

## Champions 1001

### Chapter 1001: An Unfortunate Opening

There were definitely many issues in training and to a TV announcer or a spectator, the mistakes were very obvious.

For example, in the case of Balotelli, what surprised him was that this kid did not mean to be sloppy. On the contrary, he was very hardworking and competent during training. Before this, Twain thought that Balotelli was going to go against him for sure, but his current performance really surprised him. Initially, he even wanted to pick on Balotelli, to pick on his weaknesses and mistakes and suppress the rest of the team, using him as an example.

It seemed that he did not know anything about his players and it really was a setback.

Thiago Silva was not much of a worry. Would a 33-year-old full-back like him still want to be a starter? If Twain placed him in the reserves this instance and it came down to either him or George Wood, would he still come up with any tricks? For the external factors affecting the squad, just use realistic defragmentation measures to resolve the issues.

The formation of the Foreign Legion had something to do with the lack of a strong manager in the dressing room. Because they could not find a core player to trust, they would become individually attached to the people they thought were strong, and gradually form their respective small cliques. Now that there was a strong character in Nottingham Forest's changing room, these people would need to reconsider their initial choice.

Twain decided to approach Eastwood to find out more about Balotelli's situation. After all, Kerslake's period in the team was short, and there was no way he could fully understand the individual situations of the players. Eastwood has been in the Nottingham Forest team for five seasons, and he definitely had a lot of information about those players who were added to the team after Twain left.

"Balotelli?" Eastwood frowned when he heard Twain mention this player. Twain noticed his unusual expression.

"He's really talented..." Eastwood mused, weighing his following words. "However, he has a few traits that made him seem boastful and he has always wanted to leave the team so he's not on great terms with the rest of them."

"I could tell," Twain recalled the situation during training in these two days. During the break times in between training, there was no one who would take the initiative to talk to Balotelli. During the team selection during training, not many were willing to be on the same team as him. However, he wanted to ask about something else. "Was he always as hardworking in training?"

Eastwood thought for a while, then shook his head. "No."

"Oh..." Twain then turned silent. He did not question Eastwood further, because he generally knew what was going on in his mind.

“Are you thinking of transferring Balotelli out, head coach?” Eastwood was trying to guess the intention behind Twain asking him about the Italian player.

Twain shook his head. “No. Now the team is having a lack of players, and I would only complain about having insufficient players, so why would I transfer one out? During this winter transfer window, I do not plan to take any players out.”

Afterward, Twain went ahead to find a few more coaches to understand Balotelli’s situation. He really did not want to transfer Balotelli out of the team, unless the two of them argued like there was no tomorrow. Like the situation between him and Anelka, when both totally lost their trust for each other. It was just like what Eastwood had said: this person had talent, and the current Nottingham Forest team needed his capabilities.

So Twain did not have any ideas of transferring him out. Instead, he wanted to utilize him properly.

Nevertheless, just relying on his conversations with the other coaches was not enough. It seems like he needed to have a direct conversation with Balotelli. However, he did not have the time for this.

He took over the team in the middle of the week, and there was a match on the coming weekend.

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Nottingham Forest’s away game against Aston Villa was not the main show that was most talked about, but the game was selected by the BBC channel in the last minute to be broadcasted for the whole country to watch for free. The reason was very simple – this was the first match since Tony Twain’s return to Nottingham Forest. It made sense that this match was placed on high priority for all to view.

During the few days before the game, the media started to hype up the competition and there were many Premier League team coaches who were asked about their views on Tony Twain’s return to Nottingham Forest.

There was a variety of answers. Some were supportive, some simply did not care, and some even thought that Twain’s return was a mistake as he would definitely not be able to reach the peak he had achieved in the past.

“If I were him, I would definitely just stay at home.” Mourinho did not express any joy in his reunion with his rival. “His capability has long expired.” During the interview, his expression was cold and detached, as if he did not know who Tony Twain was at all.

“I welcome Tony’s return, and I personally think that was a very brave decision.” This statement made by Everton’s coach Moyes seemed to make everyone think that he was on the same side as Twain, but the following speech was not well-liked by Twain’s supporters at all. “But it’s best if we don’t get our hopes high for the results his team is going to bring. His return to the team is already a victory of its own kind.”

“I think you all are very lame in hyping up this topic. It’s simply a head coach returning to his old team.” There were people who were not very concerned with Twain. The one who delivered the aforementioned statement was John Robertson, the current head coach for Aston Villa. His team was going to face Twain’s team very soon. It was certain that he did not want the crazed media, which was exaggerating in the amount of attention they gave this topic, to disrupt his team. “He could change

today's Nottingham Forest overnight, but he would definitely not be able to get the team to return as the current season's main character. What is there to talk about?"

Of course, it was impossible for Twain to have everyone's good opinion.

"I don't think that Tony's return was just for show. I know him very well. If he decided to get back to the team, it must have been after endless consideration. He must have thought that he would be able to take on the role properly before he agreed to the decision." This comment was made by the head coach of Leeds United. He was Twain's golden partner in coaching the England team, so he definitely knew Twain a lot better than others. "Hence, I don't think that his return was simply just to hype up Nottingham Forest's reputation. Anyways, I just want to remind the rest to be wary of him."

Regarding all these comments, Twain kept his silence throughout, neither rebutting nor agreeing. This was because he was busy trying to settle all the internal relations within the team so there was no time to fuel the media circus.

It was almost as if he wanted to prove right those who were looking down on him. On the debut match after Tony Twain's return, he had suffered a terrible loss. In Aston Villa's home court, Villa Park, Nottingham Forest was flattened with a 1:2 defeat and their ranking fell to 17th place.

This match puzzled many people, including those who knew a lot about Twain. For instance, the one who was commentating about the match, Mortensen, was shaking his head throughout. "I really don't know what Twain is thinking..."

No matter what situation his team was facing, he was simply sitting at the coaching seat and did not stand up at all. Throughout the whole match, he did not make any adjustments. Some people even joked about whether the actual Tony Twain had really returned to Nottingham Forest to coach. Maybe this was just a wax model that was stolen from the museum that came back to coach.

There was not much difference in the tactics employed by the past Nottingham Forest and the current team, save for the fact that Balotelli was back in the forward line, partnering with Mitchell. George Wood continued to stay on the middle path and Gago was assisting him from the side. The spectators did not see the fatal side flank attacks by Nottingham Forest, the attacks made by the team concentrated in the middle path, creating huge congestion in the middle sector.

Aston Villa was happy to see how Nottingham Forest concentrated their offense in the middle path as this made things a lot simpler for them during the match.

Twain used all three substitutions in the game but none of those had much purpose. Agbonlahor replaced Mitchell and Balotelli stayed on the pitch for the full 90 minutes. Alex Teixeira replaced Gago, as he went forward and played as the offensive midfielder, Cohen replaced Wijnaldum in hopes to strengthen the offense. After the substitutions, the Nottingham Forest's flanking offense looked a lot better, but it was too late. The score was already 0:2 with Nottingham Forest being behind.

After the end of the match, the reporters were all waiting for the press conference that came after the match. They were excited to hear Twain's statement after that defeat – he definitely would not be able to escape from this topic.

Twain was sitting on stage and looking at those reporters who were mocking him. He knew exactly what the reporters were expecting. He surely would not be able to escape this freely. That way, the media would definitely talk about his integrity.

“Aston Villa played well, so they won the game. We played badly, so we lost the game, that’s all there is to it.” His post-match comments were very brief.

The reporters showed no mercy. “Can you elaborate on how badly you guys played?”

Twain was not infuriated upon hearing this provocation. Instead, he gave a detailed evaluation of the issues in the tactics implemented by his team and this really caused a shock to those in the media waiting for a good show.

“Our offense was stacked in the middle, it was over-congested...” Twain spread his arms. He noticed the changes in the expressions of some of the reporters. That was the effect he intended. You all want to watch a good show, but I simply will not give you what you want!

The whole press conference continued for fifteen minutes, and the loser Tony Twain instead became the focal point. The head coach of Aston Villa, John Robertson, was extremely depressed. He realized that even when he won over Twain, he was still unable to become the main character.

Twain was very comfortable on stage, so much so that he was able to prevent the media from getting hold of too many of his weaknesses. After the end of the press conference, there were some who were uneasy and thought Twain was simply too cunning. They were unable to adapt to this low-profile Twain. Actually, it was most unfair to John Robertson. Though he was the winner, he had only been asked two questions throughout the whole press conference. Twain had completely stolen his limelight.

Even though Nottingham Forest scored a goal before the end of the match, it only won them back a bit of fame. None of their pride was regained. Twain and his team had become the target of the mockery from the media.

“Look, I’ve said it from the start, you guys should not have high hopes about the results from the team he is coaching.”

“Twain needs some time to fully adapt to his new job after having left football for four months...”

“The main takeaway from this match was not the score. I feel that one should focus on the process instead – commenting on the process, this match was a total disaster!”

“I discovered a problem. In the face of questions from so many about his ability to coach, it was unusual that Tony Twain did not fight back like he did last time. Then recalling his attitude during the press conference after the match, it is most probable that Tony Twain had already predicted this loss. Expanding on this fact, regarding this situation on returning to Nottingham Forest, he might not have sufficient confidence in handling this issue...”

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“These media people really guessed one matter accurately,” Twain said during his meeting with the coaches. “Before the start of the previous league match, I was indeed not sure if we would be able to

win. After this match, everyone might have realized that taking the middle path was not the right way. We must ensure that Nottingham Forest returns to the same track it took in the past.”

“Now that we have a week’s time, let’s throw away the tactics used in the past and start from the beginning.”

“From now on, adjust your mentality before the training, expand on the focus on the defensive, and strengthen the tactics on the offense after the free-kick. Before January, we will rely on these two tricks to stabilize the position of the team.

The coaches had no opinions on the arrangements made by Twain. They were professionals who knew that defense and free kicks were tactics that would immediately show effect. Change the offense? Take your time. First, they needed to restore the confidence and the morale of the team, then they would be able to see an efficient offense.

After the routine tactical meeting, David Kerlake and Freddy Eastwood stayed.

“Tony, you’re really tolerant,” Kerlake shook his head. “The only thing media hasn’t called you was an infamous liar.”

Twain laughed dismissively. “It is only a game, the media is often like this. You must understand them, David, it’s rare for them to see situations like this.”

Eastwood, who was beside him, was frowning upon another matter. “The next match will be on our home court, head coach. We definitely can’t lose this one...”

It was normal for him to worry about this; there was nothing much to losing on an away court. But on the home court, the expectations that the Nottingham Forest fans had of Twain were different. They definitely did not care about those theories of “head coach needing time to familiarize with the team he just took over”, they only knew that Tony Twain was the savior of the team, and were sure that once he took over the coaching seat, no matter how tough the situation was, he would be able to achieve victory. This did not sound possible for a human, but in the hearts of the Nottingham Forest fans, Tony Twain was comparable to a god.

Eastwood was thinking about this point. If Nottingham Forest lost on their home court, then Twain would have a difficult path ahead of him. The doubt and the disappointment of the fans and the segregation within the team would send the team sinking too deep into the abyss.

Although their opponents were not strong in the upcoming match, it was extremely important for Twain that there would be no room for errors.

Twain clearly knew the importance of this match. The issues behind the tactics were entrusted to the coaches and the daily training was thoroughly settled, so it did not require much effort from him as well.

The thing that really required his attention was the players; he felt like he needed to quickly find Balotelli for a one-on-one chat as soon as possible.

## **Chapter 1002: Balotelli**

Balotelli thought his position in the team should be promising, because he was rearranged to play forward, and he scored the only goal of Nottingham Forest F.C. in that lost match. He considered himself the best player on the team in that match, but of course, the media didn't agree. One point of the game evaluation was the same among many different media people. They all agreed George Wood was the best player in Nottingham Forest F.C.

Balotelli admitted Wood's performance was not bad, but when it came to the best of the team, he could not admit anyone was superior to him.

In addition, more importantly, he had the faith that this goal made the new manager see his value clearly. That was a brilliant goal after the breakthrough of the double team!

Upon his thinking, Dunn called him over after the training ended.

"Do you have time, Mario? I want to talk to you privately."

Seeing the smile on the face of his manager, Balotelli became more certain of his idea. He paused deliberately to prevent himself from appearing to be overexcited. Then he nodded slowly: "Fine, I have a few minutes."

"Come to my office." Dunn turned and walked away.

Balotelli was dumbfounded for a moment. He didn't expect the manager to turn and walk away so quickly. Somewhat unhappy, he followed Dunn, though at a very slow speed.

In fact, Dunn didn't mean to put on airs in front of Balotelli. All that was on his mind was to find out how to start a conversation with the player, to make their talk more harmonious and to get the desired result.

His aim was nothing more or less but to bring out the best in Balotelli to help the team.

After he achieved that, he could focus on other details.

Balotelli felt that he did not get enough respect, and following this way of thinking, he decided that this conversation with the manager would have to be an unpleasant experience.

Nobody else was in the manager's office except the two of them.

Dunn motioned for Balotelli to sit down and asked what he wanted to drink.

Balotelli shook his head and declined.

Dunn didn't expect a straightforward rejection like this and felt somewhat awkward. At this time he noticed a problem. Compared to when he was in Inter Milan, Balotelli was now much fatter...

No wonder his performance was unstable.

Dunn decided to start with the goal, for goals were all forwards cared about. "Mario, your goal of the last round league was wonderful."

Balotelli was secretly delighted upon hearing this from the manager. He finally got his worth acknowledged!

“However...” Dunn changed his tone, “Can you score such a goal often?”

Balotelli was taken aback by this question.

Under double team, he still managed to break and shoot the ball in through a gap between the defender’s two legs, bypassing the goalkeeper. He surely couldn’t score such a goal very often...

Dunn didn’t give Balotelli a chance to answer. In fact, he did not expect Balotelli to answer this question at all. The answer was obvious.

He asked another question: “Do you prefer playing right midfielder or forward?”

Balotelli said without hesitation this time: “Forward, naturally.”

Dunn smiled. This was exactly what he had anticipated. “Can you tell me your view regarding the team now?”

Balotelli’s answer was not much of a surprise. “I think I should be the core. With me as the core, the team can score many goals, and winning matches will not be a problem.”

Dunn nodded slightly and appeared to agree with Balotelli’s words. However, after hearing him out, he said, “But I’ve never used a forward as the core...”

He was telling the truth. He never considered using a forward as the core of a team since he became a manager. Whether it was Anelka, Van Nistelrooy, Eastwood, or Ľuboš Michel, none of them was the core of a team, and the team’s tactics had never been centered around those forwards. How could a manager who preferred defense make a forward the core? All offense came from the backfield, and naturally, the defensive midfielder was the most suitable person to be the core.

However, Balotelli didn’t know that. He didn’t expect those discouraging words from his manager and changed color abruptly.

How could this change of his expression escape Dunn’s eyes? Of course, the purpose of the conversation was to make use of Balotelli’s talent, but if Balotelli asked for too much, he would say no. Like now...

To be the core?

It was ridiculous! Having a forward at the core was contrary to all his tactics. How could he turn his tactics around and change the core? And get the entire team to adapt to the change in time? Time was most precious now. He could not waste it on such issues.

Besides, if Balotelli was an unstable player, why should he be the core? A core must be stable. If he sleepwalked in a match, wouldn’t the whole team suffer?

He wouldn’t do such a silly thing!

Although Dunn thought so, he could not say it. He stressed his opinion that the core as a forward and the core as a midfielder were not the same thing. If he got Balotelli to score more goals, he might reconsider...

Since he aimed to motivate Balotelli, this could be regarded as a way to do it.

Therefore, he changed his expression immediately: “But you know, Mario, our tactic is to stagger two forwards, one in the front and one behind...” He made a gesture of staggering, and Balotelli nodded to show that he had understood. “I let you play forward. The aim is not to let you stay at the forefront to play center-forward.”

Balotelli understood that a center-forward should thrust into the penalty area of the opposition, where he would be surrounded by the opponent’s backs. Not just scoring goals, but even taking possession of the ball wouldn’t be easy.

