

## BEYOND THE SPIRITS OF AN IRON HEART

S02 E06 - "Flashpoint"

**NOTE: PLEASE DO NOT READ IF YOU HAVE NOT YET COMPLETED IRON LEAGUER, INCLUDING ITS OVA. SPOILERS AHEAD.**

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The sky was clear without a single cloud, but the Silver Castle practice area was bleak, as if an invisible dark cloud had settled in.

Across the halfway line, the seven original members, including Magnum and Windy, who were facing off against Garret, Killer B, Killer Q, and the four new faces of the Wild Bunker, were filled with a spirit that was worthy of being called a duel.

"Heh! Latest model or not, we're not gonna lose!" Windy's challenging tone proxied how the rest of Silver Castle felt.

"Hmmm, that's scary. You don't need to stare at me so much, I'll show you the difference in ability," Killer Q said with a chuckle.

"Well, that is if your eyes can keep up with our movements," Killer B snarked. He's a brother who doesn't mince words.

"What was that?!"

That's when Windy and the others darkened at the provocative tone. "Keep it together, guys."

With his eyes on the other side, Magnum scoured the field. Everyone's eyes were focused on him. "It's all about the play, that's what it means to be an Iron Leaguer!" There was a glint of inner conflict in Magnum's eyes.

Sheena's beauty seemed like a cold shield of superiority, and Ruri struggled to keep her knees from shaking. She hadn't thought it would take so much courage to step into the owner's room that had been hers yesterday.

"You're in trouble. What's the point of doing this?" Sheena bit her nails like an engineer who had suffered unexpected trouble.

"What?"

When Ruri questioned her, a begrudged explanation came back. "The data proves that Garret and his team's performance is far superior. It's a waste of time to repeat calculations that have been already done."

It was too clerical an answer. Ruri wasn't convinced. "You don't know that until you try!"

Sheena shook her head unresponsively. "We already have."

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"Well, wait a minute..." A voice came out of nowhere and Ricardo appeared. The tension was critical, everyone took a step back and paid attention. He always pulls everyone into his pace like that, without question.

"Ricardo Ginjo..." Sheena bit her lip and looked up at Ricardo.

"I don't know, why don't we try this one as a competitive simulation test... Magnum and the others are also brave leaguers long standing. Maybe we can get something new out of it."

The tone was polite, but there was a strength in Ricardo's words that convinced people to obey him. Sheena meditated once and looked at him in decision. "Alright, if you say so."

Dai, who had been silent until then, changed his color. "Ridiculous, you think the head office would allow such selfishness..."

"I'm the owner, Dai."

At the towering Sheena, Dai clenched his teeth, swallowed his words, and left the owner's room. The way she looked at him seemed to suggest the presence of a complicated agenda.

Sheena looked at Ricardo again. There was an air of dignity on her face. "However, the time is forty-five minutes of the half. That's enough time for data collection."

"Understood. That's about long enough for Ruri, too."

At her prompting, Ruri stiffened and nodded, and Sheena turned on her heel and began tapping away at the computer keyboard.

"Dad..." Ruri leaned closer to her father with anxious eyes.

"It's okay, trust them, they'll be fine," Ricardo gently hugged her shoulder.

Sheena took a blank look at the exchange between the father and son and directed him to the microphone.

"Kickoff, Garret."

The clock on the display began to count.

"Now, let's get started..." Garret, in the lead, kicked the ball up. They lacked a goalie.

Killer Q ran on the right side. Windy shouted as he chased after it.

"Wait, your keeper."

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"We need a keeper, because you're not going to let one foot in our area anyway."

"What the hell?" Windy was so angry that he jumped to get the ball, but Killer Q jumped on the ball far higher and passed it to Killer B on the opposite side. It was a sudden chance to shoot, but Bull Armor reacted quickly and kept things on course.

"Alright, bring it!"

When challenged, Killer B sneered, and then kicked the ball high above Bull Armor's head. When he looked up with a gasp, Garret, who had transformed into his flying form, was waiting for him.

"Air Force! Code: Aim V!"

Garret, unmorphing, came falling with the ball. Bull Armor, unprepared, was unable to catch it, and the ball flew into the goal. All of Magnum and the others were stunned by what happened so quickly.

"I'll take it," he said, following Killer Q.

"Damn it!" Windy punched the field in frustration.

Edmond was in the practice field director's office with his arms folded as usual when Meckel came rushing in in a hurry. "What are they doing, what are they doing?"

"They're in a practice match," Edmond replied flatly.

"What? We're going to be in full maintenance for the season opener today! You'll have to stop them."

"Hey, Meckel."

Meckel, who was about to take it back, stopped at Edmond's call. "What is it?"

"When I was a kid, my dad bought me a ball that was a treasure..."

"What?" Meckel frowned at the abruptness of the story.

"It was my greatest treasure, even in tatters. Even if it's just an old ball in the eyes of others."

Meckel scratched his head. It didn't seem to make sense, but the sentiment was clear. "Well, that's the thing."

Edmond looked down at the field.

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The match was dominated by Garret and his team; they held to their word. Magnum and his team were unable to get beyond halfway and were forced to defend themselves. Since the opening shot, there was no sign of a goal.

"Why don't we take a shot?" Windy chased after the Killer brothers.

"We're going to win anyway, a point or ten is the same."

"If I let you guys score too many points and discourage you, you're going to get your team in trouble."

