

Champions 191

Chapter 191: The UEFA European Football Championship Part 2

The shining new football stars were all taken a long time ago. In that case, what could Nottingham Forest, a new Premier League team that was neither as influential as the powerhouses nor able to promise better wages to those players, use to attract them? Perhaps the only thing that it could offer was “participation in the next season’s UEFA Europa League”But for players who were being contested over by various powerhouses, which one of them would still care about the qualifications for the UEFA Europa league? Shouldn’t their battlefield be the UEFA Champions League instead?

It really was really a paradox; the players who had caught Tang En’s eye would not show the slightest interest in Nottingham Forest, while the players who would be interested in Nottingham Forest would not have caught Tang En’s eye.

Greece’s center back, Dellas, was instead a rather decent candidate for the newly-promoted Nottingham Forest. His performance in the UEFA European Football Championship had gotten widespread recognition; he was currently deemed the last traditional sweeper remaining in Europe. But the problem was that if Tang En had quoted a price to Roma one month earlier, then the club, which had already decided on giving up the Greek player, might have even given him away for free. However, that opportunity was no longer available. If Nottingham Forest really wanted him, Roma could definitely ask for an exorbitant price based on his extraordinary performance during the UEFA European Football Championship. In any case, there were many other teams that were interested in this tall Greek player, and Nottingham Forest was merely one of the many.

As the UEFA European Football Championship progressed, Tang En and Dunn’s workload actually lessened. By the end of the championships, there were only those few teams left. The players whom they had to assess had already been assessed, and the only ones left were either those who did not catch Tang En’s eye or who Tang En had no means of purchasing at the moment.

The Greek team played well, challenging the traditional perspectives of European Football time and again in their matches. This had, however, also repeatedly caused football fans to grind their teeth in hate. However, in Tang En’s eyes, despite him always putting in good words for the Greek team in his special column, none of the Greek players caught his attention. That was because Tang En knew that even if the Greeks were to attain the championship title this time, it was still insufficient to say that their players were on the same level as the other top players in Europe, or that they were on equal footing with other football stars from traditional strong teams.

It could only be said that throughout the twenty-odd days of the UEFA European Football Championship, the Greek team was the best-performing team among the sixteen teams present, and that their players worked together the best. Nothing more, nothing less. After the finals ended and everything settled down, discussing whether Greece would become a powerhouse in the European Football scene from then onwards, or whether Greek players would become more popular, was completely meaningless.

Perhaps others might disagree, but it should be noted that Tang En had time travelled back in time from year 2007. How many players from the Greek team had continued to play well for their clubs? Not even one.

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When the Greek team had defeated many powerhouses such as France and Czech Republic to finally advance and meet Portugal in the finals, the whole world favored Scolari more. Regardless of which angle they looked from, they felt that Portugal should win that night. They were the hosts, had a world-class champion manager, and their opponents were one of the weakest teams, Greece.

Even the waiter at the hotel where Tang En was staying gave him an unusually friendly smile. The waiter took the initiative to chat with Tang En about the finals match that would be held that night. This Portuguese youngster was very confident about his country's national team. Out of sympathy, Tang En did not shatter his dreams.

After sending off the waiter, who had rattled on endlessly, Tang En stood near the windows of the hotel and saw the crowd of Portuguese fans assembled downstairs. They were wearing red and green colored Portuguese jerseys, waving Portuguese flags, and singing songs as they walked past the hotel in flocks.

"I really don't know what these people's expressions will look like in a few hours. Celebrating so brazenly before the match even starts... aren't they afraid of angering the Greeks?" Tang En shrugged and turned around to look at Dunn, who was still taking down notes in front of the table.

"Got it, Dunn." Tang En walked up to Dunn and closed his notebook. "You got to learn how to enjoy things... Only when you learn to enjoy life can you enjoy your work. Haven't you heard that saying? They often use it in advertisements, but I've got to admit that it's true. Let's go, we'll get a drink."

Dunn looked up at Tang En, who shrugged again. "You can't become a successful manager by just burying yourself in a mountain of information. Go and relax a bit, engage in some idle chat, and maybe you'll find some inspiration. Let's go."

Dunn still did not move.

"Alright, I don't care what you were like in the past, but now that you're with me, you have to do as I do. That way, we can improve our chemistry." After Tang En said that, he directly dragged Dunn out of the hotel room.

Tang En randomly chose a crowded bar along the streets outside, brought Dunn along, and squeezed in. The majority of the patrons in the bar were Portuguese, but there were, of course, still a minority of Greeks present as well. This was easily discernible just from a look at the jerseys which they wore. Before the match started, everyone was still able to get along with one another, taking pictures of themselves raising their beer glasses as mementos. Speaking as a whole, the Greek fans were slightly low-profile. Next to the Portuguese people, who were celebrating as though they had already won the championship, the Greek fans did not seem humiliated.

Tang En squeezed to the bar counter and asked for two glasses of beer in English. Afterwards, he pushed one glass to Dunn and said, "Just drink. It's not poison."

Dunn shook his head. "I once swore never to drink alcohol again."

Tang En did not want to put him in a tight spot, so he took that glass of beer and put it in front of himself. "What a coincidence, I was afraid you would want to drink... mmm...So good!"

After downing a mouthful of icy beer, Tang En felt so good that his hair was standing on end. Unable to help it, Tang En shivered.

Seeing that Tang En was completely immersed in it, Dunn remained unmoved. Right at that moment, another voice sounded from behind Tang En. "What a coincidence! Hi Tony!"

Right after Tang En opened his eyes, he saw Pierce Brosnan standing behind Dunn and waving at Tang En frantically.

"Hi, Mr. Reporter." Tang En said as he waved, and Dunn turned his head around to look behind him.

"It's really unbelievable that even though we're both in Portugal, we only met on the day of the finals." Brosnan saw Dunn, and the sight of an Asian face shocked him.

"Hello." Dunn took the initiative and greeted the other.

"Hello..."

"I forgot to introduce him to you." Tang En waved his hands at the waiter to ask for more beer before pointing at Dunn and saying to Brosnan, "Dunn, from China. From today onwards, you'll be seeing him very frequently."

"Chinese? Your second Chinese teacher?" Brosnan started laughing. "He looks really young... How did you guys get to know each other?"

"No, Mr. Reporter." What Tang En said after made Brosnan stare at him in shock, unable to believe his ears. "He's the new assistant manager of Nottingham Forest; my assistant, partner, and colleague."

As Brosnan turned his head and saw the calm look on Dunn's face, his mouth was opened so wide that one could stuff a beer glass into his mouth.

Tang En was pleased to see Brosnan in such a state of shock. and he continued to giggle by the side. Despite bringing the beer glass to his mouth, Tang En was simply unable to pour it into his mouth.

Brosnan, who had finally recovered from his initial shock, shook his head and said to Tang En, "Tony, we all know that you like to do things in an unconventional way... but I dare say that your action this time is the most exaggerated one ever! You know that? Never has there been any English Premier League team that is willing to hire a Chinese person to be an assistant manager. And he is still so young..."

Tang En pointed at Dunn, who was behind him, and said, "Be careful what you say, Mr. Reporter. Dunn is completely able to understand what you're saying. His understanding of English Football might even be more than yours and mine combined."

Brosnan still felt found it hard to believe, and said, "An Indian fan who reads the news everyday might also be more knowledgeable about English Football than us! But what's the point of all this? He... does he have a coaching license?"

"I will make him get one this summer," Tang En casually said as he sipped on his beer.

“Which is to say that he doesn’t have any coaching experience?”

“In a way... you can say it like that, but it isn’t entirely correct...” As he said this, Tang En thought about how Dunn’s work experience on the youth team alone was much more than Tang En’s experience as a manager.

“No fame, no qualifications, no... nothing at all. You intend to let this kind of person become Nottingham Forest’s assistant manager?”

Tang En suddenly hated Brosnan’s tone and attitude. This was in spite the fact that Tang En knew that it was only natural for him to doubt Dunn. After all, Dunn had not displayed his abilities to others yet. However, Brosnan yelling at his assistant manager in such a rude manner was equivalent to doubting Tang En, because this person was chosen by Tang En himself.

“I don’t feel like there is any issue. Assessing a manager’s abilities cannot be done by looking at boring things such as their qualifications or reputations. Whether or not he is able to be an assistant manager, won’t the answer be clear once you see him in action? You, on the other hand, Mr. Reporter, must be terribly drunk. You should go to the toilet and sober yourself up,” Tang En said unceremoniously, with a displeased look on his face.

Realizing that he had gotten carried away, Brosnan sat dumbfounded for a while before apologizing awkwardly to Tang En and Dunn. “I’m really sorry. You’re right. I don’t even know how many glasses I drank just now. Alright, let me go to the toilet and sober up...”

Seeing Brosnan’s figure disappear amidst the crowd, Tang En said to Dunn, who had been silent all the while, “Dunn, you’ve been doubted by someone. And you’ll have to get used to it. There will be more such situations happening this summer.”

Dunn replied dismissively, “It’s very normal. I haven’t done anything yet.”

Looking at that placid face, Tang En felt that that was a face that he wouldn’t have made if it were him. “You don’t feel that you’ve been humiliated, or feel angry?”

“I’m different from you. I’m not used to quarrelling with people.” Dunn finished all the water in his glass before turning and heading for the exit. “I’m heading back first.”

Tang En, who was holding the beer glass in his hand, grinned behind Dunn. Unsure of the reason why, Tang En suddenly recalled the piece of red paper that was stuck onto the refrigerator door: “Must win,” accompanied by three big exclamation marks.

Chapter 192: Gerard Piqué Part 1

When the final was over, the city of Lisbon was silent for a few seconds. Tang En stood in the stands and applauded the Greek national football team. Everything had happened exactly as he had known it would, and there was no change in the course of events. In this tournament, it could be said that only Otto Rehhagel’s Greek national football team could completely restrain the official host team.