“Your position is the second striker.” Dunn took a piece of paper, scribbled on it, and showed it to Balotelli.

As the picture showed, Balotelli’s position was wandering around the penalty area and seemed to be sort of away from it. However, this place was more suitable for his style and he would be freer in this area than in the penalty area.

Balotelli’s view of this manager changed gradually as he saw this picture. It looked like this boss was different from the previous ones, and had really researched his skills to make the best of them.

“Your position is more flexible...” Dunn pointed to the picture and looked at Balotelli. He didn’t expect the conversation to be a tactical discussion, but it was good. Better cut to the chase than talk nonsense.

“Mitchell will distract the attention of the opposition’s backs for you, and you need to connect our midfielders and forwards. He will push the opponent’s defenders to the forefront, leaving you with this vacancy...” Dunn drew a circle in front of the penalty area. “It’s up to you to shoot or pass here.”

Hearing this, Balotelli’s first thought was to shoot, but Dunn seemed to know what was on his mind. “Of course, if you always shoot regardless, I will reconsider your position...”

In fact, Balotelli wasn’t that much of a lone wolf player. Otherwise, the right midfielder wouldn’t be one of his most accustomed positions. He liked to cross from byline for his teammates, which was a very prominent tactic when he was in Inter Milan. It was just that he was the player with the highest net worth after he came to Nottingham Forest F.C. George Wood hadn’t transferred to another team and didn’t have an exact net worth, so no comparison was made between the two. Naturally, he was somewhat arrogant; he wanted his teammates to pass the ball to him rather than cooperate with teammates.

Now Dunn had to adopt a carrot and stick approach to let Balotelli regain his willingness to cooperate with his teammates. He didn’t need a forward who only focused on shooting and scoring, because the tactics of his team put emphasis on collectivism, and on one under his charge could be a lone wolf. If this were the case, it would be his fault as the manager.

“A second striker who can shoot by himself as well as cooperate with his teammates is better than one who only shoots all by himself. I hope you understand me, Mario.”

Anyway, Dunn was a manager who won the grand slam in both the club and the national team. No matter how contemptuous Balotelli was, he had to restrain himself in front of Dunn.

In fact, what was on the players’ mind was simple: if the manager had an impressive resume, no matter how famous and influential a star player was, he would obey the manager. One of the reasons why



Balotelli was conceited and intractable was that the previous managers were not very important in his eyes.

“When should I shoot by myself and when should I pass the ball?” Balotelli asked a question that he immediately found foolish.

As expected, Dunn grinned at him. “You are the genius, Mario. Don’t you know the answer to this question?”

Ridiculed by Dunn, Balotelli was a little embarrassed. “I know, of course I know!” He resented how his question represented low confidence and vigor.

Dunn, too, didn’t want him to be too embarrassed. For exceptionally talented players, the management methods should not be too harsh. He was now 50 years old, no longer a young man in his thirties. Back then, he could hold Anelka on the substitutes’ bench very tightly for maintaining his authority. He couldn’t do such a thing now. Maybe because of advanced age, or because he had experienced too much, that sort thing of thing felt trivial now. He didn’t resent Balotelli’s pretentious pride.

That was why his mind was filled with ideas on how to make use of Balotelli rather than drive him away.

Of course, the authority of the manager should be maintained, but it should not be done by driving players who were talented and in their prime years to the stand. Didn’t Ferguson make the threatening remark that “I’d rather let him rot in the stands than sell him to Real Madrid”? However, did he really do so? No. Not only he did not, but he also made Ronaldo the core of Manchester United and even sacrificed Rooney for doing so. That was what a godfather-like manager should be: broad-minded and skillful. It was all in the team’s interest.

Tony Twain, who was 50 years old, really became mature, but regretfully, he would only be in charge until the end of this season. If he hadn’t had a heart condition and had been healthy, one could imagine what glorious achievements he could have reached in his position...

Well, in that case, was his retirement a fortune or misfortune to global football?

Dunn and Balotelli were discussing the details of tactics and strategies on the pitch in the future. The atmosphere between the two was harmonious, which was much of a surprise to both of them. As far as Dunn was concerned, Balotelli, the 28-year-old Italian player, was entitled to be arrogant, because he was really talented. Balotelli could understand his tactics without too much emphasis; he only needed to state them once. In Balotelli’s eyes, this manager who had countless glorious achievements was not just a glib and lucky guy; on the contrary, he really understood football and himself, and he was a boss one could pledge his loyalty to.

When in Inter Milan, there was a man who made him feel that way. That man later went to Manchester United. During his four years in Nottingham Forest, he always thought about going to Manchester United, which was in fact for following that person. Now he realized he didn’t need to do that anymore.

The private conversation was planned to last less than fifteen minutes, but when Dunn and Balotelli looked at the time, it was already 2 o’clock...

When Balotelli realized this, he simply laughed. Looked like it was a funny thing as it happened with a godfather of champions.

Dunn didn't care much how players looked at him. He touched his belly and said to Balotelli, "Let's have lunch, my treat today."

After one hour's communication, their relationship became very friendly. It was not strange to Balotelli that Dunn offered this.

"Anything is OK, I don't want any food in particular. Actually, I'm not hungry..."

"Don't say that. There will be a training course in the afternoon. You think you can handle my training on an empty stomach? If you have to quit halfway because you are physically inadequate, I'll certainly take this chance to punish you. You should know how much I would dislike anything to go wrong in this team now..."

Dunn said this with a poker face, which really scared Balotelli, who was sure that his boss was serious.

Remembering how Twain treated Bale, the veteran of this team, Balotelli thought he ought to be careful. Just because Bale slacked in a group of shuttle run, Twain let Bale run another 20 rounds under the scorching sun.

He was the King of Wilford. Here, no one dared to go against his will.

"Okay, I'll follow your order, boss..."

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During the training interval, everybody found that Balotelli was actually chatting with his countryman Fiorillo, which didn't happen usually. Even Fiorillo himself was surprised, and he couldn't keep up with Balotelli's conversation at times.

Kerslake and Eastwood looked at Dunn with inquisitive eyes and wanted to know what he said to this Italian.

"Just cater to his pleasure," Dunn shrugged. "He is eager to be taken seriously, so take him seriously. Trust him, I think he won't let us down..."

### **Chapter 1003: Thoughts of an Ordinary Man**

Thiago Silva felt a little depressed lately because he realized that his position in the dressing room was under a major threat. The threat did not come from his teammates whom he spent a lot of time with, but from the powerful manager who had come back.

Within two days, Twain had talked to many players alone. These were players who joined the team after he left Forest, but he did not ask to talk to Silva. To Silva, it was obvious that he was way down the pecking order in Twain's mind...

Other than that, there was another reason why he felt insecure. That was because the players who were usually always hanging around him were slowly moving away from him and he felt that he was no longer a core member of the dressing room.

The age of 33 was not an age that rendered a center back unable to play as his experience would be able to give him good positional sense to compensate for his decline in physical attributes. However, Silva could feel that the new manager was obviously overlooking him, and did not plan to start him at all. Forest lost to Aston Villa away during the last game and the media focused their criticism on the attack, as they believed that the team lost not because they were poor defensively, but because they lacked firepower. He was unable to refute that because that was the fact.

Silva had a two-year contract with the club. He had originally planned to fulfill his contract and retire straight after that. However, it seemed like nobody would want him to remain even if he wanted to stay in the team...

He wanted to remind Twain of his status in the team, but he could not find a suitable excuse and opportunity to do so. Hence, he decided to continue waiting and observe from the side. If the results were bad, there would bound to be voices of displeasure against the manager. When that happened, he could just add on to it...

Twain had just lost a match and if he continued to lose the next home game, the day that Silva was looking forward to would come soon.

After all, Forest had not won anything for the past few seasons, but they had quite a number of new managers. He did not mind getting another new manager.

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“We’ve been training defense for the whole week. There are some players who are worried that we would not be able to solve the issue of insufficient firepower,” David Kerslake reported the concerns of the players that he had gathered to Twain.

“How is that possible? We’ve arranged for offense practice during our daily training,” Twain shrugged. “Fine, I admit that our attacking patterns are much simpler than before... However, under the current situation, the simpler it is, the more effective it will be. They should be able to understand the meaning of this during the next game.”

Twain did not continue talking as he got back to his data and continued analyzing his future opponents.

Kerslake looked at Eastwood next to him and shook his head. It looked like they could only hope to win at home. If they lost the game, they would be hit by waves of criticism. He was sure that Twain knew that.

Twain thought for a while before looking up and realizing that his two assistant managers were still around, and then he seemed to have recalled something. He took off his glasses and said, “Okay, I’ll explain it to them myself during the tactical briefing this afternoon.”

Only then did the two assistant managers leave as if a huge burden had been lifted off them.

Twain thought that it was funny as he looked at the back views of the two of them. It looked like there was a lot of pressure on him. Everyone who cared about him wanted him to win whereas all those who hated him could not wait for him to lose at home...

Could he feel the pressure brought on by this burden then?

Twain placed his hand on the left side of his chest. His heart was beating rather quickly.

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During the tactical briefing in the afternoon, Twain gathered all the players and started to explain the tactics for the game that would take place two days later, as well as the objective of the training for the past few days.

“Is there anyone who thinks that our lack of firepower won’t change because we’ve been doing defensive training for the whole week? Is that it?” Twain asked his players as he stood in front of the blackboard. However, nobody answered his question.

It was one thing to complain in private, but quite another to openly question the manager...

“But we’ve also been doing attack training,” Twain said, raising his arm. “Isn’t Mario being positioned as the second striker? And the attacking patterns on the flanks... Are you guys taking the training seriously?”

“Yes, boss!” The older players knew that things would be bad if they did not say anything after Twain frowned, so Bale stood up in a hurry to speak.

“In that case, why would you guys think that we’ll be lacking in firepower?” Twain asked again. He looked at Bale since he was the one who stood out.

Poor Bale did not know what he should be doing or saying at that moment.

“This tactic is too simple, it’ll be very easy for them to see through us,” Someone finally answered Twain’s question, but it was not Bale. It was someone behind him.

Twain tilted his head slightly to see the one who spoke out as Bale shifted to one side.

Thiago Silva’s face appeared in Twain’s view.

Twain was not surprised. He had a feeling that the Brazilian would definitely look for another chance to undermine his authority. This was a good opportunity for him.

Twain looked at Silva and then asked him, “Before I came here, the football you guys played was very complicated. Your possession went as high as seventy percent, your offense was mesmerizing, and you had all the advantages on paper... How were your results?”

Silva had no answers to that. The results were indeed pathetic previously, everyone knew that.

However, the question was, did their results improve after Twain’s arrival? If they were judging based on the previous game, the answer was no. However, Silva could not continue to question Twain that way. After all, Twain was the manager now, and unless Silva was prepared to openly go against him, it was not wise to continue this argument.

Silva wisely chose to shut up and watch. He was waiting for the next opportunity patiently.

“I agree that the offensive tactic that you were practicing might seem to be too simplistic, but in our current situation, I don’t think it is suitable for us to be attacking as if we’re on a show. What we need are goals, not fifty passes outside the opponent’s penalty box before passing it to the opponent’s

goalkeeper. Simple and direct. That's the requirement that I have for you in the attack. Our strikers have the height to be a threat in the air, that's why I want you guys to cross more from the flanks. If Mitchell can get a shot on goal, it's good. If he can knock the ball down for Balotelli or any other midfield players pressing up, that's good as well. I don't want our strikers to always be facing away from the goal and fighting for every inch of the ground with the opponent. There's no need for that!"

Twain waved his arm. "We have the aerial advantage, why fight with them on the ground?"

"We're playing on the counter, not full-out attack. There are many times when there will only be two, or maybe three people up front when we have a chance to counter. In such a situation, finding the fastest way to tear through their defense and the space to take a shot is what you should be doing."

In the current Forest team, there were not many who had experienced the days when Twain had first managed the team. Defend and counter was the trademark for Forest then. If this team were the same team as it was at that time, there would be no need for Twain to be saying all this in front of them. To that team, all these were a given.

The situation was different now. There were too many new players and they had to sit through this talk of Twain. Otherwise, if they were hesitant on the pitch and could not agree with the manager's tactics, they would naturally lose the game...

"If we can score with one pass, why must we pass the ball three times? If we can come up with a shot after three passes, why must we pass back and forth twenty times? My football philosophy is all about efficiency. Anything that will slow down the game or make us miss a good opportunity won't fly with me. That's why I hope you can change the style of play that you're used to. It's impossible for me to accommodate you guys. In this team, there's only my way or the highway!" Twain said while pointing to his feet.

Even though he had only returned to management about a week ago, it seemed like he was more like the master of the place than the players who had been there for four years.

He was the King of Wilford indeed. This was his back garden.

Twain paused after he finished speaking. He was observing the players. There was nobody else who stood out to refute him and he was satisfied with that.

"Since nobody has any other opinions, let me talk about our tactics for the next game in detail. Long balls and crosses..."

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Many people believed that Twain's team could never win the match at the Crimson Stadium and that they would at most get a draw. The tone used by the local media in Nottingham gave a feeling that "even a draw would be a good result for Nottingham Forest now".

The "Nottingham Evening Post", a staunch ally of Tony Twain's previously, seemed to be finding it hard to adjust after four years and they did not seem to know how to be on the same page with Twain anymore.

“Even a draw would be a good result for Nottingham Forest now” was written by Pierce Brosnan himself.

Actually, Brosnan had been feeling very uneasy after his article was published as he waited for Twain to call and give him a scolding. However, up until the day of the match, there was no call from Twain.

He thought that Twain was too busy and did not read the article. This disappointed him a little...

It was not that Twain did not read the article. In fact, he had read it thrice. A few years ago, he would most definitely have picked up the phone next to him and called Brosnan to give him a piece of his mind, telling him to be on the same page as his team. However, Twain did not do that this time. One reason for that was that his mentality had changed after going through so many things. Another reason was that the team belonged to Dunn anyway. He was just a transition manager, so why would he go against the local media?

The local media from Nottingham were a little biased towards Twain and the stuff they came up with was still rather friendly. The media from outside were not as friendly and wrote about everything they could think of to insult Twain, then waited to watch Twain make a fool of himself at home.

“I can predict the cheers that Twain will receive when he returns to the Crimson Stadium. They will be deafening. But what I’m interested in is the treatment that he will receive after 90 minutes,” Carl Spicer said in his pre-match show. “Just like how the sequels to most classic movies are usually bad, a lousy script such as the return of a legend usually does not end well. Oh? Did I just admit that he’s a legend? Oh well, since he led the team to a World Cup victory, and he almost got knighted by the Queen, I guess he can be deemed a legend... But that’s not important. All that belongs to the past. Other than helping him stabilize the dressing room and bring about greater attention to the team, his reputation doesn’t guarantee that his team will win. When he goes on a losing streak, his reputation will become the straw that breaks the camel’s back... I’m not trying to be an alarmist, and I believe Mr. Twain will agree with me, won’t he? Ha!”

Spicer was a stronger representative of the anti-Twain camp, and he was someone who did not mince words.

The voices of doubt reached a peak and stormed Nottingham Forest before they hosted Middlesbrough at home. These voices were just usual gossip, stuff like “the Nottingham Forest today is not the same as the Nottingham Forest before, the Tony Twain of today is not the same as the old Tony Twain”, “Nottingham Forest fans should not worship one person blindly and they should not have too much hope”, “Middlesbrough is higher than Nottingham Forest in the league standings, and even though they are playing at home, Forest should first think about not losing, instead of winning.”

“Logically speaking, they are right.” There was still half a day before the match started in the afternoon. The team was resting in the hotel that they were staying in and Kerslake was having coffee with Twain, chatting to pass time. Kerslake was talking about the negativity of the media.

“That’s right, logically speaking,” Twain nodded and said, “But these are the thoughts of ordinary men. Now, do you know why some of them can only be failures as managers and can only earn a living by talking?”

Kerslake was unable to react for a moment.

Twain continued, "People who think that we can at most get a draw will definitely be proved wrong. People who think that we will lose will have to eat their hats. Ordinary people? Ha, too bad I'm not one of them!"

