

Champions 231

Chapter 231: Going Toe-to-Toe Part 1

Naturally, Chelsea's players and fans had reason to doubt the decision made by the referee. They could reason that Ferreira did not slide tackle Ribéry, and he fell only because of the slippery ground, or that Ribéry had purposely flopped in hopes of being awarded a penalty kick. But their doubts or protests could not change the results.

Just 11 minutes into the match, Right Back Paulo Ferreira was given a red card because he had tackled a player from the back. In addition to that, Nottingham Forest was awarded a penalty kick by the referee.

Ribéry, who had gotten tackled, lay outside the field. He was receiving treatment from the team doctors, and his condition did not seem serious. On the other hand, Ferreira looked dazed as he stood and watched the main referee raise a red card at him. His mind was a mess. Not only was he given a red card, he also had given the opponents a penalty kick; he had put Chelsea at a disadvantage both in terms of the number of players and points.

José Mourinho pursed his lips as he watched all of this from the outside. He was the one who had brought Ferreira in from FC Porto. In the new club, Ferreira was one of the more trustworthy players; after all, he was already an old troop. He chose not to use William Gallas or Glen Johnson, insisting on using Ferreira all in hopes of letting someone familiar take up a main position on Chelsea's first team; to help firm up his position as their general. Unexpectedly, Ferreira, who had been such an eye-catcher with his excellent performance on FC Porto, had had persistent difficulty in getting used to the style of English football after coming to London. Match after match, he played worse and worse until no one had any confidence in him at all.

Perhaps it was time to give up on him.

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"Red card! Penalty kick! This is a catastrophe... Paulo Ferreira's performance is a complete mess! This poor Portuguese man couldn't keep up with Ribéry's speed and rhythm at all. He was taken for a spin by his opponent, and in the end, could only finish up this failure of a match with a foul."

Looking at the displeased expression of the referee, Ferreira lost all strength to try to defend himself. He simply hung his head and turned to walk off the field.

On Nottingham Forest's side, Tang En gave a deep sigh of relief as the team doctors informed him that there was no big issue with Ribéry's ankle. With the Frenchman's outstanding performance, he had already become one of Forest's main players. If something happened to him, Forest's threat in their offense would take a huge hit.

Now that Ribéry was fine, and Chelsea had lost a person along with a penalty kick, Forest's situation was extremely advantageous.

Eastwood put the ball on the penalty spot and took a few steps back as he prepared to take his kick.

In front of him was Czech's genius goalie Petr Čech. A big man who stood over six feet tall, his robust body reflected both his strength and speed. When he stood before the goal with his arms stretched wide, the opening looked entirely sealed off.

Chelsea's players still held onto a sliver of hope. Penalty kicks did not have a hundred percent chance of becoming a goal; and added to that were the slippery grounds caused by the rain. Perhaps Eastwood would be unsteady on his feet, slip, and miss the ball.

But Eastwood quickly burst their bubble of imagination.

On the referee's whistle, he took off with strength and speed, shooting a powerful volley!

Čech made an error in his judgment of its direction. As he hurled himself towards the right side of the goal, the ball went towards the middle instead.

"Goal! 1:0! Home team Nottingham Forest leads Chelsea!"

The spectators' stand in City Ground erupted with ear-splitting roars. Earlier, they had still been shouting Brian Clough's name. Now, they were stamping their feet and clapping for Freddy Eastwood.

While all of Forest was celebrating the goal, José Mourinho was pestering the fourth official, protesting the unfair judgment made by the main referee. The fourth official warned him to be careful and not to throw around accusations without conclusive evidence. Furthermore, the referee was the law on the field. His judgments could not be changed.

Tang En could not care less about what José Mourinho was trying to do; he was celebrating the goal with the rest of the managerial team. In fact, he might as well take up a spot supervising on the sidelines. Now that his team was leading and the opponent had one less player, the situation was greatly to their advantage. He needed to be on guard against Mourinho's retaliation and remind the players to maintain their composure.

After waiting for the players to get back onto the field and be ready for the kick-off, Tang En yelled at them from the sidelines to capture their attention. He gestured, pressing down both his hands and making a motion to "keep steady."

The most dangerous moment was often after a goal while gaining a lead on the opposition. It was easy for players to get off track in their thoughts and lose focus. This could lead to a chance for the opponent to even the score, which would be a huge blow to the team's morale.

Other than helping his players calm down, Tang En did not need to do anything else. The situation was good, and he only had to wait quietly in a corner while Mourinho adjusted.

José Mourinho quickly did so by substituting Forward Kežman for William Gallas. Now, his priority was how he could prevent losing any more goals, not how many to beat Forest by.

Chelsea's core in their midfield was Frank Lampard. However, his main purpose was not managing the ball, but in scoring. It could even be said that Frank Lampard had become so successful only because of Mourinho's tactical arrangement.

Tang En asked Albertini to guard Lampard for the match, primarily to prevent him from scoring after a break. As Lampard was not a holding midfielder, it would reduce his threat if he was only allowed to pass.

Originally, Tang En was worried that Albertini would not be able to cope on his own. But now he no longer had that worry. With Chelsea down a player, they were forced to swap a Forward for a Full Back. This took pressure off Forest's defense. So, Tang En adjusted his own strategy. George Wood would continue his co-defense with Piqué against Drogba, and Albertini and Matthew Upson could handle Lampard.

Chelsea, who had lost a player, resolutely began playing with the strategy of long passing from the backfield to Drogba. After losing a ball, it caused the pressure on Forest's defense to sharply increase.

What was the saying?

There was not much technique to speak of, yet it was very effective. The strategy of using long passes in England was exactly that.

With Drogba's physical capability and skill in heading, he was suitably qualified for the position as a center-forward who set up shots. Because Kežman had been swapped out, Lampard advanced more frequently, almost as if he was playing as a Forward. Drogba would often hold the ball and look for Lampard. In direct confrontations with Drogba, Piqué was often at a disadvantage; the difference in their experience was too big, and he lost out slightly in the physical aspect. Furthermore, in their co-defense, Wood and Piqué faced an issue with their coordination.

In the backfield, Terry wound up for the kick, once again looking for Drogba.

The African stuck close to Piqué and stopped him from coming around to his front. He then jumped to receive the ball. Piqué, who had been squeezed to the back, could only watch helplessly as the African jumped to head the ball out.

When Lampard received the ball while under Albertini's disruption, he chose not to take the midpath and instead moved diagonally towards the right wing. Drogba, who had passed the ball to Lampard earlier, turned and ran towards the goal, readying himself to receive Lampard's pass.

When George Wood saw this, he heeded Tang En's instructions and followed Drogba into the penalty area.

With Forest's defenses focused on Drogba and Lampard, the area in front of the penalty box was empty. At the opportune moment, Lampard made a horizontal pass, his aim not towards Drogba, who was right in front of the goal, but Joe Cole, who was outside the penalty area!

"Chelsea has a chance!"

Joe Cole suddenly appeared in the middle, throwing Nottingham Forest into mass panic. Upson quickly turned and tried to get to him, but the distance was too far. It was impossible for him to stop Joe Cole from shooting.

As José Mourinho saw Joe Cole lifting his right foot to kick, he shot up from the manager's seat and stared straight at Nottingham Forest's goal.

“A direct volley!”

Joe Cole’s long shots were inconsistent, sometimes great and sometimes bad. When they were good, they could be a fantastically amazing shot; but when they were bad, they posed no threat at all. Which would it be this time?

The football flew over Matthew Upson’s head, who was trying to block the shot, past the outstretched fingers of Darren Ward, and past the top of the crossbar... It went high!

The whole of City Ground took in a deep breath. The shot had only scraped past the crossbar before going out; it was nerve-wracking.

“Dammit! Another loophole!” Tang En groused. They were lucky not to have lost a ball. “The defensive line isn’t focused enough. David, we’re back to the same old problem.”

“Tony, I don’t think this problem can be resolved with just training. But there are two methods which might be effective. First, to just keep accumulating match experience so the players know when they need to stay focused; Second, to yell at them during halftime to wake those lads up.” Kerlake laughed.

Tang En scratched his head. “I’m afraid it’ll be too late by the time half-time comes around.”

He rose and walked to the sidelines. Taking a deep breath, he yelled into the field, “Keep a close eye on your guys! Don’t let them out of your sight! Mark them! Kill them!” He pounded his fist.

When Joe Cole took the shot, José Mourinho had expected it to be in the bag. He did not think it would graze the crossbar and fly out instead. It sent him reeling back in his chair as he stomped his foot and cursed silently. As he did so, he saw Tang En yelling at the sidelines.

Kill us?

With tight brows and pursed lips, he narrowed his eyes at Tang En.

Don’t think the match is won just because you’re leading by a goal and have a player more than us.