Luiz Felipe Scolari’s Portuguese national football team not only wanted to win the championship, but also wanted to win beautifully on their home ground. But their offense did not work in the face of the

Greeks' well-fortified defense. It was as if a beautiful crystal dagger was used to stab a boulder; the final result was only a white scratch was left on the boulder, and the crystal dagger was smashed into countless pieces.

The score was 1:0. The low-key Greeks defeated their overly confident hosts. They achieved the greatest victory in the history of their national team.

Watching the ecstatic Greek players, Tang En was not as excited as he had been when he had seen this scene for the first time. While he was clapping, he said to Dunn beside him, "I can already imagine what the major media's headlines will be for tomorrow. They may be the most unconvincing champions in the history of the European Cup; even the Denmark national football team was more credible than they are."

"Because of Peter Schmeichel and Michael Laudrup?" Dunn asked.

Tang En nodded. "The Portuguese must be upset by the loss. They lost to a team with no star players. The total value of the entire team might not even be higher than the value of Luís Figo and Cristiano Ronaldo... It really is ironic. Dunn, we're not going back to England tomorrow. We're going somewhere else first."

"Where?"

"Spain. Barcelona." Tang En glanced back at the lively scene in the middle of the field and turned to leave the stands. "Let's go, the game is over."

Whether it was the ecstatic Greeks or the frustrated Portuguese, or those people with views on and understanding of the Greece national team taking the European championship and going as far as the FIFA World Cup, none of these things had anything to do with Tang En and his assistant manager, Dunn.

Their busy summer had officially kicked off.

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The next day, while the two men were on the plane flying from Lisbon to Barcelona, Dunn was reading the latest published newspapers; the European Championship final that had ended last night was naturally the focus of the media. Tang En was right. The media reaction to the Greeks winning the championship was fascinating. The local media in Portugal was almost unanimous in thinking that the Greeks had stolen the championship. They thought that the tactic of having ten defensive players and only one attacking player was despicable.

And other European media, such as that of Spain, also thought that the Greeks' revelry was not a good thing for the future of European football.

Utilitarian football would sweep across Europe again, and the viewing pleasure of football would be greatly reduced. This might make the already shrinking football market more challenging. No one enjoyed dull and boring games, so the fans would not like it, and neither would the sponsors.

Tang En glanced at it a few times; he could not understand Portuguese at all. But he was not surprised that Dunn could understand it. Dunn was very keen to learn; he spent all his spare time on his studies, so it was not surprising that he knew Portuguese.

“What does it say?” Tang En asked casually.

“It was the same as what you said yesterday.” After living with Tang En for a while, Dunn had begun to talk more. When living with someone who was constantly chattering, one would gradually get more talkative. “Nothing new.”

Tang En smiled. “The losers always have all sorts of excuses to justify their mistakes. Is the whole world going to start talking about defense now?”

Dunn put aside the newspaper and looked at Tang En’s smug face. “I don’t think defense will become a mainstream tactic for many teams in the future. But all the managers will start studying how to break this type of defense.”

Tang En shrugged. “No matter what they think or do, defense is the foundation of all tactics. When we reach Barcelona, there’s a young man there whom I’m very interested in. And our rival this time is powerful.” Looking at the confused Dunn, he chuckled. “Very, very powerful.”

Only when the two men had found a hotel in Barcelona to put their bags down, and then rushed to Barcelona’s youth training camp, did Dunn know who the target was this time, and who the Forest team was going to compete against. It was, just like he had said, a very powerful rival.

Tony Twain had his eye on the Barcelona youth team’s center back, Gerard Piqué. At this point, Piqué was not famous yet. However, in the hearts of the Barcelona fans, he was the future successor of the team captain, Carles Puyol.

When they were standing at sidelines of the training ground watching their target train, Tang En even found Lionel Messi there. But he did not get excited or plan anything with regards to this discovery at all, because he knew that Messi had become the focus of Barcelona’s First Team’s scrutiny.

As for Piqué, he knew that there was a loophole which he could use.

Spanish law was special because it stipulated that a juvenile under the age of 18 would not be allowed to sign any professional contract. This was a common law put in place for any company in Spain, and it naturally included the football clubs as well. Therefore, when Spanish clubs took great pains to cultivate a new star player and watched him become the main force of the Spanish youth team, they could not help being wary, for fear of visits and harassment from the foreign clubs.

Because they could not sign a career contract with the young players, they could not restrict the player’s situation at all. If the player felt some loyalty towards the club that trained him, and the club made a commitment to his future, he would obviously be happy to stay on. But if the club was unable to promise a future to the young player due to some of its own difficulties, and another club which could make the commitment took advantage of this, then it was completely conceivable for the talent to leave.

One example was Cesc Fàbregas. He loved Barcelona deeply and his entire family was made up of diehard, loyal Barcelona supporters. He did not receive the conscription of the Barcelona First Team because for a long period of time Barcelona could not make a promise to the young man for him to become a main force in the future due to the strength of Xavi, Andrés Iniesta and other players.

Consequently, the Golden Player of the 2003 FIFA U-17 World Championship, the captain of the Spanish youth team, left Barcelona, who had trained him, and went to North London.

Arsène Wenger was a very cunning man. He had a keen sense of judgement and a unique way of looking for loopholes.

Spanish law did not allow their professional clubs to offer professional contracts to young players under the age of 18, while English law allowed clubs to offer professional contracts to young men over the age of 16. This two-year difference resulted in English clubs rushing to Spain in succession to search for players that they could rely on: Young man, the club that trains you cannot provide you with a career contract, or promise you a future. But we can!

Arsenal's Wenger was like Christopher Columbus in the era of the great voyages. He opened up a whole new continent for the English clubs. All the English managers knew that Spain had a large number of outstanding young players, and that they were free to sign without any signing fees, and were ready to play! Especially to Barcelona, Cesc Fàbregas' success at Arsenal had proved the strength of their youth training, somewhat to the embarrassment of the Catalans.

Hence, Tony Twain was not surprised to see English-speaking people at the training ground. He knew that, among the incognito crowd, there would be scouts from Arsenal, Manchester United, and Chelsea. And the object of their investigation was also the purpose of his visit: Gerard Piqué.

Standing at the training ground and watching the Barcelona youth training for a while, Tang En asked Dunn beside him, "What do you think?"

"His physique is excellent. As a center back, his skills are much better than an English center back's," Dunn commented. This was his conclusion after half an hour of observation. He did not evaluate his other qualities, as he did not see. "Physically, I don't think he'd have any problem adapting to the English league championship. Who are our competitors?"

"As far as I know... Arsenal, Manchester United, and Chelsea." Tang En stated the names of the three most influential clubs in England at the time.

Dunn was not surprised. He nodded. "Of course." An outstanding player would naturally attract favorable attention from the best clubs. What interested him more was how Tang En planned to compete against these three clubs for the player.

In terms of financial strength, Nottingham Forest could not compete with Chelsea's deep pockets. As for the glory, the declining Forest team was inferior to Manchester United, which had been the top team of the Premier League for ten years. On the training of young players, they were not as good as Arsenal, and the Arsenal team currently had Piqué's good friend, Cesc Fàbregas.

In fact, before Tang En's arrival, Piqué had already been infinitely closer to Manchester United. Ferguson's trust and cultivation of young players touched Piqué. Chelsea had the least advantage of the three clubs, and their First Team was already stocked with too many star players. Piqué knew clearly that there would not be much of a difference between going to Stamford Bridge and staying at the Camp Nou.

It was out of Tang En's control that he was later than the others to act. A few months ago, his future and that of his team were uncertain. If the Forest team could not succeed in its promotion, they would have been a laughing stock for coming to Barcelona to compete against the three major clubs for a player.

Chapter 193: Gerard Piqué Part 2

Half a year had passed since Nottingham Forest's dark days, and the situation had changed dramatically. Tony Twain of today was very confident about going up against Ferguson and Wenger.

"It's clear that you think highly of him too. Let's head back, Dunn. Let's talk to his agent first... I've asked him to have dinner together tonight."

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Obviously, when Tang En was in Portugal, he had already arranged everything for Spain. No matter when or whom he was to meet, he had made the reservations for the restaurants.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Tang En and Dunn ate some bread to tide them over; otherwise they would be hungry. Even when Tang En was still in China, he had already known that the Spaniards were famous for lateness in their daily schedules—when he spoke to Piqué's agent, Arturo Canales, over the phone, he had said that dinner time was eight o'clock in the evening!

It was hard to imagine the manager of a Premier League football club drinking mineral water and eating bread in a hotel room. But when the Forest team was just getting started, what else could he do? Besides, Piqué was a player that Tang En thought highly of. It would seem more sincere if he appeared in person, and he also hoped to impress Piqué in this way, and be more persuasive.

But first, they had to go through the agent. The relationship between a manager and an agent was complex. Sometimes, the manager needed to curry favor with the agent, and sometimes the agent needed to please the manager. Now, it was Tony Twain's turn to make Piqué's agent happy.

At 8:15, a little later than the appointed time, Tony Twain and Dunn met Arturo Canales at the pre-arranged restaurant. Even though the player that he represented was still a young man who had not played in a professional league, he was qualified enough to put on airs before Twain.

Piqué was the Spanish youth team's main center back. His future was almost certain, even without the analysis of experts. And the agent also benefited when so many big clubs had their eyes on Piqué. While on the verge of reaching a consensus with Manchester United, Canales had no real need to meet with a manager of a recently promoted Premier League team to discuss the future of his client. However, over the phone, Twain had made him a tempting promise: if he did his best to facilitate the deal, then he would personally receive an additional fifty-thousand-pound commission from the Forest Football Club!

Mr. Ferguson did not promise to pay him an extra compensation, and as for Tony Twain... Canales could still remember that the first time he called him, he had already mentioned it. Even though Canales had never heard of him, it was clear that Mr. Tony Twain, despite being less famous than Sir Alex Ferguson, knew the business. Yes, he knew it very well.