He snorted as he looked at the reporters outside, wanting to come in but unable to.

#### **Chapter 1004: Long Live Your Majesty**

"At this time there are still people begging for tickets..." In the camera footage, a number of Forest fans stood outside the Crimson Stadium holding up "I need tickets" signboards.

"It feels like a World Cup final."

"It is all to see Tony Twain's return, and it's so hard to locate a ticket... Despite having left the Forest team more than four years ago, Twain has still retained his popularity."

"If the Forest team's results haven't been so terrible in recent years, maybe there wouldn't be so many people who miss him."

"This sounds a little sour. If we think this way, if it wasn't for his departure, Nottingham Forest would never have become a big joke in the Premier League. Then he would be the guarantee to win the championship title and the trophy. That's why we chose this game as a live national broadcast. With him around, the ratings will be high."

The two BBC television crew members were sitting in the broadcast van, watching the monitor and chatting.

In front of them was a wall of monitors, and a dozen of them showed every corner of the stadium. On the monitors that showed the entrance to the stadium and square, ticket seekers could be seen everywhere.

Inside the stadium, fans had already entered the stadium more than an hour in advance. They were hanging banners in the Robin Hood grandstand to prepare for the game that was about to start soon.

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Pierce Brosnan realized something.

Since he became a sports reporter for the Nottingham Evening Post, he had attended every Nottingham Forest home game. However, the circumstances today made him feel special because he saw a lot of old, white-haired fans among the entering crowd. Most of these fans were older men who had followed the Forest team for decades. They had witnessed the Forest's most glorious years and seen the team's darkest times.

However, as he grew older, he would rarely see them come to the stadium to watch the games these few years. Although they bought season tickets every time, they really did not have the energy to go to the stadium. That place, which was full of noise and passion, was a great enemy to the health of the elderly.

However, today, he saw many white-haired fans at the entrance.

A media outlet from London was at the entrance, conducting interviews. They naturally noticed the older fans who had come together.

“At your current age, wouldn’t it be better to watch the game at home?” A young female reporter stopped a few of the old men and held her microphone out.

Several old guys looked at each other and grinned, revealing the gaps in their teeth.

“We’re here to see an old friend,” the tallest among them answered.

“An old friend?” The female reporter thought it odd. She was not from Nottingham and there was no way for her to understand how the Nottingham Forest fans felt about Twain.

Seeing her puzzled look, a short and fat old fan smiled at her and said, “Young lady, you’re not local, are you?”

The female reporter shook her head and replied, “I’m a Londoner.”

“You must not be a Nottingham Forest fan either, ha! Other than Tony, who else can be an old friend of Nottingham Forest?”

Seeing the female reporter’s sudden look of realization, several old guys put their arms over each other’s shoulders and sang with the other fans around them the song Nottingham Forest fans wrote for Tony Twain as they walked into the entrance tunnel.

“...We have a cyborg and he has a nuclear-powered heart! He never tires and absolutely does not accept defeat... He’s hated by people, but we love him! Because he can bring us championship titles and the enemies hate him, hate him! Tony, Tony! An a\*\*hole, loved and hated by people, ha ha ha!”

“This song sounds weird...” The female reporter muttered with a frown. “It’s completely tuneless. It’s just shouting...”

“That’s the way it is,” a man next to her said. “It’s just some things that the fans yell out at the stands with a little bit of melody added in. The fans thought there was no melody worthy of Tony, so they simply expressed their feelings in the plainest way.”

The female reporter looked at the person who spoke unprompted in disbelief.

The other party calmly reached his hand out toward the quizzical-looking female reporter and said, “Pierce Brosnan. I’m a reporter from The Nottingham Evening Post, and I know Tony Twain better than any other reporter. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

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If Twain knew that Brosnan was going to pick up a girl using his own name, the look on his face would have been awed.

However, he currently was not in the frame of mind to think about others. He was only focused on his own home game.



Was he nervous? No, but his heart did beat a little faster because of excitement.

It was like a trip to his homeland, which he had left decades ago. It was his first time as the Nottingham Forest manager, directing a game at the Crimson Stadium. Previously, he was at the Crimson Stadium as the England team manager. Although the fans also gave him a lot of support at the time, that feeling was not the same as now after all.

The England team only occasionally borrowed the Crimson Stadium. Its real home ground was the Wembley Stadium.

Now the Crimson Stadium was his home ground.

In the beginning, he had tightened the belt for several years to build the stadium. He plundered all over the world for those bargain players and then had to sell the outstanding players whom he had painstakingly nurtured in exchange for funds to the club. However, when the new stadium was built, he did not lead the Forest team to play a game here before, which was something he had regretted.

Now he was about to make up for it. He would be coaching and leading the team in this stadium that had been constructed with his whole heart and soul until the end of the season.

"It's time for us to go, Chief," Eastwood stood next to Twain and called out. He noticed that Twain had been lost in a state of contemplation just now. What was he thinking of?

"Huh? Oh... The players are all down?" Twain looked up at Eastwood, the assistant manager, in front of him.

"Yes, they are all on the bus."

Twain got up and put his coat on.

"Let's go, Freddy."

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"Tony Twain has already boarded the bus. The bus is slowly pulling out of the hotel... Heading for the Crimson Stadium... We're going to keep track and continue the coverage for our audience," the television reporter waiting outside the hotel spoke excitedly as he looked at the camera. Behind him, the Nottingham Forest red bus was leaving the hotel.

It was only ten kilometers from the hotel to the stadium, but the police cars cleared the way. The bus was surrounded by the reporters' cars, which were following and filming. Such a spectacle had not been seen by the Forest players for years. They all knew who the focus of the reporters' pursuit was.

Twain, sitting in the front row seat of the bus, was chatting in a low voice with Kerslake and Eastwood.

Through the window on the left side, they could already see the red roof of the Crimson Stadium.

"Welcome home, Chief!" Eastwood spoke as he pointed to the Crimson Stadium in front.

Kerslake, next to him, also laughed. He was finally home.

The red bus caused a commotion as it drove into the square. The police officers in charge of maintaining order at the scene were almost unable to hold on due to the impact. The fans who had not yet entered the stadium, as well as the fans still waiting for tickets, flocked toward the Nottingham Forest bus in droves. They shouted Tony Twain's name.

"Tony! Tony! Tony! Tony!"

"Welcome back, Tony!"

"Isn't nice to be back home, Tony?"

"Tony, we love you!"

...

"Haven't seen such madness in a long time..." Eastwood muttered as he looked at the excited fans outside.

Thiago Silva looked out of the window with a gloomy expression. He was a popular star player at the Forest team, but the excitement caused by his appearances could never be comparable to this.

He remembered that some time ago when those old players talked about Twain, they referred to him numerous times as "The King, His Majesty." At the time, he sneered at it, thinking it was just Twain's self-promotion, and that the man just liked to toot his own horn.

However, looking at the scene today, the faces of those fans... It was just a small portion of the crowd outside the stadium. Many more fans were already in the stadium, waiting there.

Can I really go up against this guy? Can I really expect that kind of opportunity? He thought.

A seed of doubt grew in his mind, challenging his previous thinking.

No!

Soon he was back in a calm state of mind. The more these fans adored him, the more they liked him, the bigger the blow they'd suffer once he lost a game on the home ground, and the more disappointed they would be toward him. Here was the balance between heaven and hell. They could send him to heaven, but they could also let him go to hell.

Although Silva did not understand Mandarin and was completely ignorant about Chinese culture, it was remarkable that he understood the principle of "the water that bore the boat could also capsize it."

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The bus was parked at the entrance and the players alighted one after another. They were surrounded by reporters and fans, and the policemen were struggling to stop the overexcited crowd. Twain was on the bus, waiting for everyone to get off. If he were to be the first to alight, the players behind him could forget about getting out of here. The scene would become chaotic.

The situation was such now. Twain, escorted by four police officers, squeezed through the crowd toward the entrance of the tunnel. Along the way, people kept reaching out toward him with microphones, cell phones, tape recorders, and interview equipment, trying to touch him.

The path was only a short ten meters, but it was unusually tough for Twain to walk through...

“How does it feel to be home, Tony?” When he finally got to the entrance of the tunnel, there was a loud cry behind him.

He did not look back. He just raised his right hand and gave a thumbs-up. Then he quickly went in at the urging of the policemen.

“It’s so crazy... just like a rock star coming here to give a concert!” A beautiful young reporter lady could not help exclaiming as she looked at the scene in front of her.

Standing next to her, Brosnan smiled and said with a little pride, “The most successful manager in English football history has come home, so of course his fans will welcome him.”

The female reporter looked back at him.

“But you can’t imagine how this successful manager was down and out in the beginning, ha!” Brosnan laughed. “When he first appeared, all he got were boos and middle fingers.”

The lady reporter shook her head gently and said, “It’s hard to imagine...”

Brosnan pointed to fans who still refused to leave and said, “To them, Tony is synonymous with an entire era. From 2003 to 2018, 15 years’ worth of memories is here.”

As Brosnan spoke, he was also caught up in his own memories. Back then, he was a rude and impetuous intern reporter. He was a 24-year-old young man who just graduated from college. He did not know anything and had no experience. He was ridiculed and sneered at by Tony Twain at a press conference. They have almost become enemies. Who would have thought that in the future he would write an autobiography of this person?

The female reporter looked back at the middle-aged man. His eyes looked to the distance without any focus. A faintly discernible smile hung at corners of his mouth.

“It includes your memories, doesn’t it, Mr. Brosnan?”

Brosnan turned his eyes back and nodded at the young intern reporter who had just graduated from college, as he had done back then.

“Yes, Miss Alina. Memories of my youth.”

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“Defensive counterattack, guys!” Twain clenched his fists in the locker room and seized the moment to repeat the main points of yesterday’s tactical meeting for his players. “Long balls! Don’t care how the laymen criticize this. You know what we need most right now. Not good-looking offensive cooperation and not gorgeous passes with your heels, but goals and victory! Middlesbrough will be pressing on us in the midfield. George, you’ll get their special care...” Twain pointed to Wood, who was changing his clothes.

Wood nodded and continued to put his jersey on.

“So, I ask you all not to hold the ball too much in the midfield. There is a great deal of risk in passing the ball more than three times in the midfield. I don’t want to see a scene where you pass the ball back and forth in the midfield and then send it to the opponent’s feet only to let them counter-press. Whether it’s George or Fernando, I mean Gago, we have to solidify the backfield in the game. Do not pass the ball past the centerline easily. Make use of long passes to organize attacks. The two sides...”

He also pointed to the two midfielders, Chris Cohen and Wijnaldum, who were in the starting lineup today.

“Your task today is the most important. You need to keep sprinting back and forth. During an attack, you must press forward. During the defense, you have to withdraw. If you can’t do it, I’ll bring you off! Anyway, I have a lot of people here who want to play.”

There was a burst of laughter in the locker room.

Twain also laughed. The atmosphere was very harmonious. There was no trace of nervousness. It was the pre-match atmosphere he wanted.

“The two strikers...” This time he stopped his hand movements. The two people looking at Twain were Mitchell and Balotelli. They were the starting strikers for the game. “Aaron, you have to try to push the opponent’s rear defensive line forward, press them to the front of the goal to create enough space for Mario.”

Twain did not deceive Balotelli. He did give Balotelli enough trust in the game, as well as the corresponding responsibility.

“Mario, thanks to the ups and downs in your performance in previous seasons, our opponent will not mark you too tightly...” Hearing his remark, some people were worried that Balotelli would be unhappy, but to their surprise, in the face of Twain’s teasing, Balotelli laughed along with him and did not care what Twain had said. It was a rare sight. Generally, Balotelli was very sensitive and cared a lot about others’ evaluation of him. If anyone dared to say that he was an inferior imported player with poor capability, he would certainly make the other party suffer. Now, from the looks of it, it seemed the boss had already dealt with this challenge in the locker room. “And they think that you’re used to playing on the right side. This game is your chance to prove yourself again, mate. We all know you’re a genius, but people out there don’t think so. Show them what you’ve got! You’re ‘Super Mario!’”

Finally, he touched on the rear defensive line.

“Guys, you’re the starting defenders for this game. You’re the key to the game.” Twain stood in front of the four starting defenders, who were respectively the left-back, Joe Mattock, the right-back, Nkoulou, and the center backs, Sakho and Jørgensen.

“I want you to strictly defend your zones. The full-backs are not allowed to assist with the offense and move forward. Except in the placekicks, do not use close marking defense. However, you have to be careful when defending in the backfield – do not blindly make a move to lift a siege. The defense is the source of offense. All attacks come from defense. You are not only defenders who break the opponent’s attacks, but you’re also the first stop of the offense. Therefore, I don’t want to worry that you will waste any chance of attack. After intercepting the ball, pass it over to the midfielders and let them organize the attack.”

“No problem, boss,” Mattock answered Twain on behalf of all the defenders.

Twain put his hands together and said, “That’s all that needed to be said. If I say more, you will dislike me for being long-winded. Finally, I want you to know one thing: although we lost the last round of the league tournament, it is not a reason to abandon ourselves to despair in this league round. In any case, my request to you is very simple – I don’t want anything but victory.”

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Once Twain had said all that, there were still more than ten minutes to go before the game began. He gave the players a break and was asked to step outside.

The person who asked him to go out was not a staff member, but the club chairman, Evan Doughty.

Next to him stood a young man who seemed to be in his twenties.

“My son, Bob. Come and meet your idol, Tony Twain,” Evan pulled the young man next to him, pointing to Twain as he spoke to him.

“Hello, hello! Mr. Twain, I’m your admirer...” The young man rushed forward to shake Twain’s hand.

“Ah, hello, Bob...” Twain was a little unaccustomed to the enthusiasm that the chairman’s son showed him.

Evan also seemed to notice that Twain was a little awkward. He hurriedly pulled his son away and said, “If you want an autograph, wait for the game to be over. You go up first, I still have some matters here.”

Bob seemed afraid to defy his father. He turned around and walked away reluctantly.

“It was your father who first introduced you to me as well. He was completely different from you at the time.” As Twain looked at Bob’s receding figure, his demeanor went back to normal. He smiled as he talked about the past. Fifteen years ago, Evan Doughty could not even differentiate between “a manager” and “a coach.” He knew almost nothing about football. Now, however, Bob Doughty was an avid fan...

Moreover, when Nigel Doughty introduced Evan to Twain at the time, he had already intended to retire from the front line to let his son take over. Now he had followed in his footsteps and introduced his son to Twain. It might also be to make clear to Twain that his son would take over in the future. It was just that...

Why did he introduce his son to him instead of to the new manager for the next season? Could it be he still thought Twain could help his son?

“He’s in love with football thanks to you, Tony. Ever since you’ve become the Forest manager, he has fallen in love with the sport after watching a few Forest games with me.”

Twain gave a chuckle and said, “Did you ask me to step out of the locker room just to introduce your son to me, Evan?”

“Of course not. In fact, I came to look for you for another matter. However, he found out and wanted to tag along... It’s this, Tony. You don’t have to go out with the team. You should make your appearance now.”

Twain thought it was a little strange and asked, “Why? It’s still early for the game to start...”

“We have prepared a special welcome ceremony for you, so you have to make your appearance alone, Tony,” Evan looked at Twain with a smile.

“What ceremony?”

“You’ll know soon, Tony. Come on, everyone’s waiting for you.”

Twain looked at the locker room. He turned around and walked over. He pushed the door open and issued a few instructions to David Kerlake, the assistant manager standing at the door, asking him to gather the team and get ready to make their appearance. Then he followed Evan Doughty and walked together toward the tunnel leading to the field.

As soon as he left, the players also walked out of the locker room at Kerlake’s urging, and walked toward the tunnel, getting ready to line up for admission to the field.

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When Twain reached the entrance of the tunnel, only three referees were waiting there. As they saw Twain walking over, one of them extended his hand to Twain to shake his.

In any case, Twain was the manager who led the England team to win the World Cup. That fact alone was worthy of respect.

