

## Godfather Of Champions

### Chapter 18: Off To London Part 2

Tang En realized his mistake. Wood was not a football fan, and if he normally did not care about football, he definitely would not have heard the name of this sparkling-new, talented Premier League player. On August 17, 2002, the 16-year-old Rooney first represented Everton in the Premier League. Soon after on October 19th, he scored the only goal in the match against Arsenal. That was the first league goal of his career, and it finally ended the strong opponent's unbeaten record of 30 league matches, making him famous from then on in the British football world. Coincidentally, two years later October 25, 2004, the just turned 19 Rooney scored a winning goal in a match against Arsenal again. That was his first league goal since joining Manchester United. This time he ended his opponent's unbeaten record of 49 consecutive wins in the English Premier League.

"Oh, he's really hot now. In the future, he will join a well-to-do football club. The Everton genius kid will make a lot of money. He's your age." Tang En felt that by saying that, George would be able to associate himself with Rooney. "Do you know how much he earns in a week now?"

Wood, of course, did not have a clue.

"I don't know, either." Tang En playfully grinned. "Do you know how much money he'll make in one week in the future?"

Wood shook his head.

Tang En thought of a joke he had seen online. The background was that Rooney had just renewed his contract with Manchester United, and a Chinese consortium had offered an opening bid of £850 million to acquire Manchester United. Of course, in reality, Manchester United Owner, Glazer, directly refused. This joke suggested that if the Chinese consortium's acquisition had succeeded, then the following would play out: Rooney would be worried about whether the £120,000 he had asked for would be honored, so he would take the liberty of approaching the Chinese consortium's big boss. The boss, sitting in his chair, with a Zhongnanhai cigarette in his mouth, says to Rooney, "You only have two choices now, either a weekly salary of 120,000 pounds or 1.2 million Chinese yuan. Think about it." Rooney thinks about it for a long while, and finally chooses to take 1.2 million Chinese yuan. Thereafter, Rooney would pay daily attention to the appreciation of the Chinese yuan and would not go to strip clubs or bars to fool around anymore. He would watch the Chinese stock market situation everyday, for fear it would affect his weekly salary. When Ferguson sees Rooney has become so

decent, he pats his head with regret. "If I had known, I would have paid Beckham's salary in Chinese yuan, and he wouldn't have had time to chase girls."

It was a joke, of course, but Tang En remembered that figure: £120,000.

So, he showed both of his hands to Wood, one hand indicating one and the other indicating two, "120,000... Pounds Sterling."

Wood's eyes were like saucers. "How do you know?"

"I'm guessing." Tang En certainly could not say that I am from China four and half years in the future. At that time, a quick search online, and one will be able know the weekly salary of star player Rooney. "But kid, I'm just letting you know what you may get for your weekly salary in the future. You train hard on the youth team, do your best to play football, gradually become a star, and then get noticed by the powerful clubs. At that time, they will find you and naturally wave their checkbooks. Then you find a good agent to help you sign some world-renowned brands' advertising endorsement deals. I'm telling you, that advertising revenue will be so much more than your annual salary when the time comes."

Tang En did not know what kind of player George Wood would eventually become, and perhaps he might not even be a professional player at all. But this was not important. It was needed now to give the young man a little bit of encouragement and hope, to let him see a better future, and then to fight for it. What happened thereafter would be of his own making.

"Accept the eighty-pounds-a-week youth contract and train hard on the youth team to become a future star footballer. Or go back to your mover job, earn two hundred pounds a week, until you can't be a mover anymore. Maybe you'll lose that job before then. It's your choice, son." After Tang En said this, he turned around to see the First Team's match, leaving his cool back to Wood.

There was a silence between the two. Only the occasional whistle from Walker, the shouts of the players prompting each other, and the pounding sound of the ball.

Tang En did not care what Wood chose. He gave Wood a chance, an opportunity to choose. If Wood did not choose to stay, he would continue to be a mover. In that case, he would only feel sorry in his heart for that beautiful mother, for whom he sympathized. Perhaps a week later he may not remember the mother and son, because he too had to face the challenges of life and destiny. He was not a good man with a lot of compassion, like the type who would take out all his money if he saw a beggar. Never was before and definitely not now.

After a moment, Wood's voice came from behind him, "Take me to the youth team."

Tang En turned to look at him. "This is your final choice? You're not going to regret it?"

Wood shook his head.

Tang En still felt uneasy, so he tried to scare him. "We'll sign the contract. If you break the contract, you'll have to pay the compensation."

Wood nodded. "I know."

"That's good. Go back to the locker room to change, and then follow me."

Tang En took George Wood across the First Team training ground and went straight to the youth training ground. Honestly, although Twain was the manager for the youth team, Tang En was here for the first time today. Compared with the First Team's, the youth team's ground felt newer, more modern. Even the gate was electronic. The guard was also a uniformed security guard, not an enthusiastic old fan.

Like the First Team's, the youth team's training ground was surrounded by rows of green trees, vast and spacious, with no tall buildings nearby. The view was excellent. Farther north, after the woods, was Nottingham's River Trent.

After Twain left the youth team, the supervision was now taken over by his former assistant manager David Kerslake. Since it was his old partner, there was not much polite talk about the weather. Tang En took Wood directly to Kerslake.

"George Wood." Tang En pointed and introduced Wood to Kerslake. "This kid's physique is quite good. Let him train under you and see what he will be capable of."