When he arrived at the restaurant, Canales was a little apologetic towards Twain, who stood up to greet him. He said, "I'm really sorry, Mr. Twain. There was a traffic jam." He spoke fluent English.

After exchanging a few words of conventional greeting, the two sides quickly came to the point. Twain made no secret of his liking and pursuit of Piqué, and he hoped that Canales would convey this message to Piqué: that although Nottingham Forest had just been promoted to the Premier League, the club had a very ambitious plan which was a very suitable way for the young Piqué to fully show his talents. In addition, he and the Forest team had the tradition of putting young players in important positions. He did not have to worry about not being able to play in matches when he joined the Forest team. The Forest team would not make him play in the youth league championships or reserve games. Twain wanted to buy him to let him play as the main center back, rather than as an investment for the future. Thirdly—and this was Twain's trump card—although Manchester United could take part in the UEFA Champions League next season, if Piqué were to join Manchester United, it was absolutely impossible for his name to enter the Champions League list, which both Piqué and his agent, Canales, were very clear about their interest in. But the Forest team could guarantee that Piqué would definitely play in UEFA Champions League, because the Forest team was one of three teams to represent England in the UEFA Europa League next season.

What did it mean for a young player to participate in a European tournament? Twain believed Piqué and Canales must clearly understand that players could participate in more games to raise their profiles, accumulate experience, and, at the same time, help increase their business value.

Holding a negotiation while Manchester United and Piqué were already getting closer in their relationship was advantageous to Tang En, in that they did not have to be entangled with the issue of the player's sentimentality towards his club, nor could Canales use that point to ask for high prices.

Piqué was certain to leave. The only question was which club he would go to.

When they had finished their discussion, they were like old friends, chatting about Catalonia and the weather in the United Kingdom. In this regard, Twain was bound to compliment the sunny weather and beaches of Barcelona, as well as its delicious cuisine. Then, Dunn excused himself from the table to go to the restroom, and Twain slid a twenty-thousand-pound check in front of Canales and told him that it was an advance payment. If the matter was successful, the remaining thirty thousand pounds would reach Mr. Canales's account immediately. If it was unsuccessful, these twenty thousand pounds would be the basis for their future cooperation.

When Dunn returned, the perfectly satisfied Canales took the check and said goodbye to them. His attitude was quite different from how it had been during the first phone call.

After they had sent Canales off, Tang En and Dunn took the car back to the hotel. In the car, Tang En said to Dunn, "Money makes the world go round... the great wisdom of the Chinese."

"I... don't really if it's worth doing this for a young player who has not proven himself yet in the professional arena." Dunn expressed his caution and concern.

Tang En shook his head. "In a few years, you will be glad that we only had to put out fifty thousand pounds to get him, and the people from Barcelona will regret it very much... Actually, they are already regretting it now, but they can't do anything about it. I love Spain... and its law!" He laughed.

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A day later, Tang En received a call from Mr. Arturo Canales, who told him that Gerard Piqué Bernabéu would like to speak with him face-to-face.

After he hung up the phone, Tang En looked at Dunn, who was sitting on the couch and watching him. His face revealed a barely-concealed smile. "Dunn, half the battle is won. The team I want is taking shape, and I can already see it."

Chapter 194: The Future Of Youth Players Part 1

The meeting with Gerard Pique Bernabeu had been arranged at the same restaurant.

Speaking of Pique's last name, almost all Real Madrid fans would find it extremely familiar; it was the last name of Real Madrid's legendary Chairman, Santiago Bernabeu. The only thing was that Pique was not related to Real Madrid's Bernabeu in any way. Instead, his grandfather was the ex-vice chairman of Barcelona. This made people feel that Pique should be exceptionally loyal to Barcelona. But that was not really the case.

Pique loved Barcelona a lot, but he also knew that his own future should be prioritized before all else.

The young Pique still retained some semblance of a child's looks, and his most distinguished feature was his thick lips. Standing at a height of just over six feet, Pique also stood out in a crowd with his height.

When Tang En got news that Pique wished to speak face to face, he already knew that his journey to Barcelona this time had succeeded at least halfway. If Pique had steeled his resolve to join Manchester United, then he wouldn't have agreed to meet Tang En in the first place. Although Pique's agent, Canales, who was behind him, helped out greatly, the most crucial determining factor must have been Pique's thoughts.

Tang En could see this from his memories of Pique giving up on Barcelona to go to Manchester United. Gerard Pique was indeed someone who was very assertive.

"Pleased to meet you, sir." Pique, who was only seventeen years-old, did not appear nervous at all. Perhaps it was due to him growing up in a powerhouse football club from a young age, which had probably caused his confidence to be much higher than that of others his age. "After Mr Canales passed your message on to me, I felt that there was room for discussion."

"Of course." Tang En smiled and continued, "I expected it." That was definitely the case, seeing how this meeting was worth twenty thousand pounds!

"Well, sir, you know... Manchester United has already contacted me, and they've moved me with their sincerity," Pique said with his brows furrowed together. His facial expression was so serious that he looked as though he was the agent, while Canales had become the translator.

"Yes, I know about that. Manchester United may have expressed their sincerity, but we here at Nottingham Forest are sincere as well. Look, we've made a trip down to Barcelona especially for you." Tang En spread his hands and continued, "Please believe that our sincerity towards you won't lose to any other club."

Pique nodded his head lightly, but did not say anything else.

Tang En knew that it was his turn to speak. "I know the reason why you chose Manchester United and not Arsenal, despite the fact that your good friend is there. But I have to point out that in England, Manchester United and Manager Ferguson are not the only ones that hold young players in high regards. There's still us, Nottingham Forest. If Mr. Canales has briefly introduced to you to Nottingham Forest's situation last season, you will know that the majority of our team's core players are very young. I know, Nottingham Forest's reputation right now cannot hold a candle to Manchester United's, but we have an advantage that they don't have. May I ask you, Gerard, if Manager Ferguson's representative has promised you anything?"

"He promised me the future," Pique answered.

"Very good, very good. Manchester United has promised you the future, and I don't think that they are lying. But Nottingham Forest can promise you the present." Tang En extended one finger and said, "The reason for me coming all the way to Barcelona is not just to invest in Nottingham Forest's future. You already know; Nottingham Forest has already successfully advanced into the UEFA Europa League, and we need to participate in many different leagues and championship cups. Therefore you don't have to worry at all about not being able to play any matches once you come over to Nottingham Forest. If you go to Manchester United, what can the present-you get? Youth team matches, reserve team's matches one year later, being loaned out two years later to continue to accumulate experience, because the main team still won't have a position for you... Do you think I'm exaggerating?"

Pique did not answer.

Manchester United and Barcelona were both considered powerhouses, and Pique knew very clearly what a powerhouse's main team looked like. How many powerhouses out there really valued their youth team's talents? While Barcelona's La Masia youth training grounds was considered one of the best in Spain, and it had indeed nurtured many outstanding young players. But how many of them actually made it to the main team?

Why did Fabregas choose to leave the team, and head to the cold, gloomy, dampness of London? Others might not know, but how could Pique, Cesc's best friend, not know?

Barcelona's new chairman, Joan Laporta, in a bid to achieve good results as soon as possible and further stabilize his position as the chairman, would rather believe in spending huge amounts of money to buy famous football stars from other teams, than believe in giving young players a chance.

Fabregas's departure made the youngsters of La Masia see their futures. Just like that, Arsenal's star of hope became the role model for those people. He made everyone reconsider their futures if they stayed with Barcelona. Aside from Pique, there was another person who was also hesitating about his career as a professional footballer. That person was none other than the Barcelona C team's captain, Francisco Merida.

If Barcelona was in that kind of situation, what about Manchester United, a fellow powerhouse? If Barcelona did not give opportunities, would Manchester United be any different?

The center-back is a very special position. Unless the core center-back player was injured, there weren't many managers who would be willing to casually give a seventeen year-old child an opportunity. The

stability of the backline defense was something that was especially important to powerhouses, who needed immediate results. What if Pique had chosen Manchester United, and by the end of three years was still unable to play for the main team, and could only play on the field when he was on loan to other clubs, just as Tang En had described? Would his current decision still be correct?

Players usually grew the most between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two. If they played in too few matches, then the player would stop improving. The common reason behind the stagnation of countless geniuses was largely due to their lack of match experience.

Manchester United was a powerhouse, which meant that for the sake of results, they could channel more money to the transfer market and buy mature players. In that case, how many opportunities would the team give a young player?

Although Nottingham Forest was a small team, there were also some advantages to being a small team. And that was the ability to give young players the room for growth that they required, as well as their willingness to give the young players more opportunities to play in matches. Although the characteristic of lacking the financial ability to purchase those expensive famous football stars remained the sorrow of small clubs, it worked out great for young players.

Thinking about it in that way, Tang En's position as the manager of a newly-promoted team was very advantageous.

And Tang En was definitely not being an alarmist. As someone who had been through it, Tang En was very clear about Pique's future at Manchester United.... During the 04-05 season, he played for Manchester United's youth team in the FA Youth Cup. 05-06 season, he was loaned out to Real Zaragoza FC, a club playing in the La Liga. As per the contract, Pique had to be sent out to play at least twenty-times. At the start, Real Zaragoza was still unwilling to send Pique out too many times, and instead often only sent him out for the sake of counting it towards the required twenty. For the 07-08 season, Tang En did not know what would happen, but he felt that Ferguson still would not give Pique many chances. That was because Rio Fernando and Nemanja Vidic's positions as the core players of the team were very secure, and no manager would casually break up a center-back duo who coordinated so well with each other, just for the sake of nurturing a newbie whose future was still unknown.

Ferguson would not know about Pique's future achievements, and the same could be said of Tang En. However, from Pique's performance over the next three years, he knew very well that the season during which he was with Real Zaragoza was sufficient to see the youngster's abilities. Not only could he play as a center-back, he could also play as a right-back; and if the situation necessitated, he could be deployed in midfield, and play as a defensive midfielder. Of course, that would only be a temporary substitute, and not a long term plan.