Twain shook hands with the referee and found Evan still next to him. Then he turned around and asked, “This isn’t what you meant when you said ‘special welcome ceremony’, is it?”

Evan shook his head and patted Twain on the shoulder to say, “Go on and you’ll find out. You’ve got to walk this part by yourself, Tony. I’m sorry I can’t accompany you...”

Twain looked back at Evan Doughty. Doughty gestured to him to keep walking forward, so he stepped outside in puzzlement. Of course, he did not forget to stoop slightly – he was afraid that someone would throw water at him from the stands...

It was the only special welcome ceremony that he could think of, having his poor imagination...

However, it was not the case. There were no water balloons. Twain, who walked outside with his neck tucked in, looked left and right at the stands. He only saw enthusiastic fans.

Meanwhile, the music that was playing on the live broadcast came to an abrupt end and an old-sounding voice shouted excitedly, “And now! Let us welcome... His Majesty!!”

As if it were a flare signal, thunderous cheers erupted inside the Crimson Stadium before the voice faded away. All the fans in the stadium stood up, faced the entrance and called with their hands outstretched as they shouted, “Long live the King!”

Twain looked back in amazement and found that Evan was doing exactly the same thing as the fans in the tunnel.

“Long live the King!!!”

The cheers got louder with every wave.

It was indeed a special welcome ceremony...

Twain returned to his senses. He effortlessly waved in acknowledgment to the fans in the stands and then walked into the stadium with his head held high.

Along with his footsteps, the cheers continued.

With such cheers, he did not pretend to be modest but frankly accepted them. He deserved the address, and he earned the adoration of the fans because he was indeed His Majesty here!

The cheers continued as Twain walked to the center of the field. The players, on the other hand, had just arrived at the entrance of the tunnel. They had already heard the calls of the fans and saw that the boss was in the middle of the field. The old players, unsurprisingly, huddled together and pointed to Twain with smiles on their faces. Meanwhile, the players who had never played for Twain were completely stunned.

At this time, above the Robin Hood grandstand, a giant banner was hanging. The words on the red banner addressed Twain:

Welcome Home, Your Majesty!

“It’s really a surreal scene,” The television commentator exclaimed. He felt as if he was in a dream. How could this happen on a football field? In an era of the increasing commercialization of football, how many more people could still command such a heartfelt greeting?

“This game is the highlight of this round of the Premier League tournament, and Tony Twain is the highlight among the highlights!” Amid the deafening cheers, the commentator had to raise the volume of his voice as if someone had just scored a goal for the home team.

“I have a feeling that if Tony Twain announced that he was running for the British Prime Minister, he would definitely get more than half of the votes in Nottingham, and he wouldn’t have to campaign for them!”

“Even if the Queen were to be here, I’m afraid she would not be able to steal the limelight from him... No, not even the Pope could.”

“Remember that coronation night ten years ago? It is true that ‘His Majesty’ was by no means his own invention, nor was it hyped by the media. Twain is indeed His Majesty the King here!”

“Although many people hate him, he still enjoys a king’s treatment here. He was right to return. Tony! Look at the many people who adore you. You shouldn’t spend your days in retirement, ha!” John Motson laughed.

Standing in the middle of the field, Twain turned in a circle on the spot and waved in thanks to the Forest fans in the stands on all sides. He thanked them for preparing this “special welcome ceremony.” To be honest, he was very touched. Although he had left more than four years ago, his subjects still loved him, and that kind of adoration was the main reason why he finally decided to end his retirement and return to the Forest team.

People were emotional creatures. Even if Evan Doughty and Allan Adams had hurt him, the fans and the Forest team were innocent. His return was not for Evan Doughty, nor was it to make money. He just could not bear to see those fans, who used to shout to him in the stands, “Hey, Tony! Bring home another championship trophy!” to be sad. His conscience was clear about the decision.

Therefore, in the face of these fans’ wild cheers, it was inevitable and right that he accepted his position.

Among the cheering crowd were Fat John, Skinny Bill and all that group of people whom Twain was familiar with. The white-haired old guys that Brosnan had met before, and even some Middlesbrough fans, also followed the Forest fans in worship. In the eyes of all England fans, this guy should probably be ‘His Majesty the King’...

The loud cheers continued for five or six minutes and could be heard clearly outside the stadium.

Those fans in the square who could not get into the stadium also joined those inside and chanted “Long live Your Majesty!”, causing the other passers-by to fix their attention on their phenomenon.

The cheers slowly died down and ended as Twain walked toward the visiting team’s technical area to shake hands with the visiting manager, Tony Mowbray.

When curious reporters asked Mowbray after the game what he thought of the scene before that day’s game, Mowbray said with a laugh, “There’s only one ‘Tony’ today, but it’s not me.”

He was right. He was completely the supporting actor today. Even though he wanted to be the leading character before the game, that wish was gone when he saw the scene.

In the ensuing game, the Nottingham Forest team was clearly influenced by the scene. The entire team tossed out the previous gloomy appearance and shone with astounding and fearsome fighting spirit. With Twain’s long balls, as well as unexpected player and tactical arrangements, the team broke out with a powerful fighting force.

In addition, there was a huge noise created by 60,000 fans.

Middlesbrough surrendered after 17 minutes of resistance in a situation that was similar to a jet aircraft taking off.

They conceded three goals to Nottingham Forest in the second half and were utterly defeated with the score of 0:3 at the feet of the reborn Nottingham Forest.

After the game, the media joked about how they would go down in posterity as the team which personally experienced the return of His Majesty King Tony Twain. When the Premier League’s classic moments were mentioned in the future, there must be no shortage of footage on Middlesbrough.

Pierce Brosnan even excitedly used the following caption after the game:



I came; I saw; I conquered.

No one disagreed with this view, because that was the case.

All the doubting voices and arguments about Tony Twain and how “Twain is past his prime”, “Twain is no longer relevant” disappeared. The media nation-wide were unanimous in their singing of praises. Big and small media and commentators, as well as famous experts, had declared that the prevailing Tony Twain and Nottingham Forest were back. Under their iron hooves, their opponent could only cry for mercy. Middlesbrough was unfortunate but honored to be the first victim, used as a sacrificial flag by Twain.

Even though Nottingham Forest still ranked 16th in the table after this victory, even the top-ranked teams felt the chill running down their backs.

People could no longer laugh that they would surely win when up against the Forest team. The wolves lurking in the forest bared their fangs again. Tony Twain and his Nottingham Forest team were no longer jokes. On the contrary, those who once vowed to look down on them were now the biggest jokes. However, Twain did not strike back at those who had previously laughed at him in the media.

The king had returned, and everyone had to pay respects from far and near.

However, Twain smiled and looked serene.

In fact, personally rolling up his sleeves to go into battle and give out punches in his enemies’ faces would lower his status ...

### **Chapter 1005: The King without a Crown**

The media were full of news about Twain’s triumphant comeback, and no one could stop talking of it. There were people who liked him and people who disliked him, but nobody could ignore him.

Every flattering word that was invented since humans had started using written language was directed at Twain. Reporters loved complimenting him these days. Now that Twain was popular, saying good things about him could attract more readers and viewers.

There was another matter that added to his glory. In December, the British royal family issued an announcement stating the names of those who would receive an honor from the Queen on January 1. Tony Twain’s name was, astonishingly, on the list.

Britain issued royal honors twice a year, once on the first day of the year in January and the other time on the Queen’s birthday. The Order of the British Empire was awarded in recognition of those who had made outstanding contributions to the United Kingdom in various fields, such as culture, sports, and economy. Many people in the football world had received the honor, so it was not an extraordinary thing.

However, the controversy surrounding Twain when it came to the question of whether he should receive the honor has existed for a long time. In fact, after Twain led Nottingham Forest to win the Treble, it had been recommended that he should be given the honor for his outstanding contribution. Seeing how the Scottish manager, Ferguson, was awarded the Order of the British Empire by the Queen

after leading Manchester United to win the Treble, how could Twain, the most successful of all England's home-grown managers, not be honored the same way?

However, many people opposed the proposal at the time. The arguments against it were absurd – the opponents stated that the Treble win was not enough for Twain to receive the Order of the British Empire. In fact, it was simply an excuse. Ferguson was also awarded the Order of the British Empire after he led the team to win the Treble. In that case, why was Twain's achievement not enough? In fact, the real reason was not that Twain's achievements were not enough to receive the honor, but his dubious character and foul mouth. Many people thought that if the Order of the British Empire were awarded to such a figure, it would be national disgrace...

This might sound unbelievable, but it received a lot of support from many people at the time, including the sports minister and the Prime Minister himself. This went to show how terrible Tony Twain's reputation was in the country.

Fortunately, Twain himself was not interested in the honor. He never sang the anthem when he led the national team during the games. The honor meant little to him. Therefore, even though the debate over whether he was eligible for the title of "Sir" continued, he himself had turned a deaf ear. Being awarded the Order of the British Empire and receiving the title of "Sir" would not make him more money and could not lead him to make a full recovery from his heart disease overnight. He did not care for the empty title, whether he had it or not. He was fine either way.

Later, when he led the England national team to win the first UEFA European Championship in the country's history, the media mentioned the matter of the award again. Supporters thought the history-making championship title should qualify Twain to receive the honor. This time, the opponents did not say that his achievements were insufficient. They simply said that Twain's words and conduct did not conform to the code of a British Knight. Didn't Tony Twain despise authority? In that case, there was no reason to award him the Order of the British Empire...

The opposition was still strong, and Twain himself did not fight it, so the matter died down again.

However, Twain's supporters were not happy. They even set up a group calling for Twain to receive the honor. The group was known as "Twain for Knighthood", occasionally appeared in public, and petitioned for Twain to receive the honor.

It was not until the 2018 World Cup that things finally took a turn for the better.

"If a man had led a club to win almost all the championships that a football club can win, as well as leading the national team to win the highest honor of all, and still he is not awarded the Order of the British Empire by the Queen, it must be a scandal in the British Empire!" This was not a statement issued by a certain media outlet, but something that was said by a member of the British Parliament.

The remark called on the third appeal for Twain to receive the honor.

Three UEFA Champions League titles, three Premier League trophies, one EFL Cup, one FA Cup, two Football Association Community Shield cups, two UEFA Super Cups, one FIFA Club World Cup, one UEFA European Championship title, one FIFA Confederations Cup, one FIFA World Cup... Twain had gained them all.

The Nottingham Evening Post even ran a special issue featuring the photographs of all the honors Twain had received, and then it questioned the opponents, "If these honors and contributions cannot make Tony Twain a knight, how many people do you think are eligible to be honored throughout the United Kingdom?"

The Times also published an editorial pointing out that in today's British society, peerages were becoming devalued and the intrinsic value was getting lower, leaving only the use of honors as incentives. With the numerous confers of titles, even the most basic purpose of it was becoming cheap. Someone who donated a large sum of money to the government could receive the Order of the British Empire. For such a person to receive knighthood or Order of the British Empire, it could only reduce the prestige of the British royal family and ultimately render it worthless. In such a context, it was a great irony that some people who had truly made outstanding contributions to the government and country were not awarded the title due to such reasons.

Although the editorial did not mention Twain's name throughout, any fool could see that they were on Twain's side. This year, Twain must be included when it came to outstanding contributions. After he led his team to win the World Cup in Australia, he not only greatly boosted the confidence of the British people, but also enhanced the reputation of the United Kingdom. This even stimulated the British economy. With such accomplishments, it was really inexplicable to people that there was still controversy around the prospect of him being given the honor.

People even wrote letters to the Queen, imploring her to honor Twain.

It was through the efforts of these people that Twain's name appeared on the list of honorees, and it was said the Queen herself had personally decided this.

Nevertheless, Twain did not intend to accept...

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Long after the first recommendation for the honor was rejected, Twain knew that many people at the top level of the country did not like him. However, he had not like the country either. As a traditional Chinese man who "lived" in a British host, he was not interested in such a thing as the award. He had not thought to fight for his rights.

The second time that the recommendation was rejected reinforced Twain's disdain for the royal family as well as his contempt for the so-called peerage. A hundred years ago, perhaps such a peerage still held some attraction. Now that any Tom, Dick, and Harry could be honored, he had no need to shamelessly push for it. Twain was never a man who liked to get in on the action.

As for the third time... His supporters finally put him on the list of honorees, but he was disinterested in the farce.

"Do I have to call you Uncle Sir in the future?" Shania looked at the list in the newspaper and teased her husband.

Twain shrugged it off and gave her an unexpected answer, "You won't have that opportunity, my dear."

"Huh?" Shania did not understand what he meant.

“I intend to refuse the honor.”

“What...” Shania’s mouth was agape. She was shocked.

“It’s not that surprising, is it?” Twain was amused by Shania’s reaction. “More than three hundred people in history had refused the Queen’s award of honor. I will be just one of them.”

“I just don’t understand why,” Shania pouted.

“If I had been awarded the Order of the British Empire on the first occasion, perhaps I would have been happy to accept it in front of the Queen as an honor like a championship trophy. Now my mindset is different. The medal is currently not an honor to me, but a charity. I don’t want it,” Twain pointed to the list in Shania’s hand and sneered.

Shania smiled as she looked at Twain. She was not British and naturally did not look at it from the perspective of a British national honor. Anyway, it was just a title. Since her husband said he did not want it, then the matter was settled.

“Anyway, it’s a medal for you, so you can do as you please.” Shania tossed the newspaper aside and put her hands around Twain’s neck. She looked at him with affection in her eyes and then moved her body closer as she gently caressed Twain’s chest.

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Pierce Brosnan was shocked when he received an e-mail from Twain about his so-called “open letter.” Then he immediately called Twain.

“Tony, what are you thinking?”

“Huh?” Twain was not really awake yet and made a confused sound.

“I’m referring to the matter of your rejection of the honor... What the hell are you thinking?” Brosnan was holding tightly the “open letter” he had just printed out. The paper made a loud rustling sound when he trembled as he spoke.

“What am I thinking? I’m not interested in the common and tacky knighthood. It’s as simple as that, Pierce.” Twain stretched and got up from the bed. He turned his head to look at his wife, who was still sound asleep. He pulled the blanket over her and walked out in his pajamas.

It was very cold on the early December morning. He walked to the terrace, where the cold wind that was blowing in his face completely woke him up.

“Common and tacky? Tony, Don’t you know the significance of the honor?” Brosnan thought it must be because Twain had not woken up yet and was talking nonsense.

“Perhaps it was meaningful many years ago, Pierce. Now it’s meaningless. Even the owners of a fast-food chain can be awarded the Order of the British Empire. In a few years’ time, even the parents of newborn babies could reserve a spot ahead. With two thousand names a year, how many people in the UK do you think have not been awarded? Then again... I appreciate all your efforts to get me the award of honor. However, I don’t want this type of honor that smacks of charity. Am I a man who can’t live

without the Order of the British Empire and the title of 'Sir?' Do you think I care about an insignificant thing like knighthood now that I've won so many championships?"

"Er..." Brosnan was rendered speechless by Twain's words. He knew that Twain was an unruly man. It had not changed with his increasing age. However, he did not expect Twain to act this way with the British royal family...

"Don't you think it's such a pity, though, Tony?" Brosnan asked timidly.

"How can it be a pity? At best, I would be called 'Sir Anthony.' I don't think the people who did not respect me before will respect me just because I have a title. I don't think the people who have always liked me before will stop liking me if I do not become a Sir. I'm still who I am, I'm Tony Twain." Twain gazed into the distance in the east. The sun was rising, and the brilliant rays lit up the eastern skies and horizon while the white mist in the forest rose and rolled, making it look like a fairytale land.

What else could Brosnan have to say when he brought up this point? Twain was right. He was who he was. He was Tony Twain, so no one could change the decision he made. Even if he were to set himself against the world, all anyone could do was choose to stand with him or against him.

"You're going to make the royal family feel a great humiliation," muttered Brosnan.

"That's the result I want, haha!" Twain put a hand on his hip and guffawed loudly. "Some people did everything they could to make sure that I didn't get the title. Now they see this as a form of charity and peace offering to me. I'll tell them: let your self-righteous pride go to hell!"

