

THE SILENT SYMPHONY

Chapter 9: The First Team II

The remainder of the training session passed in a blur of drills and exercises, but the dynamic within the team had fundamentally shifted.

Mateo's display of shooting prowess had established him as a player of exceptional ability, someone who could contribute to the team's success in ways that went beyond normal expectations.

As the session concluded and the boys began to pack up their equipment, Álex approached Mateo with a different demeanor. The challenge and hostility had been replaced by something approaching respect.

"That was... impressive," he admitted grudgingly. "I've never seen anyone our age shoot like that."

"Thank you," Mateo replied simply. "You're a good captain. I can learn a lot from you."

The response surprised Álex, who had expected either arrogance or false modesty. Instead, Mateo had offered genuine respect and a willingness to learn, defusing the tension that had been building throughout the session.

"Maybe we can help each other," Álex said after a moment's consideration. "I know the other teams in our league, their strengths and weaknesses. You have... skills that could help us win."

It was the beginning of a partnership that would define CF Barceloneta's season. Over the following weeks, as Mateo integrated into the team's playing style and tactical system, his impact became increasingly apparent.

His vision and passing ability elevated the play of his teammates, while his shooting provided a goal threat that opposing teams struggled to contain.

But it was his first official match that truly announced his arrival as a force in youth football.

The opponents were CE Europa, a well-established club with a reputation for producing technically gifted players. They arrived at CF Barceloneta's modest

ground with the confidence of a team accustomed to victory, their players sporting pristine uniforms and expensive equipment.

"They think they're better than us," Álex observed as the teams warmed up on opposite sides of the pitch.

"Maybe they are," Mateo replied calmly. "But that just means we have to play better than we've ever played before."

The match began at a frantic pace, with both teams eager to establish dominance. Europa's players were indeed skillful, their passing crisp and their movement intelligent. For the first fifteen minutes, they controlled possession and created several promising attacks.

But Mateo was watching, learning, adapting. He studied their patterns of play, identified their preferred passing combinations, and began to anticipate their movements with increasing accuracy.

When Europa's playmaker received the ball in a dangerous position, Mateo was already moving to close down the space. When their striker made a run in behind the defense, Mateo had already communicated the danger to his teammates.

The breakthrough came in the twenty-third minute. Europa had been building an attack down their right flank when Mateo intercepted a pass that seemed destined for their winger. In one fluid motion, he controlled the ball, turned, and spotted Sergi making a run down the left wing.

The pass that followed was a thing of beauty. Struck with the outside of his right foot, the ball traveled forty yards through the air before dropping perfectly into Sergi's path. The winger controlled it with his first touch and crossed immediately, finding David unmarked in the penalty area for a simple finish.

1-0 to CF Barceloneta, and the goal had been created entirely by Mateo's vision and execution.

The second goal came ten minutes later, and this time Mateo was directly involved in the finish.

Receiving the ball thirty yards from goal, he drove forward with the kind of purposeful running that drew defenders toward him like magnets.

As three Europa players converged on his position, he slipped a perfectly weighted pass to Álex, who had found space in the penalty area.

Álex's finish was clinical, but it was Mateo's pass that had made the goal possible. The weight, timing, and placement had been perfect, threading the ball through a gap that had existed for only a fraction of a second.

But it was the third goal that truly showcased Mateo's extraordinary ability. With CF Barceloneta leading 2-0 and Europa pressing desperately for a way back into the match, the ball fell to Mateo twenty-five yards from goal. He had his back to the target, with two defenders closing in rapidly.

What happened next would be replayed in the minds of everyone present for years to come.

Mateo flicked the ball up with his right foot, spun 180 degrees, and volleyed it with his left foot while it was still in the air.

The technique was perfect, the execution flawless, and the result inevitable. The ball flew past Europa's goalkeeper like a guided missile, striking the top corner of the net with such force that the entire goal shook.

The small crowd of parents and supporters erupted in celebration, but Mateo simply jogged back to the center circle, his expression calm and focused. For

him, the goal had been the natural conclusion of the opportunity presented. The fact that it had been executed with such spectacular technique was simply a reflection of his growing mastery of the game.

The match ended 4-1, with Mateo adding a fourth goal from a free kick that curled around the wall and into the bottom corner with the precision of a master craftsman.

His performance had been nothing short of sensational: one goal, three assists, and a display of tactical intelligence that had completely neutralized Europa's attacking threat.

As the teams shook hands after the final whistle, Europa's coach approached Señor Vásquez with an expression of amazement.

"Where did you find him?" he asked, nodding toward Mateo, who was collecting balls from around the goal area.

"He found us," Señor Vásquez replied with a smile. "And I have a feeling this is just the beginning."

The journey back to Casa de los Niños was filled with celebration and reflection. Don Carlos had watched the entire match from the sideline, his pride evident in every gesture and expression.

He had seen many talented children over the years, but Mateo's performance had been something special – a glimpse of the extraordinary player he was destined to become.

"How do you feel?" Don Carlos asked as they walked through the streets of Barcelona.

"Happy," Mateo replied simply. "But also hungry."

"Hungry for food?"

"Hungry for more," Mateo clarified. "More matches, more challenges, more opportunities to improve."

It was a response that perfectly captured the essence of Mateo's character. Success didn't satisfy him; it motivated him to reach for even greater heights.

The victory over Europa had been significant, but it was also just another step on the journey toward his ultimate goal.

That evening, as Mateo practiced his ball control in the orphanage courtyard, he reflected on the day's events.

The transition from street football to organized competition had been seamless, but he understood that greater challenges lay ahead.

If he was going to achieve his dream of playing for Spain, he would need to continue improving, continue pushing the boundaries of what was possible.

The other children gathered around to hear about his first official match, their faces filled with excitement and pride.

Mateo described the goals and the atmosphere, but he kept his deeper thoughts to himself. The dream of La Masia, of Barcelona, of the Spanish national team – these were too precious to share casually.

As the stars appeared over Barcelona, Mateo made his way to bed with his football tucked securely under his arm. Tomorrow would bring new training

sessions, new opportunities to improve, and new steps toward the future he had envisioned.

The boy who had entered CF Barceloneta as an unknown orphan had announced himself as a player of exceptional promise. The journey to greatness had begun in earnest, and nothing would stop him from pursuing his destiny.

In his dreams that night, Mateo was already there: wearing the red shirt of Spain, dancing with the ball at his feet, and making his country proud on the biggest stage of all.