Seeing that Pique had gone silent, Tang En knew that Pique must be hesitating inside. As such, he decided to strike while the iron was hot. "You won't get any chances at Barcelona, and being in Manchester United will only be slightly better than that. But if you join Nottingham Forest, you can immediately get the chance to play. I don't think there's anything better than that. Moreover, We are a team that will be participating in the UEFA Europa League. What are you hesitating for, Gerard?"

Regardless of which aspect Gerard looked at, the conditions offered by Tang En were the most favorable for him. Gerard would not be given opportunities to play at Manchester United and Barcelona; when the

time came, in order to ensure that he played in sufficient matches, they would have to loan him out. He would be sent to a team from a lower league, and the same fate awaited him for the next season as well. If he wanted to play as part of the main team, it would require taking into account lots of various aspects.

Pique continued to remain silent. However, Tang En did not rush his this time. Instead, he leaned back against his seat and sipped his drink casually.

Canales lowered his voice and said a few words to Pique, and they continued to discuss something in Catalan. Tang En did not understand what they were saying, but he knew that it must be related to the current issue that Pique was facing.

Tang En's guess was spot-on. Pique was asking his agent, "Since I've already decided to leave Barcelona, is going to Manchester United or Nottingham Forest, which came out of nowhere but has better conditions for me, better?"

The moment Canales thought about the thirty thousand pounds waiting for him once the mission was accomplished, he immediately, without hesitation, recommended that Pique choose Nottingham Forest. His reasoning also sounded very convincing. "Gerard, I feel that Nottingham Forest is much more beneficial towards your future development. Since Mr. Twain over here has promised to give you sufficient matches to play in, I believe that he is being serious. The significance of this period of time to you is something that you definitely know better than me. Playing in more matches is the most important thing. Since Manchester United will still loan you out even if you join them, why not go to a team that will give you a core position on the main team? Moreover..." Canales shot a look at Tang En, before telling the player he was representing, "When your contract is up, you may also choose to go to bigger teams, and win even more glory. Nottingham Forest is only a stepping stone for you."

Chapter 195: The Future Of Youth Players Part 1

The last sentence was the determining factor. Pique lightly nodded his head and said, "Mr. Canales, you are right. But currently, on Manchester United's side... Mr. Ferguson has very high hopes for me."

Canales shook his head and said, "You don't have to worry about that. I'll be the villain. We only have to ask him if Manchester United is willing to give you a position on the first team next season. And we all know the answer to that question. If that's the case, why is there a need for you to go to his club and become a player for the youth team, when Nottingham Forest is willing to give you a position on their first team? Did Manchester United give us any promises or guarantees? Have they paid us in advance? They have given us nothing. Remember Gerard, your future is the most important thing for us to consider. You don't want to see yourself remain unheard-of after leaving Barcelona, right?"

Pique shook his head.

"In that case, do as I say: wait. Don't answer him right now. Tell that manager that you have to go back and talk with your parents, and that you will give him a reply after one day. Don't appear too anxious, I want to get you the best contract you can get."

The two of them finished their discussion. Pique told Tang En, “Mr. Twain, the conditions you’ve offered are very good. However, I have to go back and talk with my parents. I’ll give you a reply in a day.”

“Alright, I’ll be waiting for your call in Barcelona.” Tang En stood up and shook Pique’s hand, showing that he agreed. Afterwards, when Canales and Tang En shook hands, Tang En winked; both parties had a tacit understanding of the situation.

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For the rest of the day, Tang En and Dunn were at Barcelona’s youth training grounds, La Masia, watching Barcelona’s youth team train. He found a few familiar figures in there. There was Giovanni dos Santos, who resembled Ronaldinho in terms of hairstyle, skin tone, and skill. As a result, he had been nicknamed “the young Mexican Ronaldinho.” Francisco Merida, the midfielder passer of Spain’s national youth team and Barcelona’s youth team, was also there. Then there was Bojan Krkic, the “child prodigy” whom Barcelona had high hopes for... and then the famous Messi. He had already been transferred to the main team by Rijkaard, and would be commencing his training with top-tier stars such as Ronaldinho, Puyol, Giuly and Xavi, once the summer started. As such, he would hardly appear at La Masia once summer came.

Looking at those prodigious players, Tang En really had the impulse to poach them all at once. But he knew that that was impossible, and there was only a slight possibility with Merida... But his play style did not seem to fit in with that of the English Premier League. If Tang En’s memories served him right, Merida would later fall out with the upper echelons of the club when he was fifteen years-old, and would refuse to sign the contract with Barcelona. Afterwards, he left Barcelona and went to Liverpool for trials. However, Tang En did not know the in-depth details of the situation, only having heard that Merida did not stay on with Liverpool. One year later, Merida would go on to join Arsenal’s youth team.

On one hand, the main teams spent lots of money purchasing famous football stars; on the other hand, there was an increasing backlog of talents nurtured by the youth teams. This contradiction seemed irreconcilable. The main team’s manager had a tendency to distrust young players, because the pressure placed on these managers was much greater than the pressure on the youth team managers. When Tang En was playing Football Manager, he had experienced this same dilemma.

As a player, Tang En liked young prodigies who had a lot of potential. However, whenever he discovered famous football stars on the transfer market, he would be unable to resist the desire to buy them.

There was also another powerhouse which faced the same issue as Barcelona: Real Madrid.

As the football club which had the most number of La Liga championship titles to their name, Real Madrid also had a fine tradition of placing emphasis on youth training. Real Madrid’s “Vulture’s Cohort” during the 1980s was the most classic example of their emphasis on youth training. However, entering into the twenty-first century, along with Florentino’s implementation of the “one football star every year” policy, the number of players that were transferred to the main team from the Real Madrid Youth Team gradually decreased. The policy of “Zidane + Pavon”, which was spoiled with excessive enthusiasm, was a joke. Despite Real Madrid’s youth team always obtaining good results in La Liga 2 every year, despite the fact that the media and fans were always able to discover prodigies or rookies every year, in the end, almost none of the players from the youth team managed to make it to Real Madrid’s main team. Portillo, for example, was the forward that was named to be Raul’s successor, but

his talent was later depleted during the time when he was repeatedly being loaned out to other teams. Mejia was once the team captain of Real Madrid B team, and was the team's core center-back player. However, once he had transferred to Real Madrid's main team, he became the definition of a worrywart. There was someone else in the same situation as him, and that person was Raul Bravo. He had once been deemed Roberto Carlos's successor, and had even been selected to be part of Spain's national team. However, he could only be sidelined when he was on Real Madrid's main team. Additionally, after Portillo, Soldado appeared out of nowhere; and despite him breaking the records that Raul had set in Real Madrid's youth team, there was no place for him in Real Madrid's main team.

Aside from those mentioned, there were countless other "future stars" from Real Madrid that had already been forgotten completely. Where are they, and what are they doing now?

The greatest irony was that even though Real Madrid had the grandest training grounds in all of Spain, the talents nurtured by the youth training camp had all ended up leaving to play for other Spanish football clubs aside from Real Madrid.

Currently, Tang En did not have to worry about the younger Nottingham Forest players being unable to play in matches. The only thing he worried about was not being able to find players to play in the match.

Small teams always worried about the abilities of their substitute players on the bench, while the powerhouses were instead always in a dilemma over who they should send up onto the field.

One day later, Pique met up with Tang En again. This time, the reply that they gave Tang En was well within Tang En's expectations: Pique agreed to join Nottingham Forest and reject Manchester United. He hoped that Manager Tony Twain could honor his promise of giving him sufficient playing time on the field.

Tang En smiled and said, "Of course, Gerard. I didn't travel all the way from England to Barcelona just to search for talents to join the youth team. Soon, you will realize that your decision to join Nottingham Forest was very wise."

Afterwards, Tang En represented Nottingham Forest and signed a four-year professional contract with Gerard Pique Bernabeu in the restaurant. From that moment onwards, Pique, the pure-Barcelonan player born in Catalonia, became Nottingham Forest's player.

And Nottingham Forest only had to pay a sum of two hundred and twenty thousand pounds. To Barcelona, that amount of money was almost nothing compared to the amount that the club had spent on nurturing a player like Pique. However, they had no choice but to watch helplessly as the Englishman took him away, snatching away the team's future core backline defender.

Of course, the Barcelonans had reasons to be angry about this. After all, they had nurtured Pique, and Pique's grandfather had been Barcelona FC vice-chairman in the past. That added layer of relationship would make the Barcelonans view Pique's leaving as a form of betrayal. However, the most angry person was not a Barcelonan, but a Scottish man.

Pique signed his name on the contract, finally putting an end to his worries for his future, which had plagued him for half a year. He revealed a relaxed smile to Tang En and said, "Should I learn from those English players and address you as Boss? Mister?"

“Hmm, not necessarily... Welcome to the Nottingham Forest’s big family. You’ll have a lot of freedom here, including how you choose to address me. There are a few ways you may choose to address me: A, boss; B, mister; C, chief; D, manager. Which do you like?” Tang En said to Pique, mimicking the voice of a robot.

Pique smiled and replied, “C.”

“Very good, kid! You’ll love this team, I guarantee it!” Tang En said, laughing loudly and patting Pique’s shoulder. That was the person who would become the future pillar of the team!

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When Pique and Tang En were signing the contract in the restaurant, Manchester United’s manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, who was preparing for the next season in Manchester, received a call from Barcelona.

“Boss, bad news. Pique no longer belongs to us.”

“What?” Ferguson thought he had misheard. Half a month ago, his assistant had still been telling him that Pique was very willing to sign a contract with Manchester United. The Scottish manager was feeling extremely triumphant for being able to defeat Arsenal in terms of the competition for talents. Little did he know that after a mere two weeks...“Is it the French guy?” The first person Ferguson thought of was Wenger. As the two of them were arch rivals, Wenger was naturally the first person that came to mind whenever his plans were foiled.

“No, boss. It’s not Arsenal. They’ve already given up. It’s another Englishman... Tony Twain.”