Putting down the phone, Brosnan looked at the open letter in his hand and gave a sigh. He remembered a past event.

Before Twain, Nottingham Forest's equally controversial manager, Brian Clough, who led the Forest team to two Champions League titles and had impressive accomplishments, was not awarded a title by the royal family either. There were rumors that Clough himself refused the royal invitation for the honor, and some people said that the unruly old man disapproved of the government at that time. In any case, when people proposed the honor again after Clough's death, the matter was dropped because the Order of the British Empire and a peerage was not allowed to be conferred posthumously. In this way, Clough and the highest honor available to the British civilian population narrowly missed each other.

Fifteen years later, another Nottingham Forest manager, Tony Twain, also refused the royal honor. Was it fate?

Thinking further, nearly five hundred years ago, an unruly outlaw who felt contempt authority also appeared in this land. He led his men to go against the noble masters of the time, robbed the rich to help the poor, wandering the woods in the mountains with freedom.

Maybe this country has a tendency to produce this kind of characters...

Whether it was Robin Hood, Clough, or now Twain, they were all outlaws who were unruly, dared to challenge authority, and advocated freedom.

No matter what the outside world thought of them, their legendary stories would always spread through the lush Sherwood Forest. They were the heroes here.

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A day later, the open letter written by Twain himself was sent to the Nottingham Evening Post and immediately caused a stir.

In the letter, Twain thanked the British royal family and the friends who campaigned for the honor. However, he made it clear that he would reject the title. As for the reasons for the rejection, he did not say that the current intrinsic value and authority of the peerage had become increasingly lower, even though everyone knew it. His reasons were much stronger than this.

“...I know a lot of people do not want me to be honored. They think I do not deserve it, and I do not wish to comment on that. I just want to say that I never wanted to receive any Order of the British Empire from the start – have any of you seen me come out and speak up for myself during such debates? No, because I did not want it at all. Are those people who were against me disappointed now? Of course, I would like to thank my friends who have advocated for the honor on my behalf. However, I don’t want to go against my principles – I do not want to be addressed as ‘Sir Anthony’, and I do not want to make myself look like a beggar who has been given charity to satisfy others. I am who I am, I am Tony Twain. I have a better reward than an unimportant Order of the British Empire – 15 years as a manager and 16 championship trophies. I don’t need to rely on a peerage to show my worth and make everyone know my achievements. In the face of them, everyone will agree that I am Britain’s... no, the world’s best football manager.

Therefore, for all the reasons mentioned above, I refuse to accept this honor.”

Although many people had refused the honor from the British royal family for various reasons, it was the first time that someone had done it as arrogantly as Twain. His manifesto was so potent that it incited a huge response across Britain.

Once again, people experienced his recalcitrance.

The Sun later commented:

“...He did not open his mouth to strike back in the face of numerous doubting voices in the media after his comeback. He did not give a slap to those people who laughed at him after losing the first game. All this made us think that the 50-year-old Tony Twain was getting old, that he had lost his sharpest teeth and claws, and was meek like a kitten.

However, we were wrong. It was just that he did not meet an opponent worthy enough for him to make a move.

Now, as for the British royal family, the opponent’s name is impressive enough, as well as qualified enough to be his adversary. So once again we meet with the familiar Tony Twain, the guy who is used to set himself against the world.”

“A genius is always different from ordinary people.” Lineker talked about the incident with Alan Hansen and Mark Lawrenson on the television show and said this, “I admit that the appeal of the peerage to the public is declining every year. However, there are still a lot of people who want to receive such an award

every year. 2,000 places are still not enough. Under such circumstances, it is incomprehensible that Twain should give up the honor. However, he cannot be understood using an ordinary person's thinking. The comments I have heard the most since the matter came out were 'Why?', 'Why did he say no?', 'Why would he write such an arrogant open letter?', 'Why would he employ such a high-profile method of rejection?'... Many 'whys.' It seems to me that it would be foolish to ask Twain why. He never needs a reason to do things. If you must find a reason, then I can only say that he was probably in a bad mood, or in too good of a mood ..."

The Nottingham Evening Post even gave Twain the title of "The King Without A Crown" and wrote, "...Although I personally regret that I can't address Twain as 'Sir Anthony', it is just as Twain himself said: with 15 years of coaching and 16 major championship trophies, Twain no longer needs a knighthood to honor him for his accomplishments. He is, without a doubt, 'The King without a Crown!'"

### **Chapter 1006: A Man Should Not Let A Lady Go Home Alone**

The speculations about his return continued to be hyped in the media, but Twain was too busy to take notice. The most intense competition schedule had begun. If he and the players still wanted to have an enjoyable Christmas holiday, they could not lose too many games during this period...

Since Twain took over the team, he concentrated the most on defense and stamina. McAllister had neglected the stamina in the summer during preparations for the tournament and had indulged in the practice of his rich and varied offensive routines. To avoid collapsing completely in the second half of the league tournament, Twain could only help make up for what his predecessor did not do. It was why Twain insisted on competing with the simplest of tactics – he really did not have the time and energy to come up with flashy moves to please the crowd.

Since Sophia's death, Twain had been concerned about Wood's state of mind. Looking at the past few weeks, Wood had not sunk into despair due to the death of his mother. He did not bring up the matter of retirement again either.

Maybe the song sung by Shania had some effect... Twain hoped so.

Wood was hardworking, serious, and did his utmost more than ever during training. He was using this method to try to forget the pain of losing his mother, which Twain was powerless to do anything about. Time was the best medicine for the recovery from trauma. He believed that over time, Wood would eventually get over those emotions... Of course, it could not happen without the help of others.

"Hey, George." During a break in training, Twain called Wood over.

Wood thought Twain was going to talk to him about some of the arrangements for the game scheduled for the day after. However, he did not expect Twain to invite him to his house for dinner in the evening. "I've asked Shania to cook a meal for you... Why are you looking at me like that? She has honed her cooking skills now... All right, fine, I'll personally prepare the meal. In fact, Teresa misses her older brother Wood. Can you bear to make a sweet and lovely girl sad?"

Wood hesitated and finally nodded.

Twain looked at Wood's departing back view and shook his head gently. It was the only thing he could do for Wood. Twain felt uncomfortable at the thought of him locking himself after training ended, in that dark, cold, lifeless house as if it was not a real home, but an eerie and crumbling ancient castle full of ghost legends.

If it had not been for Wood's refusal, he had even planned to have Wood move to his own home and live with him. After all, there was more life in his own home.

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"Okay, guys. That's all for today. I'll remind you again that the busiest period will start from the day after tomorrow. If you don't want to spend Christmas in the English Football League Championship next season, then give me your best shot. The first target," Twain put up his right index finger as he spoke, "is to get out of the relegation zone. Always wandering at the edge of the relegation zone puts a lot of psychological pressure on me. That's all for now, guys."

The players left the training ground one by one. Twain called out and stopped Wood.

"Aren't you coming with me?"

Wood pointed to the sweaty training suit he wore and said, "I'm going to go home to change my clothes and take a shower."

Twain looked at him and said, "George, are you really refusing to consider my suggestion? You might as well move in to live with us."

Wood shook his head and said, "No, I prefer staying in my home."

Twain sighed helplessly and said, "All right, that's up to you. We'll wait for you at home. Besides, you can come whenever you want."

"Thank you." Wood did not turn around straight away but said 'thank you', which surprised Twain a little. He thought he would not hear the words "thank you" because of Wood's awkward temper.

It looked like... he had matured a little.

Twain pinched his chin and pursed his lips.

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Teresa knew that Wood was coming and was excited. After she heard the news, she sat properly in the living room and waited while Twain and Shania were busy in the kitchen, preparing a sumptuous dinner.

However, after they got all the dishes ready, Wood had not come yet.

"He just has to shower and change clothes. It shouldn't take so long..." Twain looked at his watch. It was 8:30 p.m., and the team's training was over before seven o'clock.

"Does George have a car?" Shania asked.

"No."

"He won't walk here, will he?"



Twain was taken aback by his wife's idea and said, "Walk all the way here from Wilford? Don't joke, my dear. He's not an idiot."

"Then, could he have met with some trouble..." Shania, with her chin in her hand, looked up at the ceiling and muttered to herself.

"What kind of trouble could he have? I'll be thankful if he doesn't give trouble to others..." Twain also muttered to himself. However, he was not sure what happened. Could it be that Wood went home, saw his mother's photograph, suddenly lost the will to come and decided to stay at home? It was quite possible... However, he should have given him a phone call to explain.

Just as the two people's imagination was running wild, the doorbell outside rang.

"Big Brother Wood!" Teresa happily yelled as she jumped off the couch and went to open the door, while Twain and Shania looked at each other. It looked as if their guest had arrived.

"Big Brother Wood..." Teresa, who stood at her tiptoes to open the door, looked at the two people outside with a puzzled expression.

"Hello, Teresa." George Wood, who was wearing a suit, greeted Teresa, who stood at the door looking up at himself and the girl behind him.

"Hello, Teresa," Wood's companion gave a friendly wave to the little girl.

Twain, who was still wearing an apron, and his wife came out of the kitchen and were also taken aback when they saw Wood standing outside in the yard with Vivian behind him.

"Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Twain." Vivian went round in front of Wood and waved her hand in greeting at the Twains.

Seeing the surprised expressions on the faces of both Twain and Shania, Wood pointed to Vivian, who was standing next to him, and said, "I did not ask her to come but she insisted on tagging along with me."

"I had asked George to have dinner together, but he said you invited him, so I came along. I hope I'm not bothering you," Vivian said politely to the two hosts.

After seeing the behavior of the couple, Twain understood everything. Consequently, he immediately changed the expression on his face, beamed and invited the two of them in. "It's no bother at all. We couldn't be more pleased... You know, George never brings any friends to our place, especially..." he glanced at Wood and added, "female friends."

Shania also understood what was going on, and hurriedly welcomed them. She patted Teresa on the head and said, "Teresa, show Big Brother Wood and Big Sister Vivian the way."

Teresa turned back at every step to look at the two as she led them into the house.

Twain and Shania deliberately fell behind.

"She was the nurse in the hospital who constantly cared for Sophia until she passed away," Twain said to Shania. "You must have met her at the funeral."

“Yes, she was standing behind Wood at the time... When did they start going out?” Shania whispered.

Twain gave a silent chuckle. “It seems that our woodblock has encountered a persistent character!”

“I think it’s wonderful. The best way to forget a painful period is to find new love.” Shania linked her arm with Twain’s and rested her head on his shoulder. “I’m sure Sophia would be very happy, too.”

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During dinner, the focus of the conversation was on Vivian, as if she were the one invited by the Twains, and Wood was nothing more than a prop.

Shania kept chatting with Vivian, asking her about her job, her current situation, and taking an indirect approach to find out how she and Wood had gotten close enough to have dinner together with his old friends...

All the while, Wood sat there like a blockhead.

Vivian appeared natural and relaxed. She was not nervous at all, facing a legendary manager who had just caused a huge debate across the United Kingdom and a Hollywood movie star and supermodel. She behaved a little like when she first stopped Wood in the hospital.

Twain did not chat with Vivian in the same manner as his wife did. He only occasionally said a few words, and at other times, he observed both Wood and Vivian. He noticed that Vivian always glanced at Wood, intentionally or unintentionally, while Wood was fully focused on eating his dinner.

It was interesting.

“As a friend of George’s, I think he must have been a headache for you, hasn’t he?” Twain interjected. He knew it was not easy to get along with George. He originally thought that only he and Shania could interact with Wood peacefully. Outsiders never knew when they might offend Wood. He was as strong and stubborn as an ox, but tender-hearted like a sentimental young lady.

Speaking of which, Vivian got a little embarrassed. She took a look at the indifferent Wood next to her and laughed as she said, “Actually... I think I’m the one who gives George a headache.”

Both Twain and Shania were taken aback. Oh, my God! Was there anyone else in the world who could give Wood a headache?

Seeing the surprised look in the eyes of the two hosts, Vivian further explained, “I can feel that sometimes George is angry with me, but he will not scold me, nor will he drive me away or anything like that... But I think he must have a headache.”

At this time, Wood, who had not said anything at all until now, spoke up. “She’s right, I do have a big headache.”

Twain laughed, and then Shania laughed along with her husband.

Teresa looked curiously at her parents. Although she did not understand what was going on, since her parents laughed, she laughed as well...

Only Wood and Vivian at the dining table wondered why Twain and his family found this so funny.

Twain stopped laughing after much difficulty and then looked at Wood and said, "Oh, George. I'm so happy that someone is finally able to control you, haha!"

Vivian did not understand why Wood would not scold her even though she made him angry. However, Twain clearly understood. It was because Vivian was the only one who had been with Wood's mother in the last days of her life. The young nurse had been by Sophia's bedside the whole time while she was in a coma for the final two days. It was a huge kindness in Wood's view. He certainly would not mistreat the benefactor who had accompanied his mother and stayed with her at the passing of her last breath.

However, Wood must not like the fact that Vivian was taking care of him, so he felt powerless and annoyed.

Shania also understood the reason behind it, so she laughed as well. The people all over the world who could make Wood yield could be counted on one hand and happened to be here at this table today. She turned to look at her own husband and found him staring at the two people across with a cheeky expression.

What did he see?

George's future?

Vivian was a little embarrassed by Twain's words, while Wood was even more uncomfortable.

After dinner, Wood was going to say goodbye. He did not want any jokes at his expense. However, Twain did not want to let him go just like that.

"It's Christmas in two weeks' time, George. Come to our place then. Shania is going to work again. Surely you're not going to let Teresa and me have a lonesome Christmas by ourselves?" Twain was good at finding an excuse. Once he used the sweet Teresa as the trump card, and once Wood had taken a look at Teresa's bright and beautiful eyes, full of anticipation, he bit back the words of polite decline.

He nodded.

"Are you going to spend Christmas with your parents, Miss Vivian?" Twain asked, turning to her.

"No... They've already booked a flight to Barcelona. They're taking advantage of the Christmas period to go on holiday, which they had been planning since the beginning of the year," Vivian shook her head.

"In that case, you..."

"And I have to work shifts, so I have to stay in Nottingham," Vivian gave Twain a smile.

"Well..." Twain turned to look at Wood and said to him, "Don't forget to bring Miss Vivian with you at Christmas, George."

Wood looked up in amazement at a smiling Twain.

Vivian also looked at Twain in surprise. Soon, however, she turned her gaze to Wood, as if waiting for his answer.

Vivian was not the only one waiting for it. Twain and Shania were looking at Wood, waiting eagerly.

Wood hesitated and finally gave a curt nod.

Twain smiled and so did Shania. Vivian also lowered her head and smiled.

“Very well, let’s call it a night now.” Twain and his family saw Wood and Vivian out of the courtyard. Then Twain said to Wood, “Take Miss Vivian home first before you go back.”

Wood looked at him.

“A man should not let a lady go home alone.” Twain put his hand on Wood’s shoulder and squeezed it hard.

“If you’re worried you’ll get home too late, I can allow you to be 15 minutes late for training tomorrow morning.”

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Wood was not late for the training session the next day. He was still the first in the entire team to arrive at the training base, the first one to change into the training clothes and the first one to appear on the training ground.

Two days later, in the first game of the devil’s calendar during the Christmas period, Wood led the team to a victory over the visiting Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club. Then a piece of news came from Paris, France, that George Wood was awarded the European Ballon d’Or for his outstanding performance in this year’s national team competition. On the same day, Wood was also awarded the World Player of the Year award by United Kingdom’s World Football publication. In addition, this year’s Laureus World Sports Awards’ Sportsman of the Year award was also waiting for him.

More than a week later, five days before Christmas, Wood and Twain flew together to the Austrian capital, Vienna. In Wiener Musikverein, Wood took the FIFA World Player of the Year trophy from the FIFA President Blatter.

Although the club’s performance was not very good, this year was the year of the World Cup. All the major awards were judged accordingly by a major event like the World Cup. Twain’s England team was an emphasis on the team as a whole. As the core and captain of the team, Wood was naturally the key figure in the team ultimately winning the World Cup. It was indisputable that he should be elected as FIFA World Player of the Year.