It was too humiliating a line. "Don't be silly! We can't just let this happen!" With a burst of anger, Windy took the ball at the bottom and darted towards Garret's side.

"Oh, how sweet!" Killer B's arm flew like a rocket, grabbing Windy and dragging him down.

"What the—?!"

Killer Q snatched the ball away from a startled Windy.

"Rrgh, bringing in rough play, eh?! This is just ridiculous." Magnum and the other seven were speechless at the unbelievable sight.

Ruri watched the game on the owner's room display with bated breath. Next to her, Sheena was calmly typing on the keyboard and collecting data.

"Mach Windy—outstanding soccer skills, but lacking in situational skills... Bull Armor—passable keeper, and powerful drive engine..." Sheena murmured to herself. "GZ, optimal positioning and good acceleration... Juurouta..."

In the meantime, Garret and his team continued to play rough. The Killer brothers had quickly surrounded Juurouta.

"Do not think that you, without a soul in you, can defeat Silver Castle!" A blue aura rose from Juurouta's body. "Spirit wave, strong as steel!"

His best pass went to Ryuuken. "I've got it, Juurouta!" The Wild Bunkers surrounded Ryuuken as he was about to run, merging into a spider-like creature and bringing a leg crashing down on him, stealing the ball.

"Ryuuken!"

Ruri let out a shriek.

Ryuuken grunted, dusting himself off. "I'm okay," he reassured softly.

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"Kiai Ryuuken, you have a lot of endurance..."

Unable to stand it, Ruri took a jab at Sheena. "Terrible, what are you doing! Is this what you call soccer?!"

Sheena slowly looked at Ruri. "UN Corp. isn't a group of wanna-bes, we'll stop at nothing to win. We can't afford a losing battle that will damage our image. Silver Castle has a mission to keep winning!"

"Quit messing with me, will you?!" Ruri shouted in boiling rage. "You can do it, guys!" She shouted toward the field.

"There's no time to lose anyway..." A patronizing grin grew on Sheena's face.

Top Joy shouted as he was blown away by Garret's high speed jet attack.

"Top Joy!" Magnum shouted, rushing over to help him up.

"I'm alright, but this isn't fun in the slightest!" Top Joy pointedly snapped at Garret. The leaguer coldly ignored his statement.

"We don't need to have fun. Battles are fought to be won."

"That's not the Silver Castle way of playing soccer!"

"What nonsense," Garret sneered as he took the ball away.

"I'm going to show you—my friends and I—how to really play soccer!" Top Joy stretched out a spring-leg, heading off the ball.

"What the hell?" While Garret was stunned, the ball bounced in front of Magnum.

"Magnum, do it now!"

"We're both Iron Leaguers. That's what we need to do. No, we have to show them. We have to show them what it means to be Iron Leaguers!" Magnum looked up decisively and shouted. "Let's do it!"

The clock on the display ticked zero. Time slowed down. The display in the owner's room flickered dizzily.

"This kind of power... where would it even come from?" Sheena looked at the data displayed.

"Top Joy!"

"Juurouta!"

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"Ryuuken!"

"GZ!"

"Windy!"

Garret and his team tried to cut off pass after pass, but they were just at the mercy of their speed, unable to keep up.

"Last pass, Magnum!" The ball was launched from Windy's Mach Spin, and everyone's fighting spirit burned bright within the ball.

"This is our Lightning Crash!" A super-long shot was fired from the top of the half in a flash of light from the top of the half. It was so terrific that Garret and his team were unable to move an inch. The Lightning Crash blasted the goalposts, through the electromagnetic netting, and into the practice field wall.

"We did it! Goaaaal!" Ruri squealed with delight.

Staring at the display, Sheena came to her senses and turned around when she noticed the clock counting the negative past zero. "It's invalid!"

"What does it say?" Ruri lost her color.

"The clock is running forty-five minutes. You're over time." Sheena spoke impatiently.

"But... it can't be..."

"There's no sweet excuse for lost time."

No matter how Ruri argued, it would never be right. Angrily, she jumped back. Sheena avoided Ricardo's gaze.

"What is it...?"

"Nothing. It was quite a meaningful matchup. You have my thanks."

Ricardo didn't seem like much of a sore loser. Sheena watched Ricardo's back as he walked away, feeling slightly uncomfortable by his unreadability.

Magnum and the others standing on the field were also trapped in unexplained thoughts. Windy shook his fist. "Well, we have our own way of fighting!"

GZ's expression tightened more than usual. Magnum was silent as the rest of Silver Castle marinated, but behind his eyes, a fire of determination had begun to burn.

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"Hmm...?" Gold Arm thought he heard a faint voice and stopped.

"What is it, brother?" Foot and Mask turned around.

"No, never mind." The three Gold brothers were high above white, foaming water. "I'll do it. I'll weave a magic ball with my own hands that will surpass my 44 Sonic!" Gold Arm clutched the ball.

On that moonless night, there was a shadow that came out of the Silver Castle headquarters with the sound of gentle footsteps. It was Ruri. Even though it was a dark night, she was wearing sunglasses and carrying a backpack on her chest. She suddenly stopped and looked up at the distinctive, castle-shaped building. Her eyes watered at the various memories.

"I'm sorry, guys but I'll be back... to our Silver Castle!" Ruri wiped away the tears that were about to flood her eyes and ran off to shake off her all-consuming thoughts, and soon she was out of sight in the night.

The start of a new season was already on the horizon.

END