Ferguson was momentarily stumped. This name sounded somewhat familiar, but he could not recall who it was. He asked, “Who is that?”

“Nottingham Forest’s manager, boss. They just got promoted to the Premier League this season.

After hearing that, Ferguson remembered fully who it was. It was that young man who had made Mark Lawrenson disgrace himself and shave his moustache on a television program!

“What reason did he give? I want to know what the newly-promoted team did to snatch away our player!” Ferguson’s face started to flush. That usually foreshadowed an outburst of anger.

“He did not divulge any specific details. He only said that while Manchester United can only promise him his future, Nottingham Forest is able to promise him the present.”

Those words struck at the Achilles’ heel of Manchester United, causing Ferguson’s anger to stick in his throat, unable to be released. Manchester United could not refute that reasoning for snatching away his player. Ferguson suddenly became extremely interested in the “youngest manager of the English Premier League,” whom he had not had much knowledge of prior to this.

Who is he? And what abilities does he have?

Most importantly... Can he pose a threat to Manchester United?

Chapter 196: The Disruption of Tony Twain Part 1

Tony Twain and Dunn, who had bought Piqué, soon left Spain.

The English Premier League would start earlier than the championships in other countries, and would be in full combat in the middle of August. For that reason, the Premier League teams' preparation time was earlier than those of any other country.

Now, for Tang En, there was a problem that needed to be addressed: his partner's coaching certificate.

Tony Twain had a FA Level 4 (UEFA A) coaching certificate; of course, the examination was passed previously and had nothing to do with Tang En, who transmigrated. Even though Dunn was the original Tony Twain, his current identity as a Chinese man did not even have a FA Level 1 coaching certificate.

Strictly speaking, without a coaching certificate, the English Football Association would not permit him to be a coach for a Premier League team. But if this was the case in a lower-level league, the Football Association would turn away and pretend that they had not known about it. This was a tradition of English football. Since retired players could put on white gloves and become a team doctor, why couldn't the retired players put on a suit and become a coach?

For almost all the English football clubs, letting a retired player who had played for the club for years become a coach was the best reward for his loyalty. And loyalty was what they valued most.

Dunn was not a retired player in the Forest team, but he could be an assistant manager. Nottingham Forest could get into trouble with the English Football Association and if anyone had any objections, it would not be because Dunn did not have a coaching certificate, but rather because he was too young, and because he was not an Englishman.

Tang En and Dunn had no way to solve these two points. They could not change Dunn's nationality or age. The only thing they could do was to have Dunn obtain a coaching certificate, and to make the appointment of the new assistant manager more convincing. How did they expect anyone to trust a young assistant manager who was a foreigner and did not even have a coaching certificate?

Tang En had specifically asked Dunn before making any arrangements, and Dunn had no objections with re-taking the test for the coaching certificate, since he was quite certain he could pass.

So, Tang En left Dunn in Nottingham and flew off on another trip.

This time, he went to Denmark to bolster the team's frontline.

The only Forest players left from last season who could play at the frontline were Freddy Eastwood and Peter Crouch. Two strikers were too few for a team that needed multiple attacking avenues.

Tang En's transfer strategy for this summer was primarily to get a hold of the future star of hope. Whether he would become a future leading Forest player, or be sold for money, it was all worthwhile. Just like Piqué.

He went to Denmark this time for a young forward who was still relatively unknown at the time: Nicklas Bendtner.

He was a 6 foot, 3 inches tall center forward, but his footwork was better than most other center forwards. He was fast, excellent at headers, and had a strong physique and outstanding techniques. These were his strengths, but his greatest strength was his youth.

In the first half of 2004, he played three times and scored three goals, representing the Denmark national team for under-16 games.

In Tang En's memory, he was snatched up by Arsenal this summer, and since then he would be training in the Arsenal youth team and reserves. Later on, in the 06-07 season, he would be on loan to Birmingham City and was the biggest contributor to Birmingham City's promotion to the English Premier League.

It was the summer of 2004 now, and if Tang En did not act, Bendtner would be taken by Wenger. Although Tang En did not have a bad impression of the Arsenal manager, Wenger, he would have to be ruthless and relentless when it came to matters regarding the team's performance. Taking the non-stop flight to Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, he used the same approach as he did with Piqué, and contacted Bendtner and his agent himself, which led to another negotiation.

The negotiations with Bendtner were more difficult than Piqué's had been.

A position in the First Team, a younger lineup, an English Premier League team, and the UEFA Europa League qualification were the four key conditions that Twain used to attract players to join the Forest team. They were very tempting, but Bendtner had some hesitation.

Wenger and Arsenal were extremely famous. Unlike Piqué, who grew up in a wealthy, big-name football club, Bendtner did not know that the big clubs were crowded with many talented players, just like him. Going to Arsenal could satisfy his ego. After all, it was a wealthy, English Premier League club, and who had ever heard of Nottingham Forest?

Twain could only repeatedly state his analysis that if Bendtner went to the big clubs, he would only play in the Second Team as a reserve and then experience the pain of only being able to play in matches through being on loan. Whereas in a small team, there was the benefit of playing often for the First Team as a regular player. Furthermore, the Forest team would be able to join the UEFA Europa League this season, and it was the winner of the EFL Cup last season. Its reputation was not so bad.

But the notion of a big club was too deep-rooted. For a younger player who played in Denmark, the call of a European powerhouse was too irresistible. Arsène Wenger that had promised him that the future of Arsenal would belong to him. Even though Bendtner knew he would not be able to play in a First Team game now if he went to Arsenal, it was a glorious thing to be the main striker for the Gunners in the future.

Therefore, Twain told him a tale about a big club, and trotted out the example of Barcelona's young center back Gerard Piqué. Barcelona was also a big club, but Piqué tried every possible way of leaving. Now that he was a player for Nottingham Forest, he had no need to worry about not playing in matches.

The negotiations with Bendtner lasted three to four days, and the golden-haired Danish guy was finally convinced. He agreed to reject Arsène Wenger's call, and joined the Nottingham Forest team.

Then, just like the situation faced by the Manchester United's Manager, Ferguson, Wenger received a call from his scout in Denmark informing him that Arsenal's must-have Danish genius forward, known as the "Danish Ibrahimović," Nicklas Bendtner, had given them the brush.

Wenger's first thought was that Ferguson had gone behind his back. He did not expect the scout to tell him that it was the manager of Nottingham Forest, Tony Twain, who had gone to Copenhagen in person and secured Bendtner.

When he heard the name, Wenger stared blankly for a while and he thought of the battle in the rain.

He realized the words which he had said before were fast becoming true.

The next time they met, it would be at the English Premier League.

"In addition, Sir, there's something very interesting that I think you would like to hear."

"What is it?"

"Do you still recall the young Barcelonian center back, Gerard Piqué, whom we competed against Manchester United for some time ago?"

Wenger nodded, "Of course, I was very sorry when he chose Manchester United."

The scout at the other end of the line burst into laughter. "Sir! Piqué did not go to Manchester United. He, like our other target, Bendtner, was taken away by someone else halfway. Although the news has not been announced yet, it is certain. Piqué is now a player for Nottingham Forest!"

Wenger was stunned for a moment and then laughed as well.

This season's Premier League is getting interesting, isn't it?

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After settling the matters with Piqué and Bendtner, Tang En no longer needed to personally go anywhere to recruit players. They had a perfect system; the transfers could be arranged through the telephone or fax. If Tang En was required to appear in person each time, how could he do other things?

Evan Doughty was still in the United States with his wife and children. He had just become the new chairman of the team, and the Forest team had already won a cup title and the qualification to the English Premier League. He was in a very good mood, and was not concerned about the team's general affairs. After all, Tony was overseeing the team and Allan was in charge of operations. He did not have to do anything.

They could just discuss one thing through the fax or phone and it would be decided.

During this period, Twain hired three new scouts for the team. Together with the two current scouts for the club, the Forest team now had five scouts, which was not considered small for a team that had just been promoted to the English Premier League. Obviously, compared to Manchester United and Arsenal, which had football scouts all over the world, it was still not considered enough.

However, the construction of the team was a very long process, and could not be rushed; it must be built step by step.

There were still a few days before the team ended its vacation and returned for their assembly. Tang En became busier. There were a lot of issues he needed to consider such as which players the Forest team needed in the transfer market and who could be bought, and who would have to be given up after their

promotion to the Premier League. Not to mention the warm-up match arrangements, the production of the team's newsletter, and the media interviews.

The most troubling thing for him was how to introduce and place a young, seemingly inexperienced, and unknown Chinese man on the Forest coaching team. Evan did not know the new assistant manager's identity. But when he did, what would the expression on his face be?

Tang En did not think Evan would smile, pat him on the shoulder and say, "Young people are great."

He also did not think the players would believe him based on what he said. "Even though this assistant manager looks very young, has no coaching certificate, and is unknown, he is actually very powerful!"

He also thought that the coaching staff, the team doctors in the medical team, the football scouts, the turf maintenance workers, the chefs at the club restaurant ... and even Ian MacDonald, who opened the gate, would not easily believe that Dunn was a qualified assistant manager who could help him a lot.

Chapter 197: The Disruption of Tony Twain Part 2

Maybe Tang En was the only one in the entire world who believed in Dunn's ability. But if he could not make anyone else believe, even if Dunn was outstanding, it would be pointless. He had invited Dunn on an impulse, and should not let Dunn leave just because he could not get the trust of others. He had to be responsible for his actions.

Furthermore, Tang En also knew that to make others believe in Dunn's ability, the best way was to prove it with actual results. But would others give Dunn this opportunity and time? Tang En did not know.

First of all, he would have to clear this with Evan.

Twain could certainly use his authority to forcibly put Dunn in the assistant manager position. But as a result, his reputation in the team would be affected and it would cause an irreparable rift between him and Evan. This was not what Tang En wanted.

