

Godfather Of Champions

Chapter 22: Coventry City Part 2

The Forest team's red bus stopped at the designated spot. When Tang En led the players down, he found that the fans surrounding them were all Forest fans wearing the red jerseys. They had come to specifically to support their team, even though they were only given about two thousand tickets for this match.

Tang En immediately saw Michael. He had not seen this guy since that FA Cup match. He put his hands to his mouth and made a boo sound at Michael. Michael pretended not to see him, and Tang En laughed while he followed the players through the side gate. Fans shouted behind them, "Forest! Forest! Nottingham Forest!!"

Amidst the competing shouts and singing between both sides of fans, the team entered the locker room to get ready to change and prepare for warm-up. Since Twain was still suspended, he could not step onto the field, so he could only stay in the locker room during the team's warm-up.

"You only have 20 minutes!" Walker drove the players out of the locker room like a shepherd. He looked back at Twain deep in thought, sitting in front of the tactical board and then closed the door on his way out.

When he heard the door shut, Tang En came out of his contemplation. Walker must have thought he was thinking about strategies just now. In fact, what he was thinking had nothing to do with this match. Too many things had happened during this last half a month, one after another, like a screaming train speeding toward him. He was unable to have a calm moment to sort through his thoughts. Now was a good time. Since there was no one in the locker room, he could properly think about the situation he was currently facing, and his future.

But at this time, the door opened again. And it was Ian Bowyer who came in. Tang En was a little surprised to see him in the locker room. It was obvious that he did not come back to look for something.

"I have something to say to you, Tony."

"I have something to say to you, Ian."

The two men immediately realized they both spoke at the same time together. Tang En smiled and gestured for Bowyer to speak first.

"Well it's this. I've decided to leave the team at the end of the season." Bowyer shocked Tang En with his first remark.

“What?”

“Hereford United has invited me to coach, and I have already promised them.”

Mouth agape, Tang En looked at Bowyer standing in front of him with a shocked expression. “When was this?”

“A week ago.”

Hearing this, Tang En jerked up from his seat. “Ian, you can’t do this. This team needs you!” He had wanted to get the old chap to assist him. He did not expect to hear bad news. “Your experience can lead them forward.”

Bowyer shook his head, “Wrong, the one who can lead them is you, not me.”

“Er, are you still mad about that matter?” Tang En asked cautiously.

The other man smiled, “Tony, you really broke your head.”

“Huh?”

“Do you know who I’ve had the best relationship with on this team?”

“Who?”

“Paul, Paul Hart.”

Tang En looked at Bowyer like he was an alien.

“Paul often mentioned you in front of me. He really thought highly of you. But I had a huge disagreement with him about his decision to let you take over as the First Team manager after the new year.” Bowyer passionately continued. Tang En felt like he was listening to a story. “I admit I really want to be the manager of this team, and I think I am capable of it. But the most important reason is I don’t think you’re ready yet. I know you very well. Even that lad, Des doesn’t know this. To be honest, I would adamantly oppose it if it were you before the new year. I don’t think you’re qualified enough to be the manager of this team. Your performance in the first match was abysmal.”

Tang En recalled the scene whereby he had been knocked over by Johnson, and afterwards he felt ashamed of himself when he thought about it.

“But what you did next was an eye-opener for me.” Tang En knew Bowyer was referring to the halftime and the second half of that FA Cup match. “Maybe it was God’s arrangement to let you fall. He gave us a completely different Tony Twain from before. In that halftime, I saw your qualities as a good manager. You know, Paul’s judgment on people is always quite accurate, whether it’s discerning a player or a colleague. He

thinks you can become an excellent manager, and I was always dismissive of it. Now I believe you can really do it.”

“But, Ian...,” No matter how high Bowyer was placing Twain on a pedestal, Tang En was still reluctant to let him go. Having one more able right-hand man around was always better than being a leader of no one. Walker just retired from being a player. His being a coach still could not set one’s mind at ease yet. To become a qualified coach, he still had a long way to go. His performance was not that great in the first half of that match with West Ham.

Tang En had just arrived at an unfamiliar place, and such an experience lacked a sense of security. Bowyer happened to provide him this sense of security. He needed someone at his side, to remind him, to guide him, or maybe even criticize him. If he wanted to be a real professional manager instead of an imposter substitute, he needed someone like Bowyer.

Bowyer was a very smart man. “I know what you’re worried about, Tony. You can rest assured that I will wait until the end of the season to leave the team. Before that, we still have half a season. In addition, Des also has plenty of experience, he can effectively help you mediate the locker room atmosphere, although I think you are an expert at moderating the atmosphere.”