He also stood and walked to the sidelines. He held out two fingers to both Full Backs and pointed in the direction of Forest’s goal, directing them to actively cut forward. Don’t worry about the space at the back being used by your opponents. If Forest team dares to attack again from the wings, we’ll push them back with our offense!

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For the rest of the first half, it was Chelsea, with one player less, who had the advantage in the field. They suppressed Forest into their half and bombarded them. The blues, who were behind and lacking a person, appeared to have been provoked into a fiery anger.

Tang En believed that the character of the team reflected the character of their manager. In the past, during the time of Ranieri, despite the lion on Chelsea’s emblem, they were as soft and gentle as a cat. This Chelsea, since José Mourinho took over, had the character of the Portuguese man branded on it. Wild and unruly, with upturned noses and arrogance. In such a tight spot, a team like them would explode with immense fighting power. They absolutely would not allow themselves to be defeated by a team that had only just been promoted.

Tang En knew this. It was why he loudly reminded the players to be careful after Joe Cole's attack. It was a sign of Chelsea's retaliation.

Now that Forest team had provoked a fearsome beast, it was the most dangerous period. With wave after wave of attacks from Chelsea, Drogba gave Forest's defensive line a lot of trouble. A defensive line that was this inexperienced faced too much difficulty in trying to completely stop Drogba and Lampard.

"Lampard tries for a long shot! Darren Ward takes a mighty leap!"

"Drogba unleashes a header! At such a short range, that shot took on a tricky angle! Darren Ward has already given up... Ah! But the goalpost helped him out!"

"Joe Cole... what beautiful technique, he went past! Against Matthew Upson, a backheel pass! Frank Lampard – this time it's Piqué! The Spanish champion used his body to block Lampard's powerful shot! He's collapsed onto the floor. Main referee Poll is signaling for the team doctor to go over... What an intense match, Chelsea's constant attacks at Forest's goal are giving them no space to breathe! Under a mighty attack from the Blues, George Wood and Albertini have lost their control over the midfield. Chelsea's attacks are unimpeded! Nottingham Forest has lost an important piece of territory. Things are not looking good."

While Piqué was undergoing the medical examination on the field, Tang En took the opportunity to call Albertini over. He used simple English vocabulary and gestures to get his message through.

"After intercepting the ball, do your best to kick it forward. Don't think about controlling the ball from the back and passing it up level by level. Chelsea is tackling fiercely and pressing tightly at the front. Every second with the ball under our feet is an extra second of threat to our goal. Play simply. Do you see Crouch? Send every ball over to him!"

When Albertini nodded in understanding, Tang En patted his shoulder and sent him back. With the team doctor's help, Piqué stood up and exited the field. He was bent over with a hand holding his chest, possibly requiring further treatment. Or it could just be a formality. Even if the injured player had recovered, he still had to exit the field accompanied by the doctor and wait at the sidelines until the main referee permitted him to enter.

Joe Cole from Chelsea ran towards the corner, ready for a corner kick.

Tang En stood at the side, anxiously watching the crowded mess in front of the goal.

Piqué's departure from the field would definitely be used by Chelsea. As expected, he saw José Mourinho, also on the sidelines, waving vigorously to signal Carvalho and Terry to move up from the back.

"This bastard..." Tang En muttered. He then shouted, "Crouch! Back! Go back to defend!"

Chapter 232: Going Toe-to-Toe Part 2

Crouch was the tallest point on the field for Forest. Since Tang En was prepared to launch a counter-attack at any moment after a corner kick, Crouch did not usually have to return to the penalty area to

defend them. Now that Piqué was not around, however, Tang En could only get Crouch, who was still not too good with headers, to guest-play as Center Back.

Center Back Terry, who was team Captain, encouraged his teammates with a raised fist as he ran towards the penalty area. "Guys! They have the same numbers as us now. This is a perfect chance, don't waste it!"

Albertini too raised his voice to bolster his teammates. It was too bad that he was only improving slowly in English and could not speak in long sentences. He could only shout a few simple phrases and words, "Defend! Pay attention to your opponents! Suppress them!"

Among the crowd of players, George Wood kept a close eye on the black man with a head of braided hair. Since Piqué was not here, Wood naturally assumed Drogba was the target he needed to mark during this corner kick. Since their entrance into the Premier League, in the six matches that they had played, Wood felt that he had barely had any competition in the aspect of his physical capabilities. It was only in this match that Drogba made him feel some strain. Wood understood that he did not have good technique. He never competed technically with his opponents, but heavily prized the physical game with them. He felt that that was a crucial factor in how he had become a core player for Forest.

Now that Wood had met with an opponent who managed to make him feel strained, he did not feel dejection or fear. Rather, it made him a little excited. In the depths of his heart, he felt a rising fervor for truly going at it; a thirst to have a showdown with this man. Earlier, it was mainly Piqué defending Drogba while he assisted. Also, with Drogba as a Forward, his position clashed directly with Piqué, who played Center Back. Wood had had no good opportunity then.

Since Piqué was not around, his opportunity was here.

He leaned forward heavily. Drogba, feeling someone behind him, twisted back, catching Wood's chest with his elbow. If Wood had been an experienced player, he would have gone with it and dropped to the ground in pretense. But Wood did not care about that. He took Drogba's action as a reply to his challenge and butted forward again without relenting.

When Drogba felt the pressure steeply increase instead of decrease, he knew that his opponent was onto him. He then threw his shoulder back, hoping to squeeze Wood out of his own position.

Wood did not pull with his hands but went sideways in an attempt to get to Drogba's front and box him out to stop him from jumping to receive the ball. However, in a physical fight, Wood could not get an edge and Drogba stayed firmly in front of him without budging.

Their entanglement quickly aroused the attention of the referee, and he whistled to stop Joe Cole from taking the corner shot. He ran to the front of the goalpost and pointed at Drogba and Wood, signaling with his hands for them to separate.

"Watch yourselves!" Poll sternly warned the two.

Drogba raised his hands in innocence, implying that it was Wood who had come rushing at him. Meanwhile, George Wood was glaring at him without paying heed to Poll. Of course, the two separated, about two fingers' widths apart.

After warning them, Poll retreated out of the penalty area and signaled for Joe Cole to take his kick.

As soon as Poll left, Drogba and Wood got into each other's space again. Their actions just looked less intense than before, with the two quietly putting their backs into it.

At the whistle, Joe Cole took a run and sent out a quick, level ball, flying straight to the corner near the goal where Drogba was!

Both of them jumped at nearly the same time, but as Drogba jumped, he leaned back slightly and pressed down on George Wood, who was unprepared. With Drogba pressing down on him, Wood could not use his strength or jump high, not to mention trying to contest for the header against his opponent.

With the ball in front of his forehead and no interference, Drogba flung his head to hit the ball into the goal!

This time, the goalpost was not on Darren Ward's side, and the ball barrelled into the net!

"It's GOOOAL! Beautiful! Chelsea's relentless efforts are being rewarded! Just four minutes before entering injury stoppage time in the first half, they scored an equalizer! Drogba is terrifying! He stood at a complete advantage in his fight with George Wood himself! What a beast!"

After scoring, Drogba had no interest in looking back at the losers. He opened his arms wide and ran towards the corner flag, hugging Joe Cole, who had assisted in his attack. Behind them were a flock of Chelsea's players.

In the misty drizzle, Chelsea's fans on the away stands frantically waved their fists in celebration. From a penalty kick right at the beginning with a red card that took down a player, to the evened score now, they could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

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"Bloody hell!" Tang En, enraged by the loss of the ball, swung his foot in a kick, accidentally sending a bottle of mineral water near his legs flying.

The bottle fell into Chelsea's technical area with a loud thud and startled José Mourinho who was celebrating the goal. The water spilled and got all over his pants.

Tang En, however, did not see where the bottle had landed. He had immediately turned to walk back to the technical area.

Mourinho thought that Tang En was purposefully provoking him, grew angry. With a kick, he knocked the bottle back to Twain!

Both managers had good footwork; Tang En had kicked it exactly to where José Mourinho stood, and Mourinho also knocked the bottle back to Tang En's feet. A thud sounded again, and Tang realized with surprise that the bottle he had sent flying had returned to him. He then heard someone yelling at him from behind.

With a turn, he saw José Mourinho's unhappy face. The man pointed at him and was saying something, but with the stadium so noisy that Tang En could not hear a thing.

Between the blend of cheers from the away fans and jeers from the home team fans, who could possibly understand Mourinho's weird accent?

So Tang En put his hands to his ears and turned sideways, indicating that he could not hear clearly. Mourinho took this as a clear sign of provocation. Was he pretending to be a mute?