Now, besides attending the coach training courses of the English Football Association, Dunn rarely appeared outside. He seemed to be trying hard to make up for the year-and-a-half of lost time. But seeing Dunn like this gave Tang En a bigger headache instead. Dunn was not good at communicating with people. He could converse more with him, perhaps because they shared the same fate.

In reality he was quite lazy as a person and disliked trouble. So why was he always taking the initiative to attract such trouble?

When he returned home every day, Tang En would chatter nonstop, even if Dunn only spoke ten words that night. He would continue talking and chat about the things he had encountered when he first got here and about every little thing that had happened over the last year and a half. If there had been nothing to say, he would have just said some nonsense.

He only hoped that the reticent Dunn would get livelier. He did not expect him to jabber on in a torrent, but he also did not want him to be so uncommunicative and to have nothing to talk about but football.

Every time Tang En tried to get him to go have a drink at Kenny Burns' bar, he always shook his head and refused. If he asked him the reason, he would not explain except to say he had vowed not to drink. Tang En tried many ways, but he just refused to go. Tang En finally had met a man who was more stubborn than he was.

Evan would be back tomorrow. He had specially called him and wanted him to bring the assistant manager along to meet him. It seemed he was also concerned about the team's assistant manager.

What would happen tomorrow?

Looking at Dunn, who was still poring over the video of a football game, Tang En scratched his head.

"Dunn... Well, tomorrow, Evan—that's the young Mr. Chairman of the club, I spoke to you about him before—He wants to... he wants to meet you."

Dunn knew what was going on when he saw Tang En's sighs.

"Are you worried that my identity won't be accepted?"

Tang En nodded. "It really is ironic. A Chinese guy who doesn't understand anything is immediately accepted, just because of his body. But the real football coach can't get the opportunity to prove himself because he's in another skin. Hey, Dunn, do you ever hate me? You know, because everything I have now was supposed to be yours?" Tang En had had this worry when he found Dunn. A position that originally belonged to him was snatched away by a stranger who did pretty well, but in turn, he... Tang En did not know what to say.

But wouldn't a normal person think like that?

Loathing, jealousy, resentment, hate... One would want to take back the things that belonged to them. Was this not how a normal person would feel? "That's mine! Glory! Money! Beautiful women! Status! They are all mine! You just robbed me of my body and now you are enjoying everything that is supposed to be mine! You son of a b**ch! Give me back my stuff!"

Wouldn't anyone think that that behavior was consistent with common sense, and the logical thing to do?

Tang En thought so too. If he had returned to China to find Dunn surrounded by countless beautiful women, sitting in helicopters with the Air Force escorting him to Chunxi Road for a stroll, being worshipped by people around him, with no need to have money, and he could just directly take anything he wanted to buy... In that case, he would be jealous even if he was successful in Britain.

Dunn looked at Tang En and then turned his gaze back to the television screen.

"If I suddenly jump up, throw you down on the floor and use all my strength to strangle you, hoping to kill you, do you think that would fix anything?" He said abruptly, with his back facing Tang En.

Tang En felt slightly chilled by his words. If Dunn really were to do that, he would not be surprised. A taciturn person always gives off a dark feeling, doesn't he? At the sudden thought of this question, he realized that he and this person had lived under the same roof for more than a week. It was really daring of him to do so. He could not help but rub his neck.

“If I say I’m very glad to see what you’ve accomplished, then I must be lying to you.” Dunn continued, “If I say congratulations, Manager Twain, then I must be confusing you to let you lower your guard against me. And one day, if your performance is bad enough to be criticized by the media, the person who speaks ill of you behind your back and wants to replace you would be me. So, now, are you starting to regret letting me come to Nottingham?”

When he heard Dunn’s words, Tang En was stumped for a moment, and then he burst into laughter.

Dunn was somewhat astonished at Tang En’s reaction. He frowned back and said, “What are you laughing at?”

“Nothing. It feels nice to hear you talk so much in one breath. If you didn’t talk like this, I would really have thought that you had a speaking disability.” Tang En smiled and shrugged. “Do you know? When I found out that I was you, I was angry for a long time... Yes, but I’ve looked this face all day long, and I’m used to it after a year and a half. I don’t know how you have adapted to this situation, but I think I’ve adapted pretty quickly. Maybe I’m a heartless person.”

He looked at Dunn, and Dunn looked back at him. Neither of them spoke.

After a while, Dunn turned back to continue watching the video of the games, and said vaguely, “I think this is how we were originally supposed to be.”

Were we born in the wrong place?

Tang En shook his head and said to Dunn, “Tomorrow, I will try my best to fight for you with Evan.”

Dunn interrupted him. “I know what you’re fretting about. You can make David Kerslake the assistant manager for the First Team. He’s a very responsible coach.”

“What about the youth team?” Tang En stopped speaking and saw that Dunn was silent. Wasn’t the real Tony Twain transferred from being the head of the youth team to the First Team? Very well, he and Kerslake had also worked together in the youth team for half a season and worked well together.

“That’s a good idea. If it’s acceptable to you, I’ve got no problem with it either. It’s still gonna be difficult to persuade Evan to agree, but it’ll be easier than convincing him to agree to you being an assistant manager.”

Chapter 198: Start All Over Again Part 1

Dunn’s life had changed twice in a short span of one and a half years, and this type of change could not be compared to his parents’ divorce when he was still a child. After one and a half years, Dunn had stopped thinking about absurd questions such as “Who am I,” “Where did I come from,” or “Where am I going,” a long time ago. Moreover, he felt that going to China in such an absurd manner had not been detrimental to him in any way.

He did indeed love football, and it had used to be his everything in the past. But compared to a warm and loving family, football was something that he could bear to give up on.

Dunn even felt that it was better that way, that he should have been a normal person born in a Chinese village instead. His life prior to this must have been a mistake on God's part, which had caused him to be born in England by mistake. He didn't like England, or anything about it. What had his days in England left him with? Nothing but nightmares.

So he decided to leave behind everything related to England and embark on his new life in China. I am Dunn, the Chinese Dunn, not some Englishman Tony Twain. His past, his present, and his future are all none of my business!

That was how he had felt until his fateful encounter with Tang En on the streets of Chengdu City.

Could this be fate?

Now, he was once again seated inside the Nottingham Forest Chairman's office, quietly watching as Tang En and Evan quarrelled over him. He was not concerned about the contents or the results of their quarrelling, but was instead looking at the furnishings around the room.

He remembered this place very clearly. When Paul Hart, his teacher, was about to leave Nottingham Forest, he had recommended Dunn to the club's chairman, Mr. Nigel Doughty. As the board of directors was not opposed to this recommendation, Dunn, the young manager nurtured by the club itself, naturally became the substitute manager for Nottingham Forest.

The only problem was that his career as a manager only managed to last for a short first-half of a match before it was forcefully ended.

During his daily conversations with Tang En, Dunn also learned about how well Nottingham Forest and Tang En had done after they had swapped bodies.

Now that this room was refurbished with lots of new facilities that he had not seen in the past, the century-old football club's feeling of solemnity had been largely reduced. It now had a much more modern vibe.

The chairman when Dunn had been here, Mr. Nigel Doughty, had also retired due to health considerations. As a result, Dunn felt pretty unfamiliar with the current Nottingham Forest. For instance, this new chairman appeared to be very casual in front of Tang En, completely unlike Doughty's usual seriousness.

Evan Doughty was currently seated at one corner of the desk. Faced with Tang En's endless talking, the only thing he did was shake his head continuously.

"Tony, I know that you always do things in unconventional ways, but you've gone too far this time/ You are making this person, who doesn't have any coaching experience, who has no prior experience with professional football, who is preparing to sit for the England coaching license exams, the assistant manager of Nottingham Forest? Now that Nottingham Forest is an English Premier League team, I can't let you do this."

"You think I'm fooling around? Evan. Do you think that I'm the type of person to play when it comes to serious matters like this? Look, I acknowledge that Dunn doesn't have anything right now, but we can give him a chance to prove himself. That won't require too much time-"

“Tony!” Evan slightly raised his voice. “Putting the main team’s results at stake just for a newbie to prove himself is not something that we, a newly-promoted team, can afford to do!”

It was a rare sight to see Evan looking this serious. Tang En was momentarily dumbfounded before he recovered from his shock and curled his lips. “You said that I have full say over the team’s matters.”

Evan sighed. “Tony. I don’t know how you got to know this Chinese man” Evan shot a glance at Dunn, and discovered that he was not paying attention to the conversation between him and Tang En, and did not have the nerves and apprehension that normal people should have in this situation. “Alright, perhaps he’s related to that beautiful Chinese teacher of yours. If you intend to arrange a job position for him in the club, that’s not an issue. You can put him on the turf maintenance team, the equipment maintenance team, or let him be a waiter at the canteen... or any job of the sort, really. But he simply cannot become the assistant manager of the main team. That is a very important position.”

“If you know that that position is so important, why did you agree to let Walker leave?” Tang En retorted.

“Um...” Evan was at a loss for words. He knew that he was at fault. He scratched his head and jumped off the table before turning around and walking to the large French window behind his seat. Evan looked at the busy training grounds and saw the workers hastily making preparations for the training that was about to commence. “Tony, letting Walker go was my problem. At that time, there were many things about this team that I did not understand. I thought that as long as the team had an outstanding manager, any and all problems would be resolved. After my father caught wind of this, he told me about the importance of an outstanding assistant manager on a team. It’s precisely because this that I can’t let him become the assistant manager.”

Tang En looked at Evan without uttering a single word. He simply stared. Evan saw the look in Tang En’s eyes before adding, “Perhaps he can become the assistant manager in the future. But not now. It doesn’t matter if he is competent enough. Find someone else for now, Tony.”

The two of them looked at each other for a short while before Tang En shook his head and complained, “I spent an entire summer in China to find the most suitable assistant manager, and now you’re telling me the club doesn’t agree with this personnel appointment, and that I have to find someone else. Evan, do you know how much time we have left? The team will be starting its pre-season trainings in two days, and all the plans have to be formulated by then. Asking me to change to someone else now... How do you plan to solve the familiarization issue the team will be facing in the future?”