Wood appeared a little awkward and slow of speech at the awards ceremony, but his brief acceptance speech made Twain’s eyes tear up as he sat below the stage with a smile on his face and prepared to clap.

“All my glory belongs to my mother, and this is no exception.” He held up the golden cup in his hand and said, “Thank you, Mom. Thank you, Mr. Twain.”

It was the first time Wood had won such a prestigious award and his career had reached a peak. Hopefully, his life would start a whole new chapter from now on...

In addition, Tony Twain, who led the England team to the World Cup, was once again named FIFA World Coach of the Year. This was nothing new. Twain had appeared on this stage to accept the awards when

he led his team to win the first UEFA Champions League, as well as the defending UEFA Champions League title and when he won the Treble as well.

It was the fourth time in his coaching career that he had stepped upon this podium.

“I hope you don’t get bored.” Twain’s first words made everyone below the stage burst into laughter. “It’s definitely not a pleasant thing to see my annoying face again. But it doesn’t matter; you all can breathe a sigh of relief.” When Twain said this, he turned to the FIFA and UEFA officials. “I’m only working again for this season, so I want to say goodbye to you in advance.” He waved his hand and continued, “This time, the farewell is real, and I won’t be coming back. So, you can have a good night’s sleep in the future, guys.”

Then, amid the startled expressions of the senior officials, Twain took the trophy and slowly walked off the stage. He was greeted by a standing ovation from the entire audience.

Although there were many rivals here who were his opponents on the field, they still gave respect and acknowledgment to the professional who had won so many honors.

No matter how much they disliked Twain, those championship trophies served as constant reminders for them to respect him.

In Wiener Musikverein, the top classical music hall of Vienna, Tony Twain, the best in his field, had also made it to the top level of football. Everyone, including his opponents, respected him. No one dared to question his status again.

### **Chapter 1007: Inside First, Then Outside**

Although rejecting the Queen’s award caused a stir at home, Twain wasn’t much affected. He was still taking the team everywhere, playing the game. In every Forest home game, their Crimson Stadium was still full of seats. The Nottingham press continued to sing his praises every week. The voices of the few opposing media people did not affect him at all.

Britain’s royal family only regretted that Twain, such a prominent celebrity, has refused to be honored. They did not say much about it. Perhaps they thought that it was really inappropriate to take it so seriously when one had royal noble status like they did.

However, someone must have been dissatisfied with Twain’s open letter, because they felt like they were deeply offended. Twain didn’t care how they felt. Just let those haters keep on hating him.

“Nottingham Forest have risen from 17th to 14th place...”

Xia Yang was reading the news of international football in the newspaper.

“Are you still questioning my choice, Uncle Xia?” Chen Jian was sitting next to him, peeling an apple for himself.

“Hey...” Xia Yang had to admit that he was not as trusting towards Twain as the young man next to him was. “Just a few victories, that doesn’t make a difference. And I’ve heard that Twain will retire again at

the end of the season. What will you do then? You have to know that ‘every emperor has a cabinet composed of his own favorites’, Chen Jian.”

“I’m going to be worth more than I am right now even if I only spent half a season at Nottingham Forest. Don’t you know this, Uncle Xia?” Chen Jian lifted the apple parings, and Xia Yang saw the paring of an apple was not cut off at all. The slices were still connected as one. “Furthermore, maybe the new head coach will like me as well?”

“Stop your daydreaming!” Xia Yang gave him an angry stare, but deep inside he wished this may be true.

“What did the club say?”

“Nottingham Forest has made an official offer, but they haven’t given any reply yet. I think they’re going to wait until the winter transfer window opens. I hope it will get more attention from the other clubs for a better price.” Speaking of this, Xia Yang frowned. “I have given the news to the press, but I think the pressure they put the club under is quite not enough yet.”

“I would like to join Nottingham Forest as soon as I can, Uncle Xia. ”

Xia Yang looked at him. “If you want that, you will have to go to Manzano to talk to him personally, Chen Jian. Media news can only be considered as catching the wind and grasping at the shadow, but as for the player’s own opinion, they will have to consider it.”

Chen Jian put a piece of apple in his mouth and took a bite. “OK, I’ll go to talk to Mr. Head coach.”

Chen Jian went to find his coach Manzano for a showdown, while Twain was making his way to Thiago Silva.

“To be honest, Thiago, the club doesn’t need you anymore. If you think of looking for a new club after the winter window opens, I’m sure many will be ready to appreciate the contribution you’ve made in recent years.” Twain sat in his office chair and looked at the 33-year-old center-back on the sofa.

Both men looked a little aloof. Twain had long wanted to get rid of this “Overlord in the dressing room”. Now the chance was finally here.

During the last round of the league, Twain used the rotation system in the dense schedule. Thiago Silva, who hasn’t played ever since he took the job, finally appeared in the starting lineup. However, his performance was not flattering at all. At the age of 33, he clearly couldn’t resist the impact of a young striker. His speed was low, his turn slow, and his bounce poor. Where he’s been had become a major weak point for the opponent. Twain eventually had to replace Silva at the start of the second half and sent Sacco to finally stabilize the situation.

Although in this game the Forest team only got a draw, it showed to many people Silva’s embarrassing performance.

“I’d like to finish my contract with the club and retire from the Forest,” Silva made his own comments without any expression.

“If you’re willing to leave the team in January, the club will compensate you for the rest of the season.” In order to get rid of this man, Twain spared no effort. And Evan Doughty was also in line with Twain. Even if it meant losing lots of money, he wouldn’t hesitate.

“I have signed a contract with the club for a year and a half.”

Thiago Silva’s remark meant that the club should compensate him for the entire duration of the contract. Twain and Doughty would certainly not agree to such a request, but at least it meant Silva was ready to leave the team, it was only that the price didn’t reach his expectations yet.

Twain could only curse Evan privately in his mind. He could not understand how Evan was thinking to sign another three-year contract with a 32-year-old center-back. It was said that Alan had done this deal, and now he could not help believing that Allen had received some profit from Silva’s agent.

Therefore, it might not have been a whim for Evan to dismiss Allen.

What if Silva insisted on fulfilling the eighteen-month contract?

Twain said, “Then I’ll give you a showdown, Thiago. From today on, until your contract expires, I will not put you on the starter lineup, nor will I put you on the roster. You won’t get a second in all the games, even in the preseason. The team doesn’t need you now. You can go back to Brazil for a holiday, or you can go somewhere else to play or spend your vacation however you wish. I won’t care if you come to train or not. However, every time you miss a training session, I’ll deduct your salary for a week. Every time you are late for training, I’ll deduct your salary for a week as well. What do you think of this condition?”

Thiago Silva suddenly showed a surprised look – this head coach was simply too ruthless!

Seeing his change of expression, Twain grinned silently. He wasn’t at all afraid that doing so would cause the other players to complain. The Brazilian was no better at the dressing room than Balotelli, and many English players and veteran players were eager to see how Silva would suffer.

However, since the conversation has gone this far, there was no need to talk about it anymore. Silva would definitely not discuss it calmly, and Twain wasn’t planning on wasting his breath.

Silva left the head coach’s office with a furious look, and Twain believed that next, he would look for his agent, but he was not afraid at all. If Silva was going to leave, of course it would be the best choice for both of them. However, if he insisted on staying, Twain was determined that the Brazilian would know who was in charge of Wilford and Nottingham Forest.

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However, Twain did not see Silva’s agent, and Silva wasn’t late for training or absent. Instead, he worked harder in the training. Twain thought Silva was testing him to see if what he said was true or just a bluff.

Twain was not concerned whether Silva believed what he said or not. In the next week, in two games, Silva did not even enter the roster.

In fact, that Silva didn’t make the roster list for two rounds in a row wasn’t such big news, so basically, the media didn’t pay much attention at first. But then came the news in The Sun that there was a conflict between Silva and Twain.

Twain had a hunch that it was something Silva’s agent had done in an act of trying to put pressure on him. What a joke. He was not afraid of this.

Indeed the reporters quickly came to Twain to ask him if he had a conflict with Silva or not.

Twain didn't answer the question head-on. "A nearly 34-year-old center-back was out of the roster list for two rounds in the league. Isn't it normal for a player of that age? I don't know what you're so surprised at."

As Twain's partner, Evan stood out at the right time and said, "The club is thankful for Silva's contribution to the team over the course of four seasons. The club also hopes he can get better at the end of his career."

This was a subtle expression of the club's position – Tony Twain and I are on the same side.

In this case, Nottingham Forest club and Tony Twain were both right. They didn't have to waste their weekly salary on a guy who basically couldn't get out to play regularly. They didn't care if they were criticized for being ruthless. How many clubs were charitable these days? Besides, charity was for those with true loyalties, not for everyone alike. Otherwise, the club would turn into a nursing home. AC Milan was once regarded as the most humane club, but they didn't leave every worthless player in their club. They drove away a large number of players every year. A world like professional football was actually very cruel...

The team actually knew there was a conflict between Twain and Silva, but no one came forward to say anything. Even those foreign players who had been very well with Silva once now saw him as the plague and tried to get away from him as far as they could.

Once a big rival in the locker room to George Wood, he was suddenly deserted by his followers. He no longer had anything to rely on to move against Twain. After these two rounds, he was convinced that Twain was really someone who could do anything as he said. Two rounds out of the roster list were just a warning. Then if he had the slightest slack in the training, and were caught by Twain, it would end up with real punishment.

It looked like his good days here were over.

Twain finally met Silva's agent, who came to confirm whether if Silva really left Forest this winter the club would compensate him for the rest of the half-season.

Twain nodded and made the promise. They could inform the media about this news. If the club didn't live up to that promise, Silva could get justice for himself through the news media.

The next thing was simple.

Silva wanted to return to Brazil to end his career. The club was generous enough to say that they could terminate Silva's contract ahead of schedule and compensate him for the rest of the half-season so that Silva was free to join any club he wanted.

Meanwhile, negotiations for Chen Jian were continuing. The RCD Espanyol offered 20 million, and both Evan and Twain thought it was too much. Even as the core of the RCD Espanyol, Chen Jian was not worthy of this price. Therefore, they deliberately cooled down the negotiations, waiting for news from Barcelona.



A few days later, the local Barcelona media reported that Nottingham Forest was interested in buying Chen Jian, who also found Manzano to give him a showdown and expressed his desire to leave the team.

As a head coach, Manzano certainly didn't want his team core to leave, but he was under pressure from both the club and Chen Jian. Chen Jian was determined to go, even up to a refusal to train. The club also wanted to sell Chen Jian to obtain next season's transfer budget.

Finally, after repeated negotiations, the two sides finalized the transfer fee at nine million pounds. Chen Jian has become the most expensive player in the Chinese professional football history. In addition, he has once again attracted the attention of the world's football community. Of course, it wasn't just he who caught the world's eye, but also the Nottingham Forest club that acquired him for this price.

Many media outlets didn't understand why Nottingham Forest was buying a player with similar technical features and style to Wood, and a Chinese midfielder who was no longer young at that. However, this time no reporters jumped out to mock him in such a hurry. They all learned patience in the face of this man who would always slap the doubting ones in the face. The media were all waiting, waiting for Chen Jian to come to the Forest team to make a fool of himself.

Twain didn't care what the media thought. It was the best for the media to be confused because his opponents were confusing too.

He was delighted that the transfer negotiation had finally been settled before the winter transfer window opened. In this way, on January 1 next year, they could introduce Chen Jian right away.

In a phone call to Chen Jian, Twain told him the good news. "If you can pass the physical examination, you'll catch up with the Football Association Cup on January 5."

Chen Jian didn't understand why this was good news. If being able to play for the new team as soon as possible was good news, it was good for the player. It had nothing to do with the head coach!

"The schedule has come out early! Nottingham Forest's first game of the Football Association Cup this season is against Notts County." Twain smiled on the other end of the line. "To tell you the truth, Chen Jian, my successor is your compatriot and you will have the opportunity to show your strength in front of him in the Football Association Cup."

Hearing this, Chen Jian understood Twain's intentions.

He knew Dunn and Twain weren't the kind of head coaches who would be unfairly privileged. Dunn could become the head coach of Nottingham Forest after that, no doubt, only because of Twain's recommendation. There would be absolutely no question of opposing Twain's words in Nottingham. If he didn't want to just be a passer-by at Nottingham Forest, he would have to show his strength in front of the next head coach. Wasn't it better to show his strength ahead of time in front of Dunn than after he became the head coach?

This was really good news.

On Christmas Eve, Twain and his daughter Teresa dined at home with George Wood and Miss Vivian. In the passing year, many good things happened to Twain. Although Sophia has left her son this year, Twain was now delighted to see Wood make a fresh start, a new life that was entirely his own.

## Chapter 1008: New Force

January 1, 2019.

On this day, Nottingham Forest sent someone away and welcomed a new member.

Nottingham Forest announced that 34-year-old Brazilian center back Thiago Silva was out of contract now. He would be free to join Brazil's Vasco da Gama, where he planned to end his career.

Silva left the club in the morning. In the afternoon, the team had their only one move that winter – introducing midfielder Chen Jian from the RCD Espanyol.

“Only reporters, no fans, and basically only Chinese reporters. It's not the future I've planned for you, Chen Jian.” Sitting in the Ford car the club especially sent to pick them up, Xia Yang was looking at those reporters out of the window as he spoke to Chen Jian.

“The boss told me that the meeting with the fans was moved to before the Football Association Cup. As for reporters, the English reporters are waiting to see me become the biggest joke in here.” Chen Jian also turned his head to look out of the window, seeing many familiar faces.

Although Nottingham Forest now ranked lower than the RCD Espanyol in the league, after all, they were a traditionally strong football team that has taken the European Champions Cup five times in all. Chen Jian's transfer this time has attracted domestic attention. He could tell this from the several familiar signs on the press people's chests alone.

Chen Jian was getting used to all this. He was not the kind of nobody who had first come to England years ago. Now he was the number one Chinese player. The reaction to his transfer was predictable. Chinese fans still had illusions, though they were already very practical. Chen Jian's achievement already made them happy and satisfied.

“You can really see this through.” Xia Yang muttered to himself. The domestic response gave him a slight relief. Look at these reporters! It was obvious that Chen Jian was a star. He joined Nottingham Forest for a record-creating £9 million transfer fee, which was unheard of for a Chinese football player and had caused a great response at home.

In fact, £9 million was for the people who didn't know the details. It was actually £10 million, but £1 million went into Xia Yang's own pocket.

The negotiations were made personally by Evan, who slashed the price from the initial unacceptable £20 million to £9 million. If it were not for Chen Jian's firm decision to leave the team, the RCD Espanyol wouldn't want to sell him at this price at all.

“But this is not too bad. England is the birthplace of paparazzi, and the media industry here is very developed. If you play here you can get more attention.” As an agent, Xia Yang naturally commented on this transfer from his point of view. As for what happened on the court, he had no influence on that, so he did not consider it.

During the conversation, the car stopped at the entrance to The Crimson Stadium. It has long been crowded with media from China.

Chen Jian got out of the car and the flashes of cameras lit up. He didn't stay long and walked straight into the press conference hall inside the stadium.

At the backstage, he saw the club president Evan Doughty and team head coach Tony Twain.

"Welcome to Nottingham Forest, Chen," Evan Doughty, the club president, took the lead in welcoming him, reaching out his hand to shake Chen Jian's.

"Thank you, Mr. President."

Chen Jian's attitude was not too humble, nor too arrogant.

Evan knew this occasion was not for him to play the leading role. That role was for the man behind him. So he didn't say anything else to Chen Jian and went to see how the press conference was prepared, giving the stage to Twain and Chen Jian.

"After a circle, you come to the Nottingham Forest again, Chen Jian," Twain said to Chen Jian in English.

"It's always been my dream to join the Forest," Chen Jian also replied in English.

"From the beginning?"

"From the beginning."

Twain laughed with joy and stretched out his hand. Chen Jian thought he was going to shake his hand. He did not expect Twain to just pat him heavily on the shoulder.