“What’s happening on the sidelines?” The voices of the commentators sounded even more excited and enthusiastic than when Drogba had scored the goal. “It’s José Mourinho and Tony Twain! It looks like something happened between them. Let’s look at the replay... Beautiful! Tony Twain’s twist and volley got the first point for Forest team, but José Mourinho immediately returned with a screw kick! 1:1, the score is even for now. What an exciting match, both on and off the field!”

Just as both managers were about to snatch the limelight from the goal scorers, the fourth official came forward and wedged himself between the two, who looked ready to jump at each other’s throats, warning them. “Gentlemen, please be aware of your own identities. You are the managers of your teams and have to present yourselves as good examples to the players.”

“Of course. I am simply demonstrating to my players how to send the ball into the opponent’s goal,” Tang En said with a slanted grin, shrugging his shoulders carelessly.

“Mr. Twain...”

“Yes, and I was telling my players how to effectively equalize the score. As you can see, my example had the right effect, Sir.” Mourinho shot back, glaring at Tang En as he replied.

“Mr. Mourinho!”

Faced with the two most charismatic managers in the league, the fourth official felt a headache coming on. He had no choice but to bring out his trump card. “I’m warning you again! This is a match. You are the manager. Please be aware of the kind of influence you have with your actions! I hope you will keep your calm and stay reserved. Otherwise, I’ll have no choice but to allow the referee to invite you into the spectators’ stands.” He pointed into the stands, which were filled with red.

The threat was effective and both of them backed down, at least in appearance. They uncrossed their arms, indicating they would stop.

“Good. I hope the two of you can cooperate with me. Now, please return to your seats.”

Tang En shot a glance at Mourinho and walked away. At the same time, Mourinho also turned back toward the technical area, continuing his celebration of Drogba’s goal with the players on the substitutes’ bench. In his bickering with Tang En, he had not been on the losing end. And his team had just evened the score on the field. Mourinho, with his good mood, wanted to purposely show off his excitement in front of his opponent, Tang En, to anger him.

Immediately after his return to the manager’s seat, Tang En’s face darkened. It was even darker than the sky, which was raining down a drizzle.

“Damn it! Bastard! I knew it... I knew something would happen! We got suppressed by Chelsea for 25 minutes but couldn’t do anything about it!”

“Including the injury stoppage time, there’s still about six minutes before the end of the first half,” Kerslake reported.

“Mmm... Remind the players to keep up with the original pace of the match and not to let this ball affect their performance.” Tang En plopped into the chair. He would just get the assistant coach to do that. Now that he was in a bad mood, he was worried he would affect the players.

“We’ll make adjustments at halftime...”

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While everyone’s attention was captured by the clash between the two managers on the sidelines, George Wood sat on the wet ground and watched Chelsea’s players, who were celebrating.

He had lost in his showdown with Drogba. That feeling... it felt like his heart had become hollow in an instant. All of his team’s hard work had gone down the drain with his failure. Although his face showed nothing, he felt terrible inside, as if he had not completed his mission. He must have also disappointed his mother, who was watching the match at home.

At that moment, a person approached him with a hand out. It was a hand donned with the Captain’s armband.

“Get up. The match isn’t over.”

Wood did not take the hand Albertini had offered, and chose to stand on his own.

“George, wait till you have actually lost the match before getting dejected and unfocused. For now, let’s just keep going.” Albertini patted Wood’s strong shoulders and walked together toward the center circle.

Wood said nothing and nodded.

Chapter 233: Entanglement Part 1

The confrontation between the two managers on the sidelines became the most talked about topic. The television broadcast repeatedly replayed the situation from different angles and positions to provide the overall view on the entire process, to satisfy the viewers’ curiosity.

The game was still going on, but the spotlight had moved from the star players on the field to the two managers, Tony Twain and José Mourinho.

“We could say that the managers have stolen the limelight from the players. Whenever there is a game with Mourinho and Twain, they will be the focus of everyone’s attention. What a riveting game. We have just enjoyed a terrific goal, and we can also watch the passionate and hot-blooded duel of the two head coaches!”

Amidst the commentator’s laughter, the first ended with Nottingham Forest temporarily tied with Chelsea at 1:1. If the strength of the two teams were taken into consideration, this score could satisfy Nottingham Forest. However, considering the number of players on both sides and the spectacle in the first half of the game, Tang En did not feel any satisfaction at all.

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Losing the ball at the end of the first half was a blow to the Forest players. This was clear from their heavy and hurried breathing as they sat down.

Twain stood in the locker room and watched the players as they changed into their clean jerseys in silence.

"I remember a few days before the game, I was stressing to you what kind of team Chelsea's team is. I said that if we are leading, we have to pay attention to their counterattack. Now my words are confirmed. Chelsea, who is a player short in this game, equalized the score.

"It looks like we conceded the goal because Wood did not defend against Drogba, or because Piqué left the field due to his injury, leaving us with one less player to mark and defend against Drogba. But in reality?" Twain spread out his arms. "We were already playing under pressure from them for twenty-five minutes before we lost the ball! We were completely helpless!

"In those twenty-five minutes, if they had been lucky, they could have scored at any time, and it would definitely not have been a draw now. We're completely controlled by them, aren't we? When we attacked, we couldn't succeed. When we tried to defend, it was difficult."

The players were quiet because obviously they felt the same. Chelsea was truly strong, and they had only realized it after playing against them. No wonder they could keep pressure on Arsenal, the leading team in the league.

"All right!" Twain said, suddenly raising his voice, "Don't lower your heads! Let's look at this problem from another angle. It's not necessarily a bad thing to concede the goal at the end of the first half. At least we have more time to make specific adjustments. And their momentum is interrupted by the halftime interval. It's only an equalizer. Do you think our goal in the first half was just luck? Were we lucky that Ferreira was sent off? Chelsea is not an invincible battleship, they have a lot of weaknesses too. Franck, why did it look like you disappeared in the latter half of the first half?"

"I... Well, I was back on defense." Compared to when he had first come to Nottingham, Ribéry's English had improved rapidly. In both his comprehension and oral skills, he did not have many issues.

"Okay, remember, in the second half: Continue to play like you did in the first part of the first half. Our offense is mainly on the flanks. If you and Ashley Young are missing, how can we fight back? You two, listen; in the second half, we will play like this on the flanks..." Twain turned around and drew on the tactical board. "Your mission is not to pass the ball close to the ground outside the penalty area."

He drew two oblique arrows into the goal area at the two corners of the penalty area. "Push the Chelsea full back into the penalty area, try your best to retain control of the ball, and then try to break through them after entering the penalty area. Take bold actions in the penalty area and be mindful of your opponents."

Ribéry and Ashley Young nodded at the same time.

Twain turned around and looked at George Wood. "George, mind telling me how you felt when you were marking Drogba one-on-one?"

Wood looked at Twain, and then spat out a remark. "He's very strong."

“Of course. Twenty-four million pounds was not just a story.” Twain shrugged his shoulders. “In the second half, your mission is the same; two men against Drogba, press on and defend against him with Piqué. Don’t give him too many opportunities. If he has the ball with his back towards the goal, don’t give him the space to turn around, and be careful of his long shots. If he returns a pass, leave him alone and let him pass, but never let him face the goal area once he has the ball. Don’t underestimate his crude technique. Understand?”

Wood nodded.

After he had assigned the individual tasks, Twain began to talk about the team tactics. “Guys, you’ve all seen it. Chelsea has been very aggressive in our backfield, which is key to their continuous attack. So in the second half, I want you to play a little more succinctly. Be fast when you receive the ball, and run quickly. Your passing speed must be swift too. We can’t give Chelsea the chance to intercept the ball at our feet. It’s very dangerous to keep the football in our backfield. If you can’t find a suitable teammate to pass the ball to, just kick the ball far to the front field. Do you see? Crouch is so tall. If he shaves his head again, he’ll simply be a beacon for you in the fog to show you the way forward!”

Twain slapped Crouch hard on the shoulder and his teammates laughed.

“Well, if we look at the rankings, we’re not doing too badly. Chelsea is second place and we’re only thirteenth. A difference of eleven spots. If we treat ourselves as an ordinary, newly promoted team, the result could be worse. A lot of teams will have already made up their minds to view not losing as some sort of victory for themselves when they encounter stronger teams. But we can’t do that. Why? Because we are different from them. We aren’t an ordinary newly promoted team.

“Our objective this season is not just to maintain our spot in the league. We have a bigger quest. We are the home team in this game, so there’s no reason for us to feel satisfied with a tie. If we don’t win at the end of this game, I guarantee you that we won’t have a rest day tomorrow. From this game onwards, I hope you guys can understand that if it’s a game that we can win, I will never accept a draw. And if it’s a game we can’t win, I will never accept defeat!”