Kerslake sized him up and agreed with Twain's assessment of this kid; his physique was not bad. His shoulders and legs were stout like horse's legs, strong and powerful.

He waved for Wood to come over. "Lad, how old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"What position do you like to play?"

"Striker." Because a striker could score goals, it was easier to become famous, plus there were goal rewards. etc. In short, Wood's lack of football knowledge made him think that being a striker was the best way to "strike it rich."

"Very well, go to the locker room and get changed to start training!" Kerslake saw that Tang En was making eye contact with him, so he simply dismissed Wood and asked, "Tony, what's the matter?"

"Uh... I have to warn you a little. He's a complete football rookie."

"Rookie?"

“In terms of his football standards, he may not even compare to the middle school students who only learned about football in their physical education lesson.”

Kerslake looked at Twain’s expression. He did not look like he was joking. He suddenly felt a headache coming on. “Tony...”

“Er, it’s because his family situation is very complicated, and they’re broke... It so happened that he helped me once. So, I decided to give him a chance, to try out for the youth team, perhaps become a professional football player, or maybe not... Anyways, you look after him a little. It depends on him whether he can be trained or not.” After watching Wood’s 20 minutes of performance, Tang En was unwilling to reveal more to his old partner.

Kerslake sighed. “I understand. I will try my best. But his physique is indeed quite good, just as a beginner, his age is really...”

Tang En nodded. “There are exceptions to everything. What if this kid becomes an exception?”

Kerslake sighed again. “Too uncertain to bet all your youth and energy on such a faint possibility. The Forest team’s youth training system is excellent, but how many can be Jermaine Jenas?”

“David, that kid just experienced a very important choice in life. It’s not a question of betting, he didn’t have any hope to start with.” Tang En thought of that life in the ghetto. “If he has to have hope, he needs to do this. All we can do is to give him a chance.”

Kerslake nodded. “Don’t worry, Tony. I will do what I can to teach him.”

Tang En smiled and patted Kerslake on the back. “We were all trained up by Paul. I believe in your ability.” They were both Paul Hart’s assistant youth managers.

In the middle of their conversation, Wood had already run out wearing his youth training uniform. Tang En called to him with the intention to give him a few final words of advice. He would be focused on the matters of the First Team. His time here would be very, very little.

Kerslake tactfully stepped away and returned to the training ground to continue his work.

“George,” When there was no one else around, Tang En said to Wood, “I am aware of your situation, and I believe you know it better than I do. But I still have to say this: do not take professional football lightly, or it will punish you. You don’t think about anything else here, just focus on training. Come to me if you have any trouble. Your mother is a good woman, don’t let her down.”

Wood firmly nodded.

“Ok, go to your training!”

George Wood turned around and ran toward the training ground where there were teammates around his age, and also a yet-unknown future that belonged to him. Tang En was completely uncertain how this kid was going to turn out.

Looking at Wood’s back, Tang En sighed like Kerlake. I’ve done my best. It’s up to fate, kid. Let’s see how you make your own fortune.

Then he turned in the opposite direction and left the youth training ground.

Back in the First Team training ground, Tang En was informed by Walker that the Chairman had made a trip to the training ground with his son to introduce him to everyone. And to go to the Chairman’s office when he returned.

When Tang En heard this news, he felt apprehensive. Is the old man angry? Just because he was not here when he introduced his son, he got angry? It was unbecoming of a chairman.

“Did he say anything?” Tang En asked Walker.

Walker shook his head. Tang En was about to leave, but he heard Walker add, “But Mr. Chairman looked grim.”

Tang En’s heart immediately went “ba-dum.” Although the team had lost the FA match, from the Chairman’s congratulatory call, this should not be related to that. Was it the locker room incident? Tang En knew English football was traditional, but it never occurred to him that the Chairman would care so much about traditions.

He hurried to the Chairman’s office, right above his own manager’s office.

Knocking while opening the door, he took one glance and saw the Chairman Nigel Doughty sitting behind a large desk. His boss’s desk was larger than the one in his office! There were only two people in the office, one was Nigel Doughty, and the other was his son, Edward Doughty.

Tang En did not expect the “American” Englishman was here too. He was a little startled, but quickly put a smile on his face.

“Mr. Chairman, Mr. Edward.”

After the initial greetings, Nigel stood up from his chair, held a piece of paper in his hand and walked toward Twain.

Tang En nervously looked at the paper in Chairman Nigel's hands. Could it be a letter of dismissal? In his first job after graduating from college, he was dismissed after three months. At that time the manager had also held out a payroll slip for Tang En to sign and leave.

He'd just helped a needy teenager find hope in life, and now he had no hope himself? What else could he do if he lost this manager position? He did not know how to do anything else!

The Chairman began speaking, "This is a fax from the Football Association."

What? Tang En thought he'd heard wrong. What has my dismissal have to do with the Football Association?

"They want you to go to London tomorrow to attend a hearing."

Tang En responded. "Is it something to do with what I said after that match?"

Nigel nodded.

Though it was not a letter of dismissal, Tang En's mood did not improve. To have brought so much trouble to the club, he would not escape the fate of being dismissed from the team according to the Chinese tradition.

But then Nigel's next words made Tang En feel that life was full of sunshine.

"The club will be fully supporting you. Together, we've already sorted out and submitted the video of that match to the Football Association. There was nothing wrong with those two goals."

Tang En looked up again at Nigel. The President smiled and said to him, "Do some preparations, my son will go to London with you tomorrow."