"I hope Nottingham Forest can be the last stop of your career."

Chen Jian thought about retiring at Nottingham Forest. It sounded like a pretty good thing. He nodded and said, "I hope so."

"What do you think of the team's results? I remember some media saying Nottingham Forest's league rankings were not even as good as those of the RCD Espanyol," Twain asked. "Some of the press is saying that your transfer was only for the money."

It was very understandable for Nottingham Forest to pay Chen Jian a higher weekly salary than he got in RCD Espanyol. At the current stage of Chen Jian's career, why would he choose to transfer for less pay? The RCD Espanyol hasn't raised Chen's salary since his arrival. Chen Jian was the RCD Espanyol's main midfielder but still held the initial salary he got when he just transferred from the Eredivisie. His salary level was below the rank of the whole team. It was natural that Xia Yang always wanted Chen Jian to leave RCD Espanyol. His salary really didn't match Chen Jian's contribution to the team.

RCD Espanyol may still think the Chinese workforce was cheap, but Xia Yang was smarter than they thought.

"I am thinking more about the future." Chen Jian avoided the topic of money. He didn't lie. Compared with that weekly salary, the chance to compete in European events at Nottingham Forest was what he wanted most. As a professional football player, if asked what his biggest regret was, he wouldn't say it was never having won a title. Rather, it was the fact that he has never competed in a European event.

Neither in Spain nor in the Netherlands. He was keen to play in the European Champions Cup and the UEFA Champions League, which represented the highest level of football.

“The future.”

Twain didn't go on asking. He and Chen Jian were sitting in the background, waiting to come out quietly.

Evan Doughty welcomed Chen Jian on behalf of the club, and then Chen Jian walked out from the background advertisement board with the attention of all the Chinese media on site.

Unlike a big superstar joining the team, the press conference hall wasn't even half full. Most of the media were Chinese, and the rest were Nottingham local press. Chen Jian's eyes didn't stop there. He glanced around, shaking hands with Evan Doughty and Tony Twain, then stood in front of the microphone prepared for him.

“I'm very happy to join the team that cultivated me at the beginning. It's always been my dream to wear a Nottingham Forest uniform again.”

Many players would say that when joining the new team.

Something like, “I have wanted to play for Real Madrid since I was a kid.”

“It was my biggest dream to join AC Milan.”

“I've always been a Barcelona fan.”

“It's my pleasure to play for International Milan.”

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And so on, this was almost the standard template. All the players had to do was change the name of the club.

So no one in the media took Chen Jian's words seriously, even if they knew Chen Jian was really from the Nottingham Forest youth team.

When the media were free to ask questions, one of Nottingham's locals immediately stood up and asked: “Nottingham Forest is currently ranked very poorly. Do you feel the pressure on your shoulder?”

“I want to play football and contribute to the promotion of the team through my own efforts.” Chen Jian's answer was rather careful and mature.

The Nottingham local media was concerned about whether the arrival of Chen Jian could really strengthen the team, while the Chinese media were only concerned about whether Chen Jian could really perform in the team to his advantage.

The CCTV5 reporter stood up and asked, “You're similar to George Wood in technical characteristics. Did the coach Tony Twain promise you anything before you joined the team?” He asked in Chinese.

Twain heard this, grabbed the microphone instead of Chen Jian and replied, “You will know when the game is played. Now Chen Jian and I don't answer any of these tactical questions. Thank you for your cooperation.”

Chen Jian heard what Twain said, but he only smiled a bit. He did not say anything.

This has disappointed many people from the Chinese media. The press conference was meaningless without asking their most interesting questions.

The press conference was brief because there was no fan-meeting ceremony. After answering their questions, Chen and Twain pulled up a red Nottingham Forest uniform and showed it to reporters. It had Chen Jian's last name and the number 14 on it.

If nothing unpredictable happened, this uniform would accompany him through five seasons with Forest, when he would turn 33. If he wanted to retire from the Forest, he'd have to come up with a better performance to please the picky head coach.

Standing in front of the reporters, Twain and Chen Jian both had smiles on their faces, but they weren't sanguine. They knew that this was only the starting point, not the end for taking a long breath.

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"Chen Jian joins the Euro Champions League hot team; he is called the successor of Wood!"

This was the sports news headline of the most famous portal in China. It was not the text under the heading that was most interesting, but the comments under the text.

"Shanxi netizen: don't tease! The successor of Wood? Is the editor Chen Jian's father?"

"Sichuan netizen: Sichuan netizen sends congratulatory message for Wood on finding his successor!"

"Beijing netizen: again the Title Editor. What is the point of sticking to the Title Editor for more than twenty years... Psycho!"

"Tianjin netizen: 'Chen Jian, when do you become Wood's successor?' 'Tomorrow, tomorrow!'"

"Sichuan netizen: why can't Chen Jian be the successor of Wood? I think it's reasonable. I believe Tony really wanted this when he bought him, didn't he?"

"Chongqing netizen: Upstairs Baby son, our captain can kick to 40 years old. Can Chen Jian also do that? When he retires, the captain will still be playing!"

"Shanghai netizen: Ah, we will not see Chen Jian in the Barcelona derby anymore."

"Zhejiang netizen: Why should not he be happy? Looking at what they've done at home to the RCD Espanyol in the last few years, it's a hell of a ~~"

"Hubei netizen: Yellow dog dies!"

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"It's funny, all the news about you can be connected to the other clubs' resentment."

Living in his temporary hotel room in Nottingham, Chen Jian was preparing to write on the portal's blog via the internet.

Xia Yang was watching the news on the website next to Chen Jian. That was the sentiment he felt after reading the comments.

The website was originally contacting him through Xia Yang, who opened a guest blog for him in order to gather popularity. However, the website's headlines were still tasteless.

"I don't recall saying anything at the press conference about being Wood's successor," Chen Jian looked at Xia Yang.

"Then post an article on your blog for rebuttal! It will increase your popularity."

"Did you arrange all this, Uncle Xia? "

Xia Yang spread out his hands.

"You were known in the RCD Espanyol as the 'Smaller Size George'. This has long been circulating in China, and it's natural for other people to think about this. "

Then Chen Jian wrote on his blog about the team's press conference, explaining why the website sports news said he was Wood's successor. He said he wasn't Wood's successor at all and that no one had said such a thing at the press conference. It must have been a misunderstanding by Chinese reporters.

The original blog title was "Finally, I realized my long-time dream!"

This was originally a very inspirational, but not very creative title. However, the portal editor deliberately changed the title into "I am not Wood II, I want to be Chen Jian!"

The click rate and the comments were coming like nonstop tides. And of course, there was plenty of negativity.

The next day Chen Jian told his agent to stop blogging on the website after the contract with it expired. What the website was doing was so bitchy. Xia Yang shrugged. "You are a public figure, and every word you say can be distorted by the media with ulterior motives."

"So I will remain silent from now on," Chen Jian said with a poker face. "I will only show myself on the football field. If there is any media blog or column invitation in the future, refuse them!"

Xia Yang agreed, but he was still thinking, You cannot refuse all forms of interview, Chen Jian! You have to get used to the fact that the media are playing with their words to make any news more eye-catching!

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The next day, Xia Yang went to find a house for Chen Jian, while Chen Jian went to Wilford to report that he will attend training with the team. At the training ground, George Wood, as the captain, welcomed the new teammate on behalf of the team. As Forest players, they were no stranger to the former teammate who once walked out of Forest.

Without Thiago Silva, and with Balotelli having a more positive attitude, the atmosphere within the team was now very harmonious. Chen Jian has not suffered much trouble or obstacles.

Fortunately, China's media influence was confined to China. Otherwise, if the Nottingham Forest's team knew what happened on the Chinese network two days ago, Chen Jian really had no idea what they would think of their new teammate. What idiot would challenge the captain's authority the moment he first joined the team and plan to take his place?

Therefore, the Chinese unqualified network media could do nothing good, but would pull him back. In order to catch the eyes of netizens, they gave up on any credibility and integrity. Plagiarism, fabrication of fake news and rubbing of the edges were all commonplace, not to mention a twist of the original title.

Anyway, Chen Jian has begun his new life in Nottingham Forest. After four years, he finally got his way and put on a Nottingham Forest uniform to represent being a part of the team. It was believed that, in the history of Nottingham Forest, two Chinese names would be written and memorized. Their presence didn't change the backward state of Chinese football, but at least it gave a lot of heartbroken Chinese football fans a little solace.

### **Chapter 1009: Another Derby**

There have always been two professional teams in the city of Nottingham.

If not for this FA Cup match, most people might have overlooked this fact.

Many cities were proud of their "high-quality derby matches" as it proved that football had a very strong influence in the place and the quality of the teams was very high. This was almost impossible in the town of Nottingham as Nottingham Forest and Notts County were not on the same level.

Nottingham Forest had already won five UEFA Champions League trophies, while Notts County had not even reached the Premier League yet.

Due to the massive gap in position caused by the unconquerable gap in abilities, Nottingham Forest and Notts County had little chances of an official derby match.

Thanks to the FA Cup, such an opportunity presented itself.

The fans of Notts County had to thank the FA Cup because their opportunity was finally here. They had always wanted to teach their arrogant neighbors a lesson, but they never had the chance to do so. Naturally, Nottingham Forest would not choose Notts County as an opponent for their pre-season friendlies. They were smart enough to be cautious, as an injury to one or two of their key players might affect their whole season...

Notts County had no rights to challenge Nottingham Forest previously. They could only curse them, insult them by saying they were the lapdogs of foreign capitalism and no longer an English team.

However, the situation had changed now. Tang's arrival had strengthened Notts County noticeably and they were able to stabilize their position in the mid-table of the Championship. This made their imagination run wild and they wanted to prove their abilities to their old rivals. After all, "debauchery is a common vice among the wealthy"... Well, the meaning was not far off. As their abilities went up a level, their self-esteem naturally went up to a new level as well, and they dared to think about things that they did not fathom before.

That was why Nottingham started to simmer when the third-round draw of the FA Cup was out a month ago. At least half of the people in Nottingham were rubbing their hands in anticipation of the match. As for the rest, the Nottingham Forest fans were not that interested in a derby like this.

Maybe one could use this to describe the current state of the two teams: "Notts County only had eyes for Nottingham Forest, while Nottingham Forest only had eyes for the wide world."

Therefore, even though it was a rare "derby", the Nottingham Forest training plans did not change much and were the same as the training they did before any other FA Cup matches. The players did not talk much about the FA Cup opponents but focused on the league most of the time.

Chen Jian was the only one who thought that this was an interesting situation. He had experienced another derby in Spain before saying goodbye to that city. He did not expect to face another derby the moment he joined a new team in a different country.

He ended with a derby, and he would be starting with a derby. Interesting indeed.

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"This derby is actually pretty interesting..." The day before the match started, there were finally people who remembered that the match would be a derby.

"The manager of Notts County used to be our assistant manager," Gareth Bale was recounting the past to a bunch of new players who were engrossed in his tale. In the current team, there were not many who had experienced the days of the "Chinese assistant manager".

"Come to think of it, I did not expect him to be a manager one day, much less our rival in the same city..." Bale said while rubbing his chin. "And he's related to Chen Jian..." This brought all the attention of the people onto Chen Jian.

"Ah?" Chen Jian realized that everyone was looking at him and did not know what to say. He had just joined the team three days ago and was not familiar with the people yet. For a moment, he did not know what to say when faced with so many eager faces.

"They are both Chinese, of course they're related," Someone in the team said as a matter-of-factly.

"There are over a billion people in China. Do you think all of them are related to each other?" Bale said with some disdain. He pointed at Chen Jian and said, "Chen Jian left us when he was in our youth team then, but do you know how he came to Forest?"

Not many people knew about that. How many people would really care about the past of a Chinese player? The local media did not publish anything about it either.

"A commercial talent show," Bale laughed as he looked at Chen Jian. "He got third place then. Tang, the assistant manager then, gave him a Forest jersey and that's how he came here!"

The group of people learned something, and they were satisfied. The story was indeed interesting, similar to a legend.

Chen Jian was a little surprised. He did not expect someone on the team to know about this event of the past. After all, he did not publicize it. When he came to Nottingham Forest for a trial lasting a year back



then, it was not a very sensational piece of news. The main team would not be interested in someone like him. Then he joined the youth team's training, which was expected. Then after that, even though he signed a contract as a member of the first team, he had never appeared on the court and had never played a match in the Forest jersey before, not even a friendly game.

He had thought that nobody in Nottingham Forest of today, other than Tony Twain, would remember him.

He really did not expect the vice-captain of Nottingham Forest, Gareth Bale, to remember his past!

He suddenly remembered something that Twain told him before.

It was just after he participated in the press conference upon joining the team. The reporters had already left, and Twain had brought Chen Jian to the Crimson Stadium to step on the grass as part of another "welcome ceremony".

"Chen Jian, do you know about the legend of Nottingham in the past?"

Chen Jian was stunned for a moment, then asked, "Do you mean the legend of Robin Hood?"

Twain nodded, stopped and looked at Chen Jian behind him. "Even though the name Nottingham Forest has nothing to do with Robin Hood, the crest is related to him. The thing that looks like a mushroom is actually an oak tree," Twain pointed at the Nottingham Forest team crest on the stands, "And the oak tree is where Robin Hood and his merry band of brothers gathered. Doesn't it sound like the Chinese classic Water Margin?"

Chen Jian was surprised. "Boss, you even know about Water Margin?"

"Not only do I know about it, but I've also read it a few times," Twain wanted to reply to him like this.

"It's one of the four famous classics of China, why would I not know about it?" Twain did not continue to dwell on this topic. Instead, he said, "The oak tree represents the brotherhood between Robin Hood and his companions, and it also represents resilience. The Forest's legendary captain, Stuart Pearce, was known to have an 'oak tree's heart'."

Chen Jian did not understand what Twain was trying to tell him. What he was saying seemed to be going way off topic. First Robin Hood, then the team crest, then the oak tree and now, the current England manager...

"What I'm trying to tell you is this: Nottingham Forest is just like the merry men of Robin Hood under the oak tree. The people here are very simple. They are either nice or not. If you want to be part of the team quickly, to be recognized and accepted, then there's no point in acting. Just show them your abilities. If you can make them accept you for your abilities, you'll be a part of the merry men. After that, you'll be able to drink and eat with them heartily, ha!"

Twain laughed.

Chen Jian was a little shocked after hearing of such a strange team culture. He stood in the middle of the Crimson stadium, the stands were empty, and the afternoon sun could only shine on the east wing. The green field was inside the shadows of the stands and the roof.

The Nottingham Forest team crest was on the roof of the stands ahead of him. The metallic border shone with a golden light under the sun.

“...Nottingham Forest is just like a band of bandits, do you know what I’m saying? They will do anything for victory; stealing and robbing are just part and parcel of what they do. A team like this actually won the UEFA Champions League five times, what a tragedy for modern football...”

This was what a famous football pundit wrote on his blog after Twain led the team to the famous treble. Chen Jian had chanced upon it while surfing the net at that time.

Now that he thought about it, that person obviously hated Forest. He must have been a Real Madrid fan, but he was right.

Nottingham Forest was a lair where bandits gathered...

When Chen Jian returned to his senses, Bale and his other teammates were discussing Notts County again. They did not know much about this opponent. Twain had already shown them videos of Notts County’s games a few times during tactics briefing in the past few days, but who would care about such a weak adversary?

Therefore, their comments revolved around, “oh, I heard their number 10 is not bad”, “he was chosen to join the England under-21s team”, “number 18 seems to be decent too, but he’s not physical enough”, “they are just a championship team”, “I think we can attack their flanks...”, “What did the boss say?”

Once they mentioned the manager, Twain, everyone shut up.

After a while, the most experienced person, Bale, frowned and said, “I get the feeling that the boss isn’t taking this game seriously...”

Chen Jian wanted to laugh as he listened in. I don’t think you guys are taking this seriously either, he thought.

“To be honest, I think that if hope to qualify for a European competition next season, winning the FA Cup and joining the Europa League is the most suitable method,” Bale continued his analysis, “Yet I have this feeling that boss will give up on the FA Cup and focus on the league. But it’s too difficult to get into the top six...”

