daring attempt from Ronaldo, but unfortunately, he needed to do better than the crossbar. What do you think, Arnold?} the commentator asked his co-commentator for expert analysis.

{... Sorry, I'm still in shock after witnessing that attempt. He was more than thirty yards out and still he decided to take a chance at goal. That's just maddening}

{It reminds me of a basketball player trying to hit a buzzer beater... or in simpler terms, trying to make a basket with a shot from anywhere on the court before the time runs out}

{In all honesty, I'm surprised he even dared to have a go, and he nearly made them pay for giving him that much space} the co-commentator was still speaking when the referee blew his whistle, not giving the Madrid team a chance to take a goal kick.

{What a match. Absolutely top-drawer performances from the two sides and the only reason this game doesn't have an extravagant scoreline is because of the equally strong defensive efforts of the two teams} the commentator began as the players began to walk off the field.

{That and their luck, though Madrid seems to be the luckier side. They should be a few goals behind, but they have also been putting forward intense efforts on the attack to score as well}

{As the players step off the field for a little rest, I can't help but wonder, if all that went wrong had gone right, what kind of scoreline would we have?} the co-commentator asked.

{That is an interesting question to ponder, but for now, we'll see what the remaining half of this game holds for us. We'll be back after the second half} the commentator ended the commentary there while the players of the two teams walked into the tunnel with sweat glistening all over their bodies along with the rest of their squads, staff and managers.

As the Uventus players entered their locker room, Pirlo called out to his players as he entered with them,

"Everyone sit down, drink some water and take deep breaths. There is a lot we have to address,"

"Chiesa, let's start with you. What were you doing out there?"

Chiesa shivered at the manager's words. He had been expecting Pirlo to call him out for his performance, but he hadn't thought the manager would start with him.

'I know they called off my goal for offside, but that should at least count for something, right,' he mumbled internally.

"Is being dumb now added to your flaws? I asked you what happened out there and why you were playing like pregnant baboon?" Pirlo's words cut deep across the room and even the other players winced.

"I was off my game a bit at the start, made some mistakes, but I think I'm ok now," Chiesa managed to reply after a slight pause to swallow his welling anger.

"This is the second leg of the Champions League semifinals. It's a very important game, you're not supposed to make that many mistakes!"

"Wasting of goal chances can be accepted. Everyone makes bad touches every now and then, but we've had about three goal scoring chances where it would have been better for you to either leave the ball to

a teammate because the ball wasn't meant for you in the first place, or you could have passed the ball to a more open teammate,"

"Football is a team game and tonight is a very important game. This is the time for you to not only prove your quality to the world, but also to prove that you can win as a team,"

"I didn't see any of those qualities from you in the first half,"

"The offside goal you scored for doesn't count for anything. You have played terribly so far and if this continues, I will take you off," Pirlo said everything he wanted to say to Chiesa at a stretch and then turned back to the rest of the players.

"We have done well so far, but despite what the scoreline says, it is clear that you guys..." Pirlo gestured to the defenders.

"... are not doing enough to keep out our opponents,"

"Our game plan for today is meant to ensure our solidity in the center. We knew the flanks would be weaker because of this, but that was supposed to be countered by you guys being able to stop the cross when it comes in,"

"You guys have had problems doing that and even in the center, there have been holes that allowed our opponents to get in behind us,"

"We owe our current scoreline to Gigi, but he can't keep saving us like that,"

"I expect more solidity from you guys in the second half. Take the ball, use it,"

"If there is space, work together to create attacks, Chiesa, Kulusevski and Cristiano, you guys can spread wide and support the attack on the flanks if the center is blocked,"

"If we don't have possession, mark tightly, don't give them any space. Man on man marking for the midfielders and zonal marking for the wingers,"

"Ramsey and Mckennie, pin down Modric and Kroos, we need to stop them from making those defense splitting passes," Pirlo gave orders to his players at lightning speed, using the magnetic board to expatiate the differences his instructions would make and show the other players how they should adjust to their teammates.

Time quickly flew by, and soon the players were soon marching back onto the field, re-energized and ready to once again entertain their viewers while battling it out for a ticket to the Champions League finals.