Tang En looked at Bowyer and said nothing.

“Though I’ve served the team for a long time, though I’m respected by them... now I may not be suitable for the current Forest team. Des is closer to them, and the relationship between them will be more harmonious. I’m a little behind times, and you and Des are the ones who can lead them. Moreover, Hereford United gave me a chance to be manager, and I’ve always wanted to return to Edgar Street Stadium.”

Tang En remained silent as before.

“Well, do you have anything you want to say to me?”

Tang En sighed. “Initially, I wanted you to stay. There’s no need to say it now.”

“It’s not so bad. We still have at least half a season.” Bowyer patted Twain’s shoulder and then turned around to leave.

Looking at the Bowyer’s departing figure, Tang En muttered, “What a b*stard! God knows if I’m still going to be here after half a season.”

Twenty minutes later, the team was back and prepared for the upcoming match. The tactical arrangements before the match were still directed by Walker, assisted by Bowyer at the side, while Twain was silent. Bowyer glanced at Twain a few times and thought that he was still unhappy about his departure.

What he did not know was Tang En was just taking the opportunity to quietly learn. He had already told Walker what should be mentioned, and Walker would relay these things to the team. One day when Tang En felt that he could, he would replace Walker and become a real manager. But now was not the time.

After studying their opponents, the coaching team decided not to make any special arrangements for this match and to go with the team's usual tactical lineup. After Tang En listened to the arrangement, he said nothing and tacitly agreed with the coaching team. In fact, he had no clue what he should say. The coaching team members are professional coaches. Who was he to say anything?

He decided to do the same as he did with the West Ham match, observe the first half and then adjust during halftime. From that match, Tang En not only gained great confidence, but also found a strength of his. He was better at directing on the spot than pre-match arrangements. He liked the feeling of taking the opponent by surprise.

The preparation time before the match quickly passed. Walker had hoped that Twain would add a few words as the manager at the end. It was his intention to let the players know who the real leader was. But when Tang En looked at all the expectant eyes, he felt somewhat foolish. What should he say?

He suddenly thought of the game on the 4th, the warm feeling spread throughout the stadium, and the players' fighting spirit displayed on the field.

"Still remember the last FA Cup match?"

The players all smilingly nodded, and some even raised their fists.

Tang En spread his arms. "What else do I have to say? Just like that, go to the match!"

Tang En was the last one to go out after all the players ran out of the locker room. When he stepped out of the door, he saw two well-dressed men standing at the door, "Mr. Twain?"

"Ah, that's me." Tang En felt a little strange.

"We are with the English Football Association Independent Regulatory Commission..."

When he heard the other person recite such a long string of names, Tang En put his head a little closer. "Is there such an organization?" Seeing the men's unfriendly expressions, he laughed at once. "Just kidding! Of course, I know there's such an organization! Why are you here looking for me?"

The men stared blankly too at his words, Tang En soon laughed again, "I'm joking. Obviously I know why you're looking for me! I'm not planning to go onto the field with them." Tang En pointed to the players who just ran out.

The two nodded. "We are in charge of supervising and carrying out your suspension, so we apologize, but you have to watch this match with us."

Tang En made a strange sound. "Does the Independent Regulatory Commission not have any pretty staff?" He thought of Faria Alam, though he did not think that woman was beautiful at that time. At least she was better compared to these two big guys. "Naturally, I'm kidding. I'm with you guys."

He patted the two men on the shoulder to show his friendliness and there was no need to be overly nervous. "Let's go."

"First of all, sir. You'll need to turn off all communication tools such as your cellphone."

Tang En took out his cell phone from his pocket and simply removed the battery, and then showed it to the two men until they nodded.

"Your beeper?"

"Gentlemen, it's the 21st century now." Tang En shook his head impatiently.

"Walkie-talkie?"

"Listen, guys, I'm a football manager, not James Bond. If you're going to ask me if I have a wireless Bluetooth intercom, a pinhole receiver, a phone disguised as a tie clip, a pair of sunglasses that is in fact a micro-computer, a leather shoe or a pen that is a gun... whatever it is, my answer is: I don't have a goddamn thing!" Tang En was so infuriated with their flat expressions and grilling that he shook off the two men from the Football Association and walked straight to the stands.

Behind him, the two Football Association staff members with their "men in black" getup, looked at each other in dismay, shrugged, and quickly followed.