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Dunn sat alone in his seat. It was now in the halftime interval. Most fans had gone out for beers and food to replenish their energy. He was not interested in that because he was not like the people around him, screaming, clapping their hands, stomping their feet, exerting their strength to almost nothing, and straining their voices.

Nottingham was a city with many foreign students, so it was not uncommon for black-haired, East Asian fans to be here. No one took another look at the manager of the Forest youth team.

Twain was the team manager. He would be allocated a certain number of tickets before every home game and would always leave a ticket to Dunn, regardless of whether he went or not. Most of the time, Dunn chose to watch at home. At the same time, he would also record the games on video. He could replay the games clearly in slow motion, which would help him to analyze the games.

But today, when it rained, he chose to watch the game at the stadium. At the end of the first half, he saw the exciting confrontation between the two managers. If he were the Forest manager, such things

would never happen. He had more than once thought about how he would be if he was the head coach of the team.

He was very different from Tang En. Tang En wanted him to be his assistant manager and run the team with him. However, he considered often whether his personality would work well with such a brash person. They did live together, but as one man was the manager of the First Team and the other was the manager of the youth team, they were completely different in their work styles.

On the contrary, Tang En had always said that they would work well together. Would they work well together just because they always came together at night to study all kinds of videos? Dunn always felt that he did not know Tang En at all, and felt that his actions were sometimes completely inconceivable. For example, during his confrontation with Mourinho, was he not worried that this would provoke Chelsea? One must know that Chelsea was ranked second, and was a powerful team that had not lost a match since the start of the tournament.

It was still raining, and there were more and more people around him. The second half of the match was about to begin.

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Tang En did not know what Mourinho had said to his players at the halftime interval. The Chelsea players seemed to be in high fighting spirits and did not feel that their prospects were bleak just because they were a player short. However, he was not worried; his players were equally motivated, and did not feel frustrated by the ten-man opposing team equalizing the score.

Both teams were in a good state of mind, but what about the two managers?

Naturally, they too were in exuberant fighting spirits.

Both teams had fought each other from the start of the match till now, and unsurprisingly, they were unwilling to lose to each other. Losing three points was considered a small thing, but it was very important not to lose face.

Just because your boss is wealthy, you've won the UEFA Champions League title, and you have lots of strong players, I'm supposed to be afraid of you?

No matter how rich your boss is, no matter how many championships you've won, or how famous your players are, all this means nothing in the game. We'll let the score speak for itself!

In the second half, we'll fight again!

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In the second half, Chelsea did not change much in its tactics compared to the latter part of the first half. They pressed on hard in the front field, then created chaos within the Forest team and took advantage of their mistakes.

Chelsea relied on this method to successfully equalize the score in the first half. Mourinho believed that the inexperienced Forest team would be helpless in the face of waves of oppressive defense, and that many mistakes which would not normally be made would occur. Mourinho was smart, but Twain was no

fool either. Since Chelsea had equalized the score by depending on that move in the first half, how could he not defend against it?

The Forest team intended to consciously use long shots in its attacks to pass to Crouch in the front. And if the opponent was not too aggressive, they would transfer the ball to their flanks, to Ribéry or Ashley Young. The players would decide the details of their attacks. And the Forest team's defense? Everyone tried to reduce the time for possession of the ball. The defenders just needed to kick the ball far ahead, regardless of whether Crouch could receive it or not.

The Forest players were very determined to carry out this tactic; ten minutes later, the Chelsea players realized that they had been running around nonstop in their front field to intercept the ball to very little effect. Every time they saw the Forest players receive the ball not far ahead, they would hurriedly rush over and their opponents would kick the ball far behind Chelsea without hesitation.

This was indeed annoying. Chelsea's forceful tactics were curtailed, but at the same time, the Forest team's offense appeared to be too simple and crude, with a low success rate. The game was in a stalemate, and neither side had any good opportunities except continually making mistakes again and again.

Chapter 234: Entanglement Part 2

"Well, I'd rather watch Tony Twain and José Mourinho one-on-one on the sidelines." The commentator did not conceal his dislike for such a boring competition. "Honestly, I don't think Peter Crouch is qualified to be a center forward, and he has such strange traits... The Forest team is wasting their few opportunities for counterattacks. Maybe Tony Twain thinks that Peter Crouch can become a good center forward, but evidently he isn't now."

Tang En could understand the complaint that the commentator was making. Crouch was not the type of center forward who could use his own body to retain control of the ball, control it under fierce pressure from his opponents, and wait for his teammates' support. Crouch was a hard-working player, but he was struggling under the defensive pressure from the two center backs, John Terry and Ricardo Carvalho. What Tang En needed was a center forward with a strong body, an outstanding header, and good ball control footwork, rather than the exceptionally tall Crouch, who preferred just to use his feet.

If Crouch was not the best person to carry out the tactic, then who would be?

He glanced sideways at the substitutes' bench and saw a young man. Since joining the Forest team, he had only appeared in a few warm-up games, and out of the four strikers, the Danish kid was placed last for the lineup.

Freddy Eastwood was a protégé that Tang En had directly unearthed, who needed to be specially cultivated. His position of being the main force was naturally stable. Even considering his great ability and reputation, Mark Viduka had still cost the club six million pounds. When the club had spent so much money for a striker, how could he be just a substitute? And Peter Crouch had such a prominent trait, but was still quite low-key in the team. When Twain had arranged for him to be the third striker, he had not complained. And what about this other young man? If he did not give him a chance to prove himself, he

guessed that the reporters, who stared at the Forest locker room all the time trying to dig up some explosive news, would have something to exploit.

“Ask the Danish kid to warm up.” Twain said to David Kerslake.

“Bendtner, you have five minutes to warm up.” The assistant manager stood up and faced the bench. He raised his right palm and spoke to Bendtner, who sitting on the bench.

Bendtner turned to look at Kerslake. Then he gazed past the assistant manager and looked at Twain next to him. He saw the young manager concentrating on the game, so he stood up, put on a yellow vest and jogged out.

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Nottingham Forest and Chelsea were still entangled with each other; they were like two boxers in a tight embrace who had no way to carry out their most powerful moves because they were too busy keeping a tight rein on their opponents.

This scenario of mutual restraint was not what Mourinho wanted to see. He loathed to being dragged into this quagmire. Why? He was furious that he had been forced to be so impotent in an away match.

To José Mourinho, Tony Twain was a nobody, just like any other unfamiliar English manager. His real targets were Alex Ferguson and Arsène Wenger. Chelsea’s opponents were Manchester United and Arsenal! He did not even take Liverpool into consideration. Since his team had performed smoothly from the start of the tournament, Mourinho had never thought that he would grapple with such a tenacious obstacle in a stadium that only held twenty-seven thousand spectators.

What kind of team was Nottingham Forest? A team that won two UEFA Champions League titles more than twenty years ago? That was just a flash in the pan.

I’ve seen many such teams. You want names? I could state names non-stop until you’re tired of hearing them.

But I’m not here to talk about history, I’m here to beat this damned Nottingham Forest!

Chelsea’s offense was met with the Forest team’s stubborn resistance. The Forest team’s backfield was almost entirely filled with players. In the drizzle, the turf was slippery and not suitable for Chelsea players to play on. Other than his shot that had brushed past the goal crossbar and flown out in the first half, Joe Cole had no other performances that could appear on the television close-up. Not to mention that Duff, who was already having a hard time on the right flank, was now completely suppressed by the Frenchman, Ribéry, who had come out of nowhere.

Chelsea’s flanks were paralyzed.

This would not do. He had to find a way out.

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Bendtner soon heard the assistant manager call his name and beckon him over. So he took off his vest as he ran back.

Twain stood up from his seat in the technical area and took the tactical board from Kerslake. Bendtner ran towards him a little breathlessly. Tang En could see that he was looking forward to playing and was confident.

Twain looked at the excited young man and glanced at the tactical board in his hands. Then he threw it onto his seat, pulled Bendtner aside, and made him face the field.

“What do you see, lad?” Twain asked.

“Um...” Bendtner froze for a moment, thinking that Twain would tell him directly who he would be replacing, what his task was, and how to do it, then pat him on the shoulder and push him to the sideline. He did not expect this manager to ask him a question like that.

“Well... Things aren’t looking too good...”

“Yes, even a bonehead can tell that things aren’t looking good. Do you know what a bonehead is? No? Well, forget it, I’ll explain it later. What do you think we can do to end this stalemate?”

Bendtner knew that this was not a situation that could be hastily resolved, and he thought this might be a chance to make a good impression on the manager.

“Well... I think we need a center forward.”

“Of course, why else would I make you go warm up and summon you here? What do you think should be done if I bring you on?”