Evan spread his hands and continued. “You can transfer someone from the club. I remember that in the past, you were promoted directly from the position of the youth team’s manager to the main team’s manager.”

The fish had taken the bait.

Tang En pondered out loud, “What you’re saying is that you want me to get David Kerslake? We have worked together at the youth team for a long time, and he also has a certain level of understanding with regards to managing a football team...”

Hearing him say that, Evan started nodding his head. "You're very smart, Tony. That's exactly what I mean. Wasn't Walker also a player from Nottingham Forest? Why must you go outside to find an assistant manager?"

Tang En turned his head and looked at Dunn, who was still looking around the office and appeared to be deep in thought. "If Kerslake comes to the main team to be my assistant, then who will be in charge of the youth team? Evan, you have to know that youth training is the most valued tradition of Nottingham Forest."

"That's not an issue, we can always promote one of the youth team coaches."

Tang En shook his head, rejecting Evan's suggestion. "I've been on the youth team for a very long time, and I understand those colleagues of mine very well. All of them undeniably have decent abilities. But I feel like putting any one of them in charge of the youth team would be detrimental; it would stop them from being able to fully maximize their fortes." That was Tang En's tactful way of telling Evan that when those youth team coaches were put in charge of a specific type of training, they performed quite well. But making any one of them the manager just because of that would never work.

"That's..." Tang En and those people had worked together before, so if he said that those people were not competent enough for the position, it was definitely more convincing than Evan's train of thought, which was purely based upon assumptions. For a short while, Evan was out of ideas.

Tang En felt that it was time for him to reveal his true motive. "Alright, we seem to have forgotten about someone," Tang En said as he looked at Dunn, still seated on the sofa.

"That twenty-five year-old?" Evan knitted his brows.

"Are you going to use your veto power again, Evan?"

"Um... Tony. You must know better than me that the Football Association won't agree to let someone who doesn't have a coaching certification become the manager of our Youth team..."

"He'll get his very soon, even though it might be the lowest tier." Tang En shrugged his shoulders and continued. "You know, Evan, there's a saying that goes like this... Mosquitoes might be small, but they still have meat... It's just... Um, a common saying from a certain country that I've been to in the past. But that's not the point. The point is, we have to decide on a person to take over as the youth team manager right now, before transferring David Kerslake onto the main team. I definitely won't let the main team's coaches become the manager of the youth team, and wouldn't think about touching the rest of the youth team's coaches."

Evan nodded his head and said, "I understand what you mean, Tony. But have you ever thought if Dunn—your Chinese friend—is suited to become the manager of the youth team?"

This question indeed had not crossed Tang En's mind before, because Tang En had become the manager of the youth team and the main team at a very young age, and got along well with the coaches. So he had not been met with a situation where they were not convinced by his abilities. But his situation was truly different from Dunn's. The only reason Tang En could be accepted by his other colleagues the moment he took up the manager's position, was because of the person in front of him. It was the efforts of Dunn, who had worked in Nottingham Forest for seven years and slowly climbed his way

up. However, Dunn had become a newbie who did not have anything. His achievements were completely empty, so how could he convince others that he had the right abilities to become the youth team's manager?

Tang En discovered that he had viewed the question too simply. Although Tang En knew about Dunn's ability, would others believe him?

Evan trusted Tang En a lot, so if even Evan could not believe Tang En's evaluation of Dunn, it was all the more unlikely for others to believe him.

Tang En suddenly felt that his impulsive decision to invite Dunn back to Nottingham Forest was very foolish. Not only had he made Dunn lose his job, it was even possible that he would face the fate of being sent back to China after travelling all the way to England.

Just as Tang En was beginning to feel dejected, Dunn, who had been sitting on the sofa all along as quietly as though he were an unconcerned outsider, stood up. He said, "I can begin from working as the most elementary level coach, Mr. Chairman."

Hearing him say this, Evan looked at Tang En, and Tang En turned his head to look at Dunn, trying to figure out what was on his mind. When Tang En had brought Dunn to England, his original intention was to make Dunn his assistant manager. Tang En believed that they would cooperate very well with each other, because they had each other's bodies, and they knew what the other person was thinking about. It was an innate kind of chemistry between them. Now, if Dunn were to become a normal coach of the youth team, what was the point of bringing him all the way back to England?

However, Tang En was unable to derive the answer to this question from Dunn's face.

Chapter 199: Start All Over Again Part 2

"Tony?" Evan asked.

Tang En nodded his head. "That's not a bad idea; I'm not against it." Although doing so would be a waste of talent, starting him off at the youth team could definitely prevent many people's tongues from wagging. There were quite a few young coaches on Nottingham Forest's youth team, so a twenty odd year-old coach like Dunn would not be rare.

"Doing this would be in everyone's best interests." Evan still thought that Tang En only tried so hard so that he could land his friend a job at the club. Since that Chinese man must become a coach, then arranging for him to become an insignificant coach on the youth team was naturally the best course of action.

Just like that, they finally came to an agreement. Dunn entered the Nottingham Forest youth team coaching team with a low profile, and the club later announced the personnel changes within the club. The youth team's manager David Kerslake would be transferred over to the main team, becoming manager Tony Twain's assistant. Ian Greenwood, who had originally assisted David Kerslake on the youth team, would be promoted to the manager of the youth team and placed in charge of all the matters pertaining to Nottingham Forest's youth team.

After deciding on all of those things, Tang En was about to bring Dunn and leave the office, but he was stopped by Evan.

Tang En could only let Dunn wait outside the room.

After closing the door, Evan whispered to Tang En, "Tony, tell me what's on your mind. If he's a friend or younger brother of your Chinese teacher, are you trying to curry that beautiful Chinese lady's favor?"

Hearing Evan say this, coupled with the smirk on his face, Tang En silently sighed. "He is indeed related to my Chinese teacher, but that's completely unrelated to this... Evan, are you doubting my foresight?"

Evan Doughty shook his head and said, "If that's the case, great. If Nottingham Forest is able to advance into the Champions League finals, then the person seated beside me will definitely be Dunn." Tang En pointed to the door before he bade goodbye to Evan and walked out of the office.

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When Dunn and Tang En were standing on the youth training grounds, which were still not open for trainings, Dunn breathed in the once-familiar air and felt as though it was no different from a year and a half ago. The last time he was here, he had worked here for seven years. How much time would he need this time round?

"It won't take too long," Tang En, who was standing beside him, said.

Dunn looked at Tang En, and Tang En looked back. Afterwards, Tang En shrugged his shoulders and said, "I know what you're thinking. Don't forget about the relationship between us. Do you feel disappointed, Dunn?"

"Hm?"

"It was me who wanted you to come here and become the assistant manager of the main team, but now you have to start all the way from the bottom, as a coach of the youth team. You even quit your job in China... Have you told mom and dad?"

"I told them I've been sent overseas by the company for three years," Dunn replied.

"Three years... that's more than enough. Let's go. From tomorrow onwards, everyone will be busy. The new season is approaching!" Tang En waved his hands before turning around and leaving.

Dunn looked around at the extremely familiar training ground before following behind Tang En.

The next day, Nottingham Forest Football Club announced the personal changes to the coaches on its official webpage, finalizing the new assistant manager, which the fans had been very concerned about. Nobody expressed any form of doubt or discontent regarding David Kerlake's assumption of the position. That was because just like Tony Twain, David Kerlake had been nurtured by Nottingham Forest Football Club, and was part of the Nottingham Forest family.

Tang En knew that it was practically impossible for him to challenge that Nottingham Forest tradition. He was only an individual, but he was facing off against Nottingham Forest's 140 years of rich history.

Although making Dunn start work as a normal coach on the youth team was not Tang En's original intention, at least Dunn still stayed behind him. Once he got his professional coaching certificate in August, everything else would be easier to deal with.

The coaching team's staff had already been finalized, so Nottingham Forest's match preparations for the new season could finally commence in full.

The players also ended their holidays, and everyone returned to the team on time.

On the morning of the first training, when Tang En looked at the group of high-spirited players standing in front of him, he was filled with anticipation for the future.

"The sun is very bright, and everyone's skin has darkened considerably. How did you guys find your holiday?" Tang En asked, smiling.

"Very good!"

"Where did you guys go?"

"Paris!"

"Hawaii!"

Everyone started reporting the countries they had gone to during the holidays.

Tang En saw Crouch, and suddenly asked, "Peter, how did your romantic trip to Spain go?"

Crouch immediately blushed.

"Looks like it went quite well."

Hearing this, all the players burst into laughter.

Amidst the laughter, Crouch also started giggling. It seemed like Tang En was spot-on.

After waiting for the laughter to subside, Tang En pointed at David Kerlake, who was standing beside him, and said to the players, "This is your new assistant manager, Mr. David Kerlake. He was the manager of the youth team, and he will now be in charge of managing the main team with me. He will be in-charge of all training-related matters, so if you guys have any questions during training, you may raise them with him at any time."

As a form of response to the players' claps, Kerlake waved at them.

Afterwards, Tang En called out the two players whom they had gotten during the summer transfer window: Gerard Pique and Nicklas Bendtner.

"These are your new teammates. This is Gerard Pique, a center-back who used to play for Barcelona's youth team. And Nicklas Bendtner, a forward from Denmark's Kjøbenhavns Boldklub."

"Hello everyone." The two of them greeted their teammates in English, a language which they were not very used to speaking. Pique was somewhat shy, while Bendtner appeared calm.

Tang En patted them on their shoulders, signaling to them to stand together with their teammates. The two new teammates were quickly welcomed by the other players in a warm manner. During the previous season's winter transfer window, almost all the players who were brought over by Tang En were young players, so the Nottingham Forest players were already used to welcoming young players to the team, which was evident from how they welcomed the two new young players who were still seventeen or eighteen years-old. Moreover, almost half of the players on the team were youngsters in their early twenties, so it was easy for these like-minded people to bond together.