Chen Jian had done his research on Forest’s situation. After all, he was part of the team now... He had to admit that the vice-captain made sense. Even though the cup competition was very unpredictable, Nottingham Forest was a team that suited the big matches, and it might be good for them to focus on the FA cup. The league was too long, and who could say that there would be no other issues in the future?

“Why are you loafing around here?”

Just when they were thinking about the future of the team, the captain, George Wood, opened the doors of the dressing room and entered. “If you guys don’t go out now, you’ll all be late and you’ll have to run laps as punishment.”

With a rumble, the dressing room went into a stampede and within the blink of an eye, everyone disappeared from Chen Jian's view.

"Um..." Chen Jian did not expect his teammates to be so quick to go.

Wood had wanted to turn and leave too, but he realized that there was one more person in the dressing room. When he realized that it was Chen Jian, he stopped and looked at him.

Chen Jian realized that he was misbehaving, and he lowered his head and hurried out of the dressing room.

This captain was really awe-inspiring. I don't dare to look up while he is looking at me, Chen Jian thought as he jogged out.

Good thing he did not see the news from the Chinese website...

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Bale was right. Twain had indeed wanted to give up on the FA Cup. However, he would never give up in the first round.

The Premier League teams would only begin their FA Cup journey after the start of the new year, so this was the first round to them, but it was actually the third round of the FA Cup.

Not only did Twain not plan to give up, but he was taking this game rather seriously. Otherwise, he would not have shown the players so many videos of the Notts County matches. It was a pity... He took the opponent seriously, but his players might not.

The players had their reasons for being lax about this match. The opponent was too weak. The Forest players estimated they would only need to use fifty percent of their abilities and it would be enough for them to win. So what if it was a derby? It was not as if they had not defeated Notts County in a derby match before. Of course, that was many years ago, and Wood was the only one in the team who took a part in that match. Even Bale was still training in the youth team and reserve team then.

However, this was a piece of history that could be dug out. The Nottingham local media was talking about the derby again after 14 years. That derby was the most recent one, and the media would naturally bring it up again and again.

With this kind of "historical results", the Nottingham Forest players thought that victory was a given and they would be able to defeat their opponent easily.

Another manager might be thinking the same as his players. However, Twain had a special reason for taking this match seriously, a reason he could not share with anyone else.

He had always wanted to meet Tang in a match, to see the progress that Tang made over the years. He also believed that this was the best chance for Tang to showcase his abilities in front of the Nottingham Forest fans and Evan Doughty, and he would definitely not waste this chance.

Notts County would definitely give their all. This was a match that could not be compared to one of 14 years ago.

If they were not careful, he might... This was no 'Battle of Waterloo' this time. Nottingham Forest was no longer the force they were before, and Notts County was definitely not as weak as they used to be.

### **Chapter 1010: No Derbies, No Football**

Twain naturally has his reasons for placing so much emphasis on the match. However, he was not the only one to hold the match in such high regard. The Notts County manager, Dunn, felt the same as well.

Dunn suddenly became very serious after it was made known that his team would be up against Nottingham Forest in the next round. He has always been a thorough coach, but the Notts County players could tell that something was different this time round – he became even stricter during their training sessions. It was clear that their boss wanted to win the derby match.

It was not just Dunn. All the Notts County players wanted to win as well.

Both Notts County and Nottingham Forest were clubs from Nottingham, but they had very different fates. Nottingham Forest stood at the top, whereas Notts County could do nothing but gaze at them from below. Notts County might be playing in a lower league than Nottingham Forest, but that did not mean that their players did not have big dreams. They, too, longed to be like the Nottingham Forest players, and that was why the Premier League clubs were always able to attract many of their players over to their clubs year in and year out.

Men should always aim to reach greater heights, after all...

There was no such thing as loyalty. The talented players would only stay loyal to powerful clubs.

The Notts County players wanted to defeat the former Champions League winner Nottingham Forest to prove their abilities. It would be great if they could help their team get promoted to the Premier League, but even if they failed to do so, they would still be able to make use of the match to attract the attention of the various football teams in the top leagues and increase their chances of transferring to a better team.

To the Nottingham Forest players, this derby match was just like any other FA Cup match. The two teams were simply not on the same level ability-wise. However, to the Notts County players, this was a once in a lifetime chance to defeat Nottingham Forest. They were just like carps that had been given a springboard to help them leap through the Dragon's Gate [1].

Tang Jing was able to discern the restlessness of her husband. Dunn has always been lost in thought recently, and his brows were forever knotted in frustration. He would lock himself in the study room until past midnight, and he paid no attention to their child at all either. Not only that, her relationship with her husband has become distant in recent days as well...

Tang Jing was worried that her marriage would be doomed if she allowed the situation to go on.

She wanted to talk to her husband regarding whatever was troubling him. Her shy and introverted husband has never been so restless before.

Actually, if Tang Jing had seen what Dunn was like before the 31st December of 2002, she would not be this confused now.

The Dunn from before 31st December 2002 was just like the Dunn of today. The only difference was that he was single back then, and no one else would be able to see him lock himself in the room and discern his restlessness. To everyone else, he was just like a statue with an indifferent exterior.

Tonight was the night before the derby match, and her husband did not seem as restless as before. This could be the best chance to speak to him. Tang Jing made use of the rare free time that she had after putting her baby to bed to head over to the study room. She quietly pushed open the door and tiptoed behind her husband before wrapping her arms around his neck.

Tang Jing felt her husband struggle in her embrace for a moment, but he quickly relaxed after realizing that it was her.

"I think there's something off about you for the past few days, dear." Tang Jing tried her best to speak to Dunn in a gentle voice. She did not want to provoke him. "What happened? You've been a manager for seven years, but this is the first time that I've seen you like this..."

Dunn did not answer his wife's question directly. He lifted his head upwards to look at Tang Jing, who stood behind him, and said, "There's a derby match tomorrow."

It took Tang Jing a few seconds to react – this was the very first derby match that her husband had encountered as the manager of Notts County. The word 'derby' had a very, very special meaning in the football world, and as a former football reporter, it was impossible for Tang Jing not to know it. However, she still could not help but be confused: Notts County and Nottingham Forest were not on the same level, which meant that there was not much rivalry between the two sides. They rarely had the chance to face each other in a match, and there was no direct conflict of interest either. Unlike the AC Milan and Inter Milan fans, the fans from both teams would not get into fights with each other over the league trophy. The rivalry between them did not span hundreds of years like between Real Madrid and Barcelona either. In addition, the derby did not involve religion and was not as frightening as the 'Old Firm Derby' between Celtic F.C. and Rangers F.C. as well.

Why would her husband care about the derby match between Notts County and Nottingham Forest when their rivalry was not as great as among those other clubs?

Dunn placed his hands over his wife's. "My opponent for tomorrow's match is Tony Twain."

"Aren't the two of you friends?" Tang Jing was baffled. Twain was probably the only person whom she had been jealous of in the past. There were times where she felt that her husband cared more about Twain than about her.

"It's precisely because he's a friend that I have to defeat him."

That was all Dunn said. He did not explain further.

Tang Jing turned around and stared at Dunn's face for a while before turning to leave.

"Friendship between men sure is hard to understand."

Dunn smiled wryly to himself as he watched his wife close the door to the study room.

There would always be words one couldn't say to others, even if that other person was one's other half. His wife would never be able to accept the fact that he was actually a soul that had taken over another

human's body. This was an extremely complicated issue to talk about, and it involved very deep ethical problems as well. Dunn did not wish to think about it, but there was one thing he was certain of: the relationship that he had with Twain was definitely not as simple as just that of 'friends'.

Looking back now, he could not help but wonder if he was the one who had snatched Twain's body or if Twain was the one who had snatched his. It was impossible to tell any longer. However, it did not matter either way since he was still in a job related to football. He was just working for a different team. Would he be doing much better than he was now if the switch had not happened back then? Or perhaps... Would he be doing much better than Twain was now?

It was meaningless to think about such questions since he was certain that those scenarios would definitely not happen. However, those thoughts kept haunting him over the past few days. He was just like a possessed man who could not stop thinking about those impossibilities.

The glory that Tony Twain – a man whose body had been taken over by another soul – achieved was like a mountain that stood before Dunn. It blocked the sun and cast a huge shadow upon him.

Dunn felt as though he was living in perpetual darkness. Was he really going to live in this never-ending shadow forever?

He would just be called 'Twain's successor' when he took over at Nottingham Forest next season. If that was the case, why did he agree to Twain's invitation to return to Nottingham Forest next season?

No. He had to defeat Twain!

That was possibly the only way that he would be able to prove to himself he was not the terrified and helpless lad from 16 years ago anymore.

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Twain's gloomy face probably caused the Nottingham Forest players who regarded the derby match to be nothing more than a practice game to stop belittling their opponents.

"Do I need to remind everyone that this is a derby?"

It was halftime during the FA Cup match between Nottingham Forest and Notts County, and the home team, Nottingham Forest, was trailing by 0:1 at the Crimson Stadium.

Chen Jian had a five-minute meeting with the fans in the stadium prior to the match. He was not some famous superstar player, but the fans still gave him their warmest applause. He juggled the ball before approximately 60,000 fans and subsequently held the Forest scarf before him as a display of loyalty to the club. However, the meeting was not entirely amicable because he heard numerous boos from the stands – most of which came from the Notts County fans.

The Chinese reporters who had gathered at the Crimson Stadium to report on Chen Jian's debut match must have been disappointed by the fact that Chen Jian did not start in the match. None of the British reporters appeared to care about who Chen Jian was either. Their attention was focused solely on Forest's terrible performance on the pitch.

They were making comments such as:

“Why does George lack support in the midfield?”

“Gago has really gotten on with age...”

“Look at how the Forest players are performing when they are a goal down. It’s really hard to watch them play now.”

“Mitchell’s not able to receive a pass from the midfield at all, and Balotelli’s just like a headless chicken. He’s clearly not playing well in this match.”

Forest was not able to change the score at halftime even though they were the team with more shots at the goal.

“I’ve suddenly remembered a story. Who wants to hear it?” Twain said before his depressed players whose heads hung low. “We used ten years to build a huge empire. Back then, there was no one on the entire continent who dared to go against us. Our red flags could be seen at every nook and cranny of the continent. Those were such good times...” He lifted his head upwards to stare at the ceiling. It was as though he could see the scenes of those red flags across the world in his mind’s eye.

“The war ended soon after, and everything was peaceful. The cavalry returned to their homes and the calm lives that they led gradually wore away their courage and fight. Thus, when war broke out once again four years later, even the opponents whom we did not think highly of previously could defeat us!” Twain walked to the front of the players and bent over to look at each and every one of them. “Can your horses still run? Can your bodies still carry the burden of your armor? Can your hands still hold your spears? Can your hearts...”

Twain pounded his chest once.

“...Still beat along to the sounds of the war drums?”

Twain suddenly raised his voice and hollered.

His holler was so loud that several players raised their heads in shock.

Twain suddenly remembered a Chinese saying as he stared at the countless startled faces before him:

“Lian Po is old. Can he still eat much?” [2]

Lian Po is old...

Can he still eat much?

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“We have taken the lead, and that’s a good thing. But I don’t want any of you to be too proud of that...” While Twain was trying his hardest to boost the morale of his players, Dunn was thinking about how to curb his players from getting ahead of themselves. “All of you have to remember this. We are facing off with a Premier League team that has lifted the Champions League trophy five times...”

One of his players cut him off. “Boss, that happened four years ago. In addition, the Forest team from back then is very different from the Forest team now. A lot of the players have been changed...”

Dunn looked at the player who had stood up to challenge him. He was the core of their team, Paul Johnson, who wore the number 10 on his shirt. He was just twenty years of age this year, but he was already a starting player for England's U21 national team. Numerous Premier League clubs were paying attention to him, and he would probably not be a Notts County player after the season ended.

"You are right, Paul. They won their last Champions League trophy four years ago, and they have changed many of their players since then as well. But the person who is at the helm for this match is Tony Twain."

The name 'Tony Twain' was a household name in England, and Paul Johnson could not help but back off a little after hearing it. However, he still did not agree with Dunn's words. To him, the players were the ones who decided the outcome of a match, not the managers.

Dunn did not want to argue with Johnson over Tony Twain's importance to Forest. Johnson would most likely not understand even if he explained in detail.

He focused his attention on explaining his tactics for the second half.

"Forest will definitely go on the counter-attack in the second half, but we will not strengthen our defense to deal with their attacks." Dunn was not like Twain. He did not value defense above everything else, and he did not believe in keeping a 1:0 scoreline. "Tony Twain will do everything in his power not to allow his team to lose to us at home because this is a derby."

And because this would probably be the one and only time we'd get to compete against each other. Dunn kept this thought to himself.

"We'd be done for if we retreat backward to defend. Therefore, I want all of you to continue going on the attack in the second half. I want all of you to push Nottingham Forest back with your attacks."

Johnson was right about one thing. The Forest team now was nothing like the Forest team from four years ago. It did not matter how good Twain was. He would not be able to play in the match in his players' stead. Tactics were one thing, and the players' performance on the pitch was another. What the Forest players lacked at the moment was the belief that they could win, as well as the fighting spirit to achieve victory. Forest was a team that has gotten used to not playing well, and that was precisely why his team should continue to pile pressure and create difficult situations for them to play in. Doing so would undoubtedly allow his players to gain the upper hand in the match.

Focusing solely on defense was not an option for his team. Retreating backward to defend would only boost the Forest players' confidence. When that happened, Tony's roars by the side of the pitch and the change in the mentality of the players would become the trigger needed to shift the momentum of the match in Forest's favor. Dunn wanted to stop that from happening at all costs.

Dunn knew very well what sort of person his opponent was. He was the kind of man who would grasp at the slightest of chances to shift the game in his favor. All the opponents who have fallen before Twain in the past have proven one fact countless times: one had to be merciless when going against Twain. One had to make use of any lead one might have in the match and attack him ferociously. One could not relax even when he was down. One needed to stab him a few more times and decapitate him before one could even take a breather.



“We have restrained Wood and Gago very well in the first half, and we’ll continue to do just that in the second half. Isolate Wood and cut off all passes that they can make to each other. It’s okay to let Gago attack since he has gotten old and is no longer a player we should fear.”

“Balotelli is the player who acts as the link between the backfield and the midfield. He has a very good technique and is good at dribbling as well. Thus, all of you should hold your positions instead of pouncing at him. He would not be able to influence the match in any way as long as you stay at your positions. He has been very poor when taking the set pieces so far, so don’t be afraid to commit fouls on him.”

“We must continue to make use of the set pieces that we were given to score goals. Do all of you still remember the tactics that we practiced during our training sessions regarding how we should take set pieces? Johnson would be the player to take our team’s set-pieces. He’d choose the most suitable tactic to use based on the situation on the pitch. I leave everything to him.”

“Reduce the number of dribbles you make. Make use of your runs and passes to slice open the opposition’s defense. George Wood might be an excellent player, but he is still only human. He’ll tire fast if you pass the ball about quickly and force him to chase it all over the pitch. I want all of you to run forward after making a pass. You’ll be able to rattle their defense by doing so...”

Dunn issued one command after another. He was intent on pushing his best friend into the abyss.

This was how one should deal with Twain – deliver the finishing blow when he was down and low.

The smiles on the players’ faces gradually vanished as they listened to Dunn’s tactics. They suddenly understood what kind of match it was after experiencing the joy of taking the lead.

The boss has never been this serious before.

This was a derby match!

1. According to Chinese mythology, a carp will be transformed into a dragon when it leaps over the Dragon’s Gate, which is located at the top of a waterfall.

2. Lian Po was a military general of the Zhao state. The meaning behind the saying is that a soldier still has to fight for his country even in old age. How much a person is able to eat was seen as a sign of the person’s physical condition in the past, which was why they would ask if a person can eat a lot to determine if he was fit for war. Twain was implying that the Nottingham Forest players, whom he likened to ‘soldiers’, should still be fighting even if they were ‘old’.