This time Bendtner did not rush to answer Twain’s question. He stared at the field for a moment, and then said, “I need to do a header and fight for the first drop point. If I can take possession of the ball, I’ll do that. If I can’t, I’ll pass it to one of my teammates. If there are no teammates around, I’ll just shoot towards the goal myself.”

Twain patted Bendtner’s shoulder hard. “Very good, just do what you said. Go up and play!”

William Gallas slide-tackled the ball at Ribéry’s foot of out of the sideline. The Forest team received a throw-in. The assistant referee raised the flag up in his hands over his head, which meant that there was a substitution. The referee whistled to indicate the same thing. The throw-in needed to be delayed a little.

The fourth official examined the cleats on Bendtner’s shoes, checked his shin guards, and then raised the substitution board: “Number 21 to come off, and Number 9 is being brought on!”

Crouch raised his hands to the applause of the fans and ran off the field. A young man with long blond hair tossed his rain-soaked hair, exhaled, and ran onto the field.

This was the first official game he was playing on behalf of Nottingham Forest. Although he was not in the starting lineup, he would still prove himself, and show the boss that it was a waste to use him as the fourth striker!

Chapter 235: Air Battle Part 1

“Nicklas Bendtner, six feet two inches and 176 pounds. Currently playing as the main forward in Denmark’s National Under-17 football team. In Denmark, he once held the moniker of ‘Denmark’s Ibrahimović.’ In summer this year, several Premier League teams expressed an interest in him. However, it was Nottingham Forest’s Tony Twain who successfully signed him on. This was allegedly because Twain promised him more opportunities to appear on the field with the First Team. Still, except for a few warm-up matches, this is Bendtner’s first appearance in an official Nottingham match. Tony has substituted Crouch for someone who’s more of a Center forward than Crouch is. He isn’t willing to end on a draw with Chelsea on his home ground.”

After Bendtner was fielded, Nottingham Forest’s tactics became clearer and simpler: to find Bendtner, who outperformed Crouch in headers, for long passes. Albertini also did not advance much by dribbling. Instead, he used his precise placements in long passes to launch attacks; all of his other efforts were expended in dealing with Lampard.

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Seeing a such a childish-looking boy before him, Carvalho underestimated him immediately.

You think you’re handsome because of your long hair?

Kiddo, let me tell you... you’re still an amateur!

With a long pass from Forest’s backfield, Bendtner retreated with the intention of receiving the pass but was caught off guard by Carvalho’s sudden break from his side to jump in front of him, heading the ball away.

When they landed, Carvalho glanced backward at Bendtner. Though he was expressionless, Bendtner could tell that he was being taken too lightly.

This poodle is looking down on me!

Chelsea’s offense stopped at George Wood. Drogba realized that he had met trouble. The lad whom he had defeated in the first half of the match had seemingly found a different method of defending against him. While the Spaniard was disrupting him from behind, Wood went against him from the front, blocking off the pass routes between him and his teammates.

Wood’s improvement with Albertini was apparent. Previously, Wood’s greatest weaknesses were his inability to see the big picture and his predictive reading. However, Wood was slowly beginning to develop his own sense in reading the opponents’ intentions during their offense.

Duff suddenly broke free of Ribéry in the wings. He had planned to pass to Drogba but was intercepted by Wood, who had routed to the front to defend. Wood, with his successful interception, passed the ball to Albertini, who launched another attack via a long pass.

This time, Bendtner did not retreat but stayed in front of Carvalho, boxing out the spot and waiting for the incoming ball.

Carvalho found himself blocked by his opponent and tried to shift around to Bendtner’s front. But he quickly discovered the surprising robustness of the seventeen-year-old in front of him.

He could not budge the boy at all.

The ball was coming. There was no time for Carvalho to reposition himself. He could only jump behind Bendtner instead. One can imagine the results; the Portuguese midfielder, whose favorable position was taken, did not even touch the ball. He could only allow Bendtner to head it away.

Bendtner passed the ball to Eastwood, who had been constantly roving around him. Without hesitation, the Romanian adjusted his position upon receiving the pass and immediately raised his foot to shoot at the goal.

“A long shot... And Čech! A gorgeous save!”

Czech Republic’s national goalkeeper, Čech, took a flying leap with his body outstretched, bumping Eastwood’s attack out of the goal. Forest was awarded a corner ball.

“It looks like Nottingham Forest, who is ranked 13, and Chelsea who is number two in the league, are evenly matched. Taking into consideration factors such as being on their home ground and the number of players, perhaps this is reasonable. But let’s recall how Arsenal “equalized” with Nottingham Forest, and how Nottingham Forest defeated Man City; from those two matches, it’s apparent that Tony Twain’s team is fully able to go head-to-head against strong teams. No, I’m not exaggerating. This Nottingham Forest is already an entirely different team from the one we’ve been familiar with these past few years. Now, at least, they have no fear when facing such strong teams.”

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In all sizes of bars near Stamford Bridge in London, fans of the Blues who had gathered to watch the match hurled curses at the television. “Bullshit! They have more players than us. If they were scared, they might as well go back to the First Division!”

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Nottingham Forest’s corner ball came, not finding Piqué, but going even further back. From the crowd, Bendtner jumped up high and headed the ball towards the goal. Čech had no time to try to save the ball, but it knocked into the side of the net. The spectators’ stand in City Ground again let out a huge sigh.

At that point, there was a small disturbance in front of Chelsea’s goal. After Bendtner headed the ball, there was a conflict between him and Carvalho.

Earlier, when Bendtner was heading the ball, he had pressed down on Carvalho. Carvalho felt that the Forest team had fouled in their offense, and the main referee should give Chelsea a free kick. Originally, he had wanted to appeal to the referee; but upon catching a disdainful look from Bendtner, Carvalho immediately got annoyed. He lunged and stepped in front of Bendtner with an incensed look on his face. They were practically in each other’s faces, with their noses close to touching. Bendtner made no move to back down and stared back at him. Although no one said a thing, everyone could sense the rising winds before a storm.

Their nearby teammates would naturally not allow the storm an opportunity to land; the group of them rushed forward and pulled the two apart. The whistle of the main referee blared as well. He rushed into the crowd and stood between the two players with his right hand raised, blowing bursts of shrill whistles continuously.

“Bastard!” Albertini pushed Bendtner out of the crowd and glared at him. “What are you doing?! Calm down!”

Although Bendtner’s face was still visibly angry, he looked at the team captain before him and seemed to shrink, muttering, “He looked down on me first...”

“Score a goal, and he’ll know how good you are!” Albertini said, smacking his fists together. He then wrapped his arm around Bendtner’s neck. “Don’t let the boss down.”

Hearing this, Bendtner looked up at the technical area. The manager was staring at him.

He fell quiet for a moment, then nodded his head.

“I’ll listen to you, Captain.”

Albertini cracked a smile as he lightly punched Bendtner in his strong chest. “Listen, Nick. The best way to get back at an opponent who looks down on you is to get a goal off them!”

As Albertini was encouraging Bendtner, Carvalho started to argue with the main referee.

“He was the one who pressed down on me!” Carvalho repeatedly told the referee with his somewhat broken English. Poll only shook his head and flashed a yellow card at the Portuguese man.

“Ah, Carvalho gets a yellow card! It looks like Chelsea’s players are somewhat agitated, but Poll is unmoved and stands by his judgment. It looks like a mess of a match for Chelsea today!”

When Mourinho saw the referee flash his yellow card at Carvalho but not pursue Bendtner’s part in it, he got so furious that he simply waved and turned his back on them.

What a preposterous home field!

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“Bendtner is too eager to prove himself,” Assistant manager David Kerslake said to Tang En.

Tang En nodded in agreement. After freezing this boy, whose ambitions were sky high, for a month, he was like a lion crazed from starvation. As Tang En saw Albertini pulling Bendtner to look in his direction and pointing towards him, he immediately put on a face and stared at Bendtner. Only when the boy hung his head did he begin to laugh, murmuring lowly in Chinese, “If you want a hound to run fast, you have to keep his appetite sharp!”

“Hm?” Kerslake answered, thinking that Tang En was speaking to him.

“Ah, nothing.” At times like these, Tang En especially wished that the person next to him was Dunn. At least then it would be someone who could understand him. Plus, he then wouldn’t have to worry about having spies from their opponents eavesdrop on their discussions of tactics on the sidelines. Don’t think that spies on the soccer field are only things of fiction. On the sidelines of a soccer field, anything is possible. Tang En’s opponent in the play-off of the first season, the old schemer Neil Warnock, had previously sent spies to his opponents to listen in on their strategies.

Chelsea’s players, who had surrounded the referee in their appeal, scattered. They knew that they would not be able to change the referee’s decision on this, no matter what they did. Either way, it was

just a yellow card, not a red one. Surrounding the referee, making some fuss, or stomping their feet was just a way to vent their grievances.

After the match resumed, Mourinho stood on the sidelines shouting at Carvalho to give up marking Bendtner and to deal with the Romanian from Forest instead. Bendtner was passed to their Captain, John Terry, who had the same tough playstyle.

Tang En made some changes, but Mourinho did not make any substitutions. Due to Ferreira's red card in the first half, he had unexpectedly lost a count for his substitution quota. With that, so long as the field situation remained within control, he would not make a substitution lightly.

Even if Duff's performance appeared lacking, he was in no hurry to change him out.

Duff's performance was indeed very poor. He was completely suppressed by Ribéry, who was less well-known than him. Ribéry branded Tang En's expectations of him onto his heart: When attacking, you must be able to move forward; when defending, you must be able to return.

He was young, had good stamina, and was fast. So again and again, he sprinted back and forth in the left wings. Duff is a swift Irish horse? When it comes to speed, I fear no one!

Chapter 236: Air Battle Part 2

Just as Drogba got the ball, he found himself faced with a pincer attack from two burly men. The one pressing in on his back was the Spanish lad, while the person taking wide strides towards him with the intention of stealing the ball was the mixed-blood man.

Tang En knew that when Drogba had first entered the Premier League, his footwork was as rough as it could get. So long as he had two defenders working a pincer on him, he had a high likelihood of losing the ball. That's what Wood and Piqué were doing to Drogba. Currently, Chelsea only had two routes of offense: one route depended on Lampard cutting forward and shooting, and the other relied on Drogba. Lampard was guarded by Matthew Upson and Albertini, whereas Drogba needed to face two physically strong opponents who did not have much match experience.

As Wood took a sweep at the ball, Drogba hurriedly pulled back. However, behind him, Piqué had stretched out his foot at the best possible moment.

It got stolen!

It was so easy to take Drogba's ball!

Drogba, the beast, would not easily give up possession of the ball, and spared no effort to chase it. But just as he shifted his center of gravity to surge forward, a red back with a huge number 13 on it appeared in front of him. It was George Wood, who previously lost out to him while competing for the header, which had resulted in Chelsea equalizing the score.

Drogba felt as if he had crashed into a rock. He had never thought that his body could be inferior to anyone's; this was the first time he had ever received no reaction from his opponent after running into them. In fact, he got bounced back!

With his experience, he took the opportunity to fall to the ground. George Wood did not continue moving after he got into his path but paused momentarily. Surely this was considered an obstruction?

The player fell to the ground, but a whistle did not come. Forest had gained a great opportunity to counterattack.

“What an amazing physique! We have mentioned this several times now, but I want to say it again; George Wood has defeated Didier Drogba! It’s unbelievable that such a player has been playing soccer for less than two years! His sturdy build is God’s gift to Nottingham Forest!”

While the commentator was singing praise for Wood, Forest was amid a crucial transition from defense to offense. Chelsea had just pressed forward to attack and had not expected Drogba’s ball to be intercepted so quickly. Their players had no time to return to defense and form a complete defensive line; there were large swathes of open field ahead of them. As long as Forest seized the opportunity with the timing and positioning of their pass, this counterattack could be a huge threat.

But Wood was clearly not cut out for this.

Out of habit, he wanted to pass the ball to Albertini. But as he raised his head, he saw that Lampard had not retreated to defend, but stepped forward to box out Albertini instead.

It was an intelligent move from Lampard. He knew that the attacks from Forest had to be launched by the Italian man; so if he guarded Albertini, he would have contained the launching grounds of Forest’s attack. Additionally, he could buy some time for his teammates, who were rushing back to defend.

In Wood’s mind, a voice suddenly told him that he couldn’t do that; that he could not pass it to the captain. Otherwise, not only would they be unable to launch their attack, the ball may even be intercepted by the opponents. They would then immediately go on the offensive!

So he took a look at Albertini and turned back. Ribéry was running forward now; Scarface was incredibly fast... Why not him? I’ll kick it hard forward, to somewhere empty, and then... just let Scarface run!

Wood executed his idea as soon as it formed in his mind, giving the ball a good kick forward that sent it flying high. He could only do his best to ensure the ball stayed its intended direction. As to exactly where it would land, he really had no inkling at all.

“This is Forest team’s counterattack!!” The commentator called out excitedly but soon regretted it.

“Oh... the pass seems to have gone wide. It can’t possibly be received!”

Ribéry, who was dashing forward, heard the cheers from the stands intensify and looked back, realizing that the ball was suddenly above him in the skies and was falling just ahead of him. He increased his speed, but a blue figure abruptly appeared.

“William Gallas. He appeared at the right place just in time! The ball is coming, and he jumps! He heads the ball away to safety... But he misses!”

The ball sped towards the ground and rebounded up high in front of Gallas, bounding right over his bald head... It was incredibly improbable.

“Go!” Tang En rushed to the sidelines and hollered. It was such a ridiculous scene, but he had no time to stop and laugh.

Franck Ribéry had originally intended to slam on his brakes and wait for Gallas to stop the ball before going up to press on him. On the other hand, he thought that he might as well run back for defense. But his strong inertia stopped him from slowing down in such a short time; unexpectedly, it aided his breakthrough. He sped past Gallas and even remembered to use French to tell his comrade from France, "Merci!"

No one had thought that Gallas would miss the header. In an instant, Chelsea's defensive line had collapsed. Terry and Carvalho both dropped their marked targets and dashed towards Ribéry; the new pairing of midfielders for the season was still not synced up enough.

When Terry saw Carvalho, he waved to signal him to return and defend the middle path, leaving Ribéry to him. Obediently, Carvalho retreated. But Ribéry was not a fool. He was not going to give Chelsea's defenders an opportunity to rebuild their defensive line! He made a swift decision to give up on breaking through to the end line and immediately lifted his foot to pass to the front of the goal!

The football flew over Terry's head, entering the airspace of Chelsea's defense. As Carvalho turned and jumped to head the ball, he saw a figure hurtling towards him from the air.

"Nicklas Bendtner!"

The golden hair of the Denmarkian boy swished an arc in the rain. Carvalho even felt the water droplets from it whipping onto his face, into his eyes. And then... then there was a solid impact between bodies. Following it was the sound of ear-splitting cheers.

"What a GOOOOAL!!! What a powerful clash! Nottingham Forest takes the lead again!"

As Carvalho fell backward into the mud, he watched the red figure, with wide open arms, run somewhere beyond his vision.

Chapter 237: The Madman Part 1

After seeing the high ball from Ribéry, Bendtner knew that this ball had to be his. Because of its hasty return to defense, the Chelsea line of defense had been ripped apart. Now, the only player close to him was the curly-haired Carvalho; and he was not worried that he would lose to him.

This is the moment I've been waiting for!

He took a big step, opened his arms and dashed towards the football. Even though he knew that he would collide with Carvalho, he did not seem to consider protecting himself. Instead, he forcibly knocked his opponent aside with his body and swung his head to head the ball in!

The speed, strength, and angle of the ball were impeccable. Petr Čech brandished his hands, but could not stop the ball from flying into the goal. Perhaps he had not expected his teammate to concede in the contest for the ball in the air.

After the goal, Bendtner charged towards the corner flag with his arms spread wide open and stood under the surging waves of red in the stands, pulling at his jersey and yelling. When he had chosen Nottingham Forest and given up Arsenal's invitation, there were some people who had laughed at him.

When he came to Nottingham and played as a substitute continuously for a month without even appearing in an official game for a minute, the mocking had become even louder.

Now, he finally had used concrete actions to prove his strength and shut the mouths of those who laughed at him.

There was no better maiden showing than this.

“This is the first goal scored by the Dane in an official game played on behalf of Nottingham Forest! The seventeen-year-old genius, Nicklas Bendtner, has a strong body, excellent skills, and a formidable force of impact! What’s even more unbelievable is his youth! Tony Twain has good cards in his hand; look at his players, behold their performances, and consider their ages. It’s really exciting!”

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When he saw Bendtner head the football into the goal guarded by Cech, Twain and his assistant manager, Kerslake, jumped out of their seats. David rushed to the sideline while Twain brandished his fist in the direction of Mourinho in the Chelsea technical area and looked at Mourinho with a triumphant smile.

He did it on purpose; he was deliberately provoking Mourinho, and he enjoyed the thrill of being in the lead over his opponent. Indeed, he had not even felt so exhilarated when he was ahead of Arsenal.

He was delighted when he saw his opponent’s surly expression.

Mourinho was truly upset. Like Twain, he did not want to lose this game, especially not to this man. Originally, this had just been a normal match in the league and the Forest team had been just an average opponent. But Twain’s provocation before the match and that clash during the game made him dislike this manager. In fact, often times, Mourinho’s arrogant and conceited way of antagonizing people everywhere was a form of premeditated psychological warfare. But this time, he really detested the sight of the nobody who was celebrating and gesticulating in joy next to him.

