The Beginning Of The End

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As a Barca romantic, i don’t even know how to start this article. However, I will not be biased in my novice analysis of the UCL quarter-final faceoff between FC Barcelona and Bayern Munchen, because yes- the latter did beat Barcelona by a margin of 6 goals. And yes, the way Barca were playing, they’re lucky they did not concede more even if it seemed impossible for them to.

From the very beginning of the game, you could see the Cules taking an aggressive, attacking approach. The whistle blew, and the blaugrana shirts broke into Bayern’s half. What happened? Bayern intercepted the ball. This pretty much sums up the whole game. Yes, there’s nothing wrong with adopting an attacking strategy. Alas, there’s everything wrong with having no structure in the team and playing half-planned passes to anyone who is visible in an attacking position. Muller netted one for Bayern 4 minutes into the game. 4 minutes. Indeed Barca struck back, with David Alaba scoring an own goal in a crazy mishap. Possibly Barca’s highlight of the match. Messi was made to play on the right wing when the game started, with Suarez drifting in from the left. That was considerably alright, with Barcelona exploiting the space left by the relaxation of Bayern’s defensive line. Then everything went upside down.

Messi was shifted to the center with the Catalonian team adopting a 4-4-2 formation. What impact this significantly had is that the potential of Messi’s space-making was taken away, he was now surrounded by Bayern’s defense and midfield. Bayern exploited this apparently small change in a beastly manner, shutting down the only source of attack FC Barcelona planned to work on, constructively disrupting their loosely-tied pattern of attack. This was not even the worst part about the Blaugrana’s dim decision making throughout the game.

The nightmare of a plan of play the manager adopted, (and i mean, NIGHTMARE) was the horrible, horrible defensive trap the Cules tried to adopt.

Take a look at this picture. This was most of the game. No, I don’t mean to say that Ter Stegen had possession of the ball for most of the game. This picture is just a prelude to most of the goals Bayern scored versus FC Barcelona. Bayern has thrashed 99% of the teams it has played this season because of it’s clinical attack with it’s constant and efficient pressure as a substantive. Don’t get me started on their link-up’s and communication. They’ve simply mastered their game. What Barca slyly tried, in order to battle the Beastly Bavarians was this- they invited Bayern’s attack into the final third. Now, this may sound like a genius move from the mind of the new manager, but no- it was not. It was a very, very stupid one the non-sensible simplicity of which overshadowed it’s object. How the Spanish team thought it would turn out was that they would invite Bayern’s pressure, break through it, and score by Messi passing it to Vidal, Suarez, Roberto, Griezmann, possibly even Dembele (wasn’t brought on) in the final third. How it turned out was-

a) They invited pressure from the Bavarians,

b) The Bavarians scored.

Whenever they did break, they tried it too fast and threw the chances away. This gave Bayern the opportunities they just needed to see, and they grasped them with ease and composure. Bayern moved forward in attack as a structured group of talented football players, with each player occupying a potential hole in Barca’s defense. Yes, each attacker and midfielder occupied a hole. Pique and Lenglet were looking like helpless teenagers against seasoned professionals. It was horrible to watch. Barcelona, with an ignorant air, invited them and Bayern accepted all invitations. This ignorance continued into the second half. Mueller had already netted two in the first half, with Croatian left winger and pacey powerhouse Gnabry joining him. Kimmich scored another in the 63rd minute with a beautiful run from Alphonso Davies from the wing into the box who passed it to the 25 year old German right back, who further rounded off the assist with a simple tap-in. Lewa got his goal in the 82nd minute, peculiarly scoring only one throughout this siege of a match.

Coutinho came on quite late in the match, and netted two, assisting one. This really topped every joke that has originated from the game. The Brazilian, currently on loan from Barca, was involved in as many goals in 15 minutes as he scored in 18 months for FC Barcelona. It was a silent redemption, you could hear it in the goals. Still, the man refused to celebrate. Classic humiliation. While former Bayern player, Arturo Vidal raged in the final minutes of Barca’s humiliation, the Brazilian Coutinho almost remembered his once fantastic self.

This game was constituted by two teams- both European giants, one at it’s best and the other at it’s absolute worst. This, as Pique said, is rock bottom. FC Barcelona needs changes, and it needs them fast. You can’t sustain your dominance in Spain, or Europe, if you play every match with only one plan of defense and attack, varying throughout games, but staying the same when losing horribly. This was the problem under Valverde, and this is the problem under Setien. Not that he’s going to be around anymore. If Barcelona does not get a manager which understands the team, it’s potential when structured well, and the fact that the team needs to know how to change tactics within 90 minutes if plan A is not working, then FC Barcelona has indeed reached the dark ages. Bayern, on the other hand, are at the very top of their game, and the obvious favourites to lift the Champions League this season.