Seeing that Pique and Bendtner were quickly accepted by the other players, Tang En heaved a sigh of relief. He clapped his hands, reminding everyone to focus their attention on him. "I believe that after a week of rest, you guys have already made sufficient preparations physically and mentally, so you must be longing for a match right now, right?"

"Right! Boss!"

"That's right, Chief!"

Seeing their teammates replying to Tang En's questions in such an excited manner, the newly-joined Pique and Bendtner were rather puzzled. The relationship between this manager and his players seemed different from the usual, simple manager-player relationship.

"It's really great to see all your high-spirited faces. We'll be playing in the English Premier League this season, and do you guys know the idea behind English Premier League? It's the best league in England, and we'll be facing many opponents which are much stronger than any team that we've played before. There's also the UEFA Europa League, and all the participating teams are strong champion teams from all over Europe! Are you guys scared now?"

"No!"

"They should be the ones that are scared! Not us!"

Pique and Bendtner turned around and looked at their teammates around them who were fanatically shouting. Nottingham Forest was only a newly-promoted team, so what gave them so much confidence? Thinking about it logically left the two newcomers confused.

"Every season, there are only the same few teams contending for the championship title: Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool... I dare wager that the audiences must be sick of this. Fortunately, we are here to mess things up for them, and make them go from belittling us to fearing us! We have to make the clapping and cheering sounds from those audiences belong to us, not any other teams!"

Tang En waved his hands forcefully.

"This season, we'll give them the shock of their lives!"

Chapter 200: Forest in The Transfer Market Part 1

The team had started training, and the Forest team's movements in the transfer market did not stop for a moment.

For the midfield section, the Forest team finally bought Aaron Lennon, the young player from Leeds United whom they had wanted to buy during last season's winter transfer period. As Tang En expected, Leeds United was relegated to League One, and had then immediately declared bankruptcy. The team faced another terrible misfortune in the form of a possible relegation to another level. At that time, the minds of everyone on the team were in turmoil, and it was normal for any player to want to leave. Twain once again asked Leeds United for a quote on Lennon. Leeds United, who was beleaguered with debt, did not ask a high price for the young player. They quoted a price which was acceptable to Twain: one million pounds.

Lennon himself had a clearer understanding of the fact that he would be better off if he left Leeds United. If he stayed on Leeds United, his own strength would not be nearly enough to change the status of the team. At the age of sixteen, he had just begun to play in First Team games. Nottingham Forest was naturally the best choice due to the club's sincerity towards him and the fact that he was able to enter the Premier League at this juncture.

Tang En was worried that things might change if they took too long. So, without further ado, the payment was transferred, and he quickly signed the contract with Lennon. From then on, England's star of hope became a Nottingham Forest player.

When the Forest team announced on its official website that Lennon was joining the team, the English media realized that, while they had been paying attention to this summer's clash between Chelsea's newly appointed Mourinho, Arsenal, and Manchester United in the transfer market, they had ignored the quiet, newly promoted Nottingham Forest.

Even though it was not yet known how the Forest team would perform after the start of the season, they had already made tremendous, high-profile headway in the transfer market.

With regards to this, The Sun had a special topic in their article to analyze and forecast every club's movement during the summer transfer period. Placed in the headline photographs were several Premier League managers: Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, Arsenal manager Arsène Wenger, Chelsea's newly appointed manager, the talented José Mourinho (who had just led the Portuguese FC Porto to become the champion of the UEFA Champions League), and the just as successful Rafael Benítez, who had just joined Liverpool from Spain's Valencia CF. And the man placed behind them was the manager of Nottingham Forest, Tony Twain.

The article analyzed that, as a new entrant to the Premier League as well as a competitor in the UEFA Europa League, the Forest team faced the predicament of battling on multiple fronts. But to Tony Twain, it was a chance to expand the size of his team. So far, the players that the Forest team had bought were mainly young players. It was obvious that Twain had set his sights on the future. However, the Premier League was the top level after all, and the goals of the club's higher powers would change accordingly. If they were not able to achieve results that were to their satisfaction, then it would all be meaningless, no matter how young and talented the players were.

After introducing Gerard Piqué and Nicklas Bendtner in succession, as well as Aaron Lennon, what else could be happening in Twain's Forest team?

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It was end of June, and the sun was scorching and intense. At noon, the concrete ground of the pier was baking. It was lunch break and the narrow, run-down pier was empty. Only one person was sitting on the shore, ignoring the sweltering hot sun above.

This was in Boulogne-sur-Mer, a small coastal town on the west coast of France. In France, people callously labeled it as “the worst town in France.” Poverty had afflicted every resident in the small town. Now it was troubling the young man sitting in the sun, too.

He looked down in a daze at water below his feet crashing into the pier repeatedly. The long scar along his right cheek looked ghastly under the glare of the sun.

The young man was frowning, thinking about something very important to him: money.

At the age of sixteen, in pursuit of his dream of playing professional football, he had moved out of his house to Lille. However, he had been rejected due to insufficient academic qualifications; like most clubs in France, the young players were not only required to learn football, but also to achieve a certain degree of education. Five years had passed, and now he could not even afford to pay his rent.

He had played in Olympique Alès a year ago. On a monthly subsidy of one hundred and fifty euros, he lived frugally. He could not afford to rent a house. In order to change his impoverished situation, he had switched to another football club, Stade Brestois 29 in Ligue 2. But his situation still did not improve. Apart from the necessary expenses, he found that he had not earned a single penny by the end of the season.

When his contract expired, the club obviously did not intend to renew the contract with this unsightly, unlikable young man. The Brest team was not in a good position either, so he had to look for another team again. But he found that he did not seem to have a future in France. None of the big clubs liked him, and the small clubs offered too little money.

It really was a headache. The young man scratched his head, accidentally touching the scar on his cheek.

It had happened when he was two years old, due to a car accident. He had flown out of the car window. He had survived, but a permanent scar was left on his face. This used to be the reason that he was ridiculed and teased; its existence made him feel ashamed. He wished he could get rid of the scar by scraping it off with a knife. Of course, what he really wanted to do was find a plastic surgeon to help him fix the scar. This was a good idea; modern medical technology could fully meet his requirements. The only problem was that he had no money.

The failed professional footballer sat on the seaside for a while, looking miserable. He had no idea what to do about his future. Dizzy from the sun, he got up and staggered to his rented house, which was not far from the pier. He walked straight out of the pier, crossed a street, and on the way to his place, passed through a clearing that was full of weeds and covered in trash. Whenever he opened his window, he could see the sea outside—but since the window could only be opened halfway, the view was not too good.

This was not some luxury seaside villa. It was an ordinary, four-story small brick building with a gray steeple, and the young man lived in the topmost attic where the light was dim. Every time he opened the half of the window and looked out at the sea outside, he would wonder; would it be better to leave

France? He really could not envision a future here for him. He could only see the English Channel shrouded in fog before his eyes. What was waiting for him beyond the mist?

Taking out his key to open the dilapidated door, he saw the plump landlady standing on the stoop and holding the receiver. When she heard the door open, she turned and saw that the person entering was the one with the scarred face. She cried out, "Franck! Come here!"

With the receiver in her hand, she waved to the young man standing at the door.

"Why are you still standing there? It's for you! What a coincidence, I was just about to tell him that you weren't here, so come quickly!"

Putting the phone into the young man's hand, the landlady turned and waddled up the stairs.

The young man stared blankly for a moment and then put the receiver to his ear and whispered, "Hello?"

A male voice spoke out from the other end. It was obviously French spoken with an English accent. "Is this Mr. Franck Ribéry?"

"Yes... that's me."

"Let me introduce myself; I'm Arnold Duran, a football scout from Nottingham Forest football club, specializing in the French region."

What the person claiming to be a football scout said next immediately made Ribéry feel like he was in the clouds. He wondered if it was because of his exposure to the noon sun outside; if he was so dizzy from the hot sun that he was hallucinating, imagining the words.

"Well, here's the thing. My boss is very interested in you and he wants to find out what your answer will be to our inviting you to join the Premier League team, Nottingham Forest."

Nottingham Forest? Has anyone ever heard that name? Wait a minute... What did he say? English Premier League team? Is there such a team in the Premier League?

Ok, I guess I don't really keep track of English football.

When he did not hear Ribéry's reply, the Forest team's new football scout, Duran, asked again. "Mr. Ribéry?"

"Um... Uh..." Ribéry opened his mouth and did not know how to face the sudden news. Firstly, putting aside whether Nottingham Forest was truly a Premier League team, and whether the name was familiar or not, just a moment ago he had still been worried about the rent. And now, a job opportunity was delivered to his doorstep! Would such a wonderful thing fall into Franck Ribéry's lap?

"Excuse me, sir, I just... I just somehow don't believe it. You know, my contract is expiring with my team and... and I played in the Championnat National, so... I can't be sure..." Ribéry was stammering; his throat was dry. "Are you serious?"

After his question, he heard the voice of another man over the phone. He spoke in English and was speaking very fast. He could not understand it at all. After a while, Arnold Duran's voice rang out again.

“Very sorry, Mr. Ribéry. That was my boss, the Forest team manager, Mr. Tony Twain. He asked me to tell you that you don’t have to doubt the authenticity of this call. Indeed, we have taken a liking to you, even though you’re still playing in the Championnat National. Nottingham Forest is a team that’s just been promoted to the English Premier League from England’s second level league at the end of last season, and won the EFL Cup title last season as well. It is qualified to participate in the UEFA Europa League this season. Mr. Twain believes that your unique skills are fully in line with the Forest team’s tactical requirements, so he would like to talk to you about a contract. If you agree, we will prepare a ticket for you from France to the United Kingdom. All expenses will be covered by the Forest football club.”

After he had hung up the phone, Ribéry’s ears were still ringing with what Duran had said—English Premier League, EFL Cup champion, UEFA Europa League eligibility, new contract, salary...

Am I dreaming?