“Call Eiður Guðjohnsen over to get ready to play.” He turned back to his assistant manager, Steve Clarke. Just when Clarke was about to turn to go, Mourinho stopped him again. “Get Parker here too!”

Clarke obviously understood what the remark meant, but he was still stunned for a moment and did not turn to go immediately. Mourinho stared at the field and said, “Steve, there are times... when a little risk is needed in football.”

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“This is the Forest team’s out of bounds ball, and Chelsea is bringing on a substitution. Mourinho is bringing on two players with twenty minutes left in the game... attacking players! Both an attacking and defending midfielder, Scott Parker and the Icelandic striker Eiður Guðjohnsen! Mourinho has used up all of his substitutions. It looks like Chelsea, currently behind, is going all out!”

Mourinho had brought on two attacking players, and the pressure on Nottingham Forest’s line of defense spiked. Twain countered the move and made his substitutions when Mourinho made his. He replaced Ashley Young with a defending midfielder, Gunnarsson. He then allowed Ribéry to move freely in the front field, interweaving between the left, middle, and right flanks. His role was not to organize

attacks, but to maintain constant pressure on Chelsea's defense. More often than not, the football was sent directly from the backfield to the top of Bendtner's head, and Ribéry did not need to organize any attacks. Of course, if he did receive the ball, it would be his priority to try to control the ball in every possible way. He could covertly waste the game time by tricking his opponents into committing fouls.

In addition, Twain asked Gunnarsson to pass on a message to the team: Once our opponents commit a foul, if you can lie down on the ground, just lie down for a while. Don't be in a hurry to get up, regardless of whether you have the physical strength or not, whether your body is strong or not. It doesn't matter if you only joined the game after the starting lineup.

For the sake of victory, we will use any means. What's a little procrastination in the game time?

Twain looked at the frowning Mourinho in the other technical area, pacing back and forth between the technical area and the sidelines, and smirked.

For the rest of the game, the Forest players suddenly all became fragile. Whenever the Chelsea players tried to tackle and trip them, they would immediately scream in pain and roll in the mud. Following that, there would be the sound of the referee's whistle, and Chelsea would have committed a foul.

The game would be interrupted by one incident or another, and Chelsea could not get their rhythm in sync, let alone win the game. The Forest team had three defending midfielders and two center backs. Against such abilities, Lampard felt as if he was stuck in a quagmire.

And Drogba? With two players, Piqué and Wood, defending against him, he could only hurriedly shoot towards the goal, but did not pose much of a threat to the Forest team's goal.

Off the field, Mourinho decided to defend and fight for the game, but the current Chelsea team was not the one that would sweep across England a year later and maintain their unbeaten home ground record. The players were very impatient on the field and out of sync with each other. Guðjohnsen and Parker, who were just brought on, each thought that he was the savior of the team. When one of them received the ball, he would want to break through to shoot the goal. Even when they faced the Forest team's defense and had no chance, they would force a long shot; it's not hard to imagine the outcome of that.

When he first saw this, Mourinho would stamp his feet on the sidelines. Later, he simply sat in his seat, saying and doing nothing. In the face of the Forest players, who relaxed more as they played with even the center back daring to make bold moves, Mourinho seemed to have already felt his defeat.

It did not seem like now was the time to fight to turn the tide of the war, but rather to reflect on why they had arrived at this point.

What exactly happened...and how did we end up like this? I will admit that Ferreira being sent off more than ten minutes into the start of the game put us at a disadvantage in our numbers, and it was no small impact. But later we equalized the score and at one point we had a chance to turn the tide and reverse the situation. What happened then?

He glanced at the Forest team manager, the one that he loathed, Tony Twain. He was no longer putting on a show, but just stood on the sidelines, watching the game.

He looked down at his wrist watch again; it was less than ten minutes until the end of the game.

Winning? Don't even think about it!

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The cheering in the City Ground's stands was getting louder and louder, and the Forest fans chanted Brian Clough's name. This was not to cheer on the Forest players in the hopes that they held fast against the enemy's frenzied attack. No, this was a call to the legend of their generation in the heavens, telling him the current situation of the team that he had once led, but which had fallen into the abyss.

The fearsome Red Forest had come back!

No... Maybe it hadn't quite fully returned yet, but it was not far!

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As the match time went by minute by minute, Chelsea had utterly run out of ideas. Mourinho had already stopped directing the game and just sat in his seat and posed with a dark expression. He intended to let his team have a taste of defeat, but that did not mean he would willingly lose to Tony Twain. From a long-term point of view, the benefit of losing a game at this time was even greater.

If we want to win the championship, it's better to let them know the taste of failure at the right time, and to be on guard against failure at all times, than to fail at the most critical moment of the championship battle.

When the fourth official raised the sign on the sidelines to indicate that the injury stoppage time was three minutes, Mourinho stood up from his seat. Of course, he did not go to the sidelines to shout at the players to stake it all and attack. Instead he just stood on the edge of the technical area. The cheering in the City Ground stadium grew increasingly louder. He just coolly watched the excited red-clad fans.

Manchester United, Arsenal and Liverpool all had red colors, and now there was a red colored Nottingham Forest. One of English football traditions was the red and blue confrontation. It did not matter whether the Forest team was comparable to the three teams now; in Mourinho's mind, it had been elevated to the same position as the first three teams. Wait till we return to Stamford Bridge. We will strike back for today's defeat!

In the last half-minute of the injury stoppage time, Chelsea's offense gradually vanished. The football was controlled at the feet of the team captain, Albertini. Lampard did not go up to snatch it. He was not the only one. The other Chelsea players also seemed listless. Before the game, when they had arrived at the City Ground stadium, they had held the view that "these three points are in the bag." They had not expected to lose the game.

The referee, Poll, did not continue with the injury stoppage time, but wisely blew the whistle to end the game.

"The game is over! In an unexpected turn of events, Nottingham Forest has beaten Chelsea on their home ground! Mourinho's team has lost for the first time this season, and Tony Twain has scored a key victory on this special day. Brian Clough has a successor to carry on his work!"

Chapter 238: The Madman Part 2

Just as the final whistle blew, Mourinho, who stood on the edge of the technical area, turned and walked towards the tunnel. He completely ignored the tradition and courtesy that the two managers should shake hands after the game. Of course, Twain had not expected this defiant man would shake hands with his sworn enemy after the defeat. Tang En already knew this based on how Mourinho treated Arsène Wenger in the future. Thus, his first reaction after the game was not to go to the Chelsea technical area to shake hands and exchange greetings with his opponent, or perhaps pretend to say a few polite words, but to walk straight to the players who were celebrating the victory on the field.

As a result, there was this weird scene on the sidelines: Both assistant managers came together and completed the post-match custom on behalf of their managers. They shook hands, the loser congratulated the winner, and the winner consoled the loser.

After Twain walked onto the field, he made a beeline for the Danish center forward, Nicklas Bendtner, who had scored the winning goal. The young lad looked very excited and when he saw Twain coming over, he rushed up to hug him, "Boss! We won, we won!"

"That's right, we won. Good job, Nick." Twain was bound in a tight embrace by the other man. He grimaced and said, "If you could let go of me, I would feel even better..."

Bendtner sheepishly let go of Twain, but more Forest players came up again and surrounded the manager, full of admiration in their hearts.

Since the Forest team had lost the game to Blackburn in their first round of the league, they had not lost again. That was an incredible achievement, and what made the players full of confidence was that Nottingham Forest had never been at a disadvantage while playing against the stronger teams.

Seeing how everyone's spirits were running high, Twain simply let them surround him in a circle and stood in the middle. He said now what he had wanted to say in the locker room. "Guys, how does it feel? It feels fantastic to win, right?"

The players laughed loudly.

"That's it, victory. Constant victory. Give all the frustration and pain to our opponents, and enjoy our one-day break tomorrow!"

Cheers rang out from the crowd.

"Well, go and thank the fans who persisted and cheered for you in the rain, then go back to the locker room to take a shower and change. Enjoy your night!"

After watching the players thanking the fans, Twain turned and walked towards the tunnel. There was a press conference waiting for him, and it would be another head-on confrontation with Mourinho. Of course, now that he was the winner, he was looking forward to it. There was a smile plastered on Twain's face as he walked.

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While the Forest players were still outside celebrating the victory with the fans, Twain was already seated in the lobby of the press conference, waiting for his rival, Mourinho, to arrive.

Mourinho must have been admonishing his players in the locker room at the time. This reminded Twain of the situation after his first game. In the FA Cup, the Forest team had lost to West Ham United. At that time, the West Ham United manager had made him wait alone for a long time at the press conference, until he was so annoyed that he announced the start of the press conference in advance.

But today was different. Mourinho had made him wait here, but he willingly waited because he had won the match and was in a good mood.

There were not many reporters in the press conference hall; instead they crowded in the mixed zone, interviewing the players. Twain was not in a hurry, so he sat and waited. As time passed, more and more reporters came into the hall, and it seemed like the players had returned to the locker room.

At that time, Mourinho also arrived. He sat with a serious expression in the seat next to Twain. The reporters, who had gathered together to chat in groups of twos or threes just now, saw that the two leading subjects had arrived, and hurriedly returned to their seats. The press host also announced the official start of the press conference.

The reporters were not very enthusiastic about the result of the match, but they were very interested in the retaliatory confrontation between the two managers on the sidelines. Almost all of the questions were related to the near-end of the first half, when the two managers had clashed.

Twain did not want to talk much about this issue because he was the winner. He hoped that everyone would focus more on the match results than the silly “one-on-one match between the managers.”

Mourinho also refused to answer the question because he was in a bad mood due to his defeat. He ignored the reporters’ questions to him and talked directly about the game. “I don’t want to talk about the results of the game, I just want to talk about a few points of the game. First of all, it was absolutely unfair for Ferreira to be sent off, I think that there’s a high chance that Ribéry was just diving. Don’t ask me why, I don’t have a reason, but I ask you to go back and watch the game video.”

At this point, Twain interjected next to him. “Of course, after watching it a hundred times, you will also think that Ferreira’s red card was a result of his own actions.” When he said this, he did not look at Mourinho, but instead glanced at a corner of the room. It was obvious that he disregarded Mourinho.

The expression on Mourinho’s face grew even darker. The reporters were thrilled. Is there going to be a repeat performance of the scene on the sidelines?

But they were disappointed. Mourinho clenched his jaw and pretended not to hear Twain. He continued. “Secondly, I suggest that the English Football Association consider a penalty for the deliberate action of wasting time in the game.”

“Well, first you’d need to have a lawsuit for one year to prove someone’s ‘deliberate action of wasting time in the game.’”

It was as if these two men were in a debate. One stated a remark, the other returned with another remark. Twain deliberately interjected Mourinho’s speech, and Mourinho intentionally ignored Twain.

“Thirdly, it was only a victory for a game, it doesn’t prove anything. We lost this game, but we’re still a strong contender for the league title. As for the Forest team, I sincerely hope that I’ll still see them in the

Premier League next season.” He could ignore it all he wanted, but his fury within could not be concealed any longer. Mourinho had finally targeted the attack directly at Twain’s team.

“Ah, are you talking about the Champions League?” Twain smiled. “I also hope I can see Chelsea there.”

Mourinho got up directly from his seat, and the reporters’ cameras were flashing wildly.

What were they anticipating? Of course, it was Mourinho, unable to endure any longer, punching Tony Twain, and then the two managers quickly punching each other’s lights out in full view of everyone. The newspapers, on the radio, on the television, on the internet the next day... All the media would be broadcasting the sensational affair. The English Football Association would be the one with the headache, but the media and readers would be thrilled.

However, to their disappointment, Mourinho did not swing his fist at Twain. Instead, he turned and left the scene of the press conference, leaving behind Twain to do his one-man show.

Twain was not embarrassed by the sudden departure of Mourinho. In fact, he had expected that this would happen. Mourinho was a conceited man. When faced with his repeated provocations, it was not possible for him to just sit there, answer questions, and pretend to play nice with a person he disliked. Think about how he treated Arsène Wenger.

Therefore, Twain was completely unaffected by Mourinho’s early departure, and did not complain about the other man’s manners like he once had with the West Ham United manager Glenn Roeder.

He looked down at the group of stunned reporters and said with a smile, “Firstly, I want to make clear that I don’t wish to see you define this game as ‘an upset.’ Any mention of ‘an upset’ in your questions, and I will directly refuse to answer. It’s a normal outcome for whoever won the match between us and Chelsea. And I think that even if we win against Manchester United, Arsenal, and Liverpool, it’s still not an upset. Because we have the strength, it’s just that you never knew it. Well, gentlemen, do you have anything you want to ask?”

No one immediately raised their hands to ask questions. The media were obviously shocked by the performance of these two idiosyncratic managers and forgot what they were here for. There was a loud buzzing in the press conference hall.

Twain sat on the platform, not caring if no one asked him a question. On the contrary, he looked at the scene in front of him with satisfaction.

Chapter 239: The Entertainment Circle? No

On the afternoon after the match, several major media sources reported on the league match where Nottingham Forest, on their home ground, had welcomed Chelsea. It was not only because Forest team, who ranked 13, had beaten Chelsea who was ranked number two. It was also not due to Chelsea, who had previously won four matches and drawn two, getting its first taste of defeat. And it was most certainly not because of Denmark’s genius Nicklas Bendtner having made a stunning appearance, or Paulo Ferreira receiving a red card. In fact, the reason for the media reporting this match with such fanfare had absolutely nothing to do with the players from the team. It was because of the teams’ managers.

A half hour after the match ended, the official website of the English Premier League updated their homepage. They put up a picture that took up almost half of the screen; one that captured the scene of Mourinho and Tony Twain confronting each other on the sidelines. Below it was a simple caption:

Enemies.

An appropriate interpretation.

The evening program “Match of the Day,” during its live broadcast, even specially invited lip-reading specialists to help audiences decipher what the two managers had said during the confrontation. The results were mostly true to what had happened. After watching the exchange between the two generals, even the usually eloquent Lineker was without words. He seemed at a loss about how to comment on the two managers’ performances.

Of course, that was all just a gimmick. If Nottingham Forest wanted to gain a greater position in the League, it was not enough to depend on Tang En hopping up and down in a verbal war with the opposing manager. Forest needed to show off their capabilities, and the victory came at just the right time. Even though the audience would inevitably feel that Tang En’s words at the press conference were somewhat arrogant, Forest’s fans would be supporting Tony Twain more fervently than ever.

Old fans who still missed the era of Brian Clough and the new fans who had no experience but had heard the legend of Clough and his character countless times all declared that they had found the true successor of Brian Clough. It was not José Mourinho. It was Tony Twain, who continued to deny any intentions of becoming Clough’s successor. They could care less about how Tony saw it. They simply published their own expectations.

After the match had ended and Forest’s players had satisfied the signature requests from their fans, they boarded the bus. Tang En, who was last to exit, then walked out of the stadium. Amongst the cheering crowds along the way, he noticed a fan with a head of white hair. He looked like an old fan who must have experienced the period of Forest’s greatest glory. He stood next to the Forest team’s bus. Unlike the other Forest fans, who were dancing, singing, and jumping, he only stood there with a board in his hands. On it was written, Forget Robin Hood, Remember Clough. Now, we have a second Clough.

As Tang En passed by him, his attention turned to the words written on the board. He then raised his head and looked closely at the person. The old fan looked back at him without a word, asking for neither signature nor photograph. Tang En gently shook his head and turned to board the bus.

He knew of the hope that the fans had for him, but looking at such words, he still did not know what to say. Would he never be able to step out from under the shadow of Clough? No matter how successful he became in the future, others would only say, “Tony Twain is Brian Clough the Second!”

At the thought of this, Tang En smiled wryly. Even though the Boss looked well upon him, he was trying so hard to reduce the man’s influence on himself. It was an unexpected situation.

A characteristic manager?

He wasn’t trying to intentionally imitate the Boss’ style; he was just being himself.

Just ten minutes before Forest's team bus left City Ground, Chelsea's blue coach took off as well. Mourinho turned down all interview requests from the reporters. As the loser, he swiftly left with his team, all the while thinking about the ample time he had ahead of him to return the favor.

A BBC news reporter stood in the middle of City Ground square and said to the camera, "Although Brian Clough has left, he left us with a topic to ponder for a long time: who is his true successor? José Mourinho or Tony Twain? For a while, I believe that the contest between the two will be an indispensable part of the Premier League. It will definitely be entertaining..."

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On the second day, the discussion of who would be Clough's true successor continued. Naturally, Nottingham's local media leaned towards Tony. London's media, meanwhile, showed no interest in the moniker, but media from other areas seemed keen on joining in the fun. If only from their achievements, Mourinho indeed appeared to be closer to the title of one of England's most successful managers.

Tang En had no interest in the debate and made no attempt to take the opportunity to update his column. This disappointed the owner of "Nottingham Evening Post." It was such a hot topic, Twain surely could attract more readers to participate in the discussions. Newspaper sales would definitely be on the rise. It was too bad. The manager of the Evening Post could not do anything as he watched an opportunity slink away right under his nose.

He could not order around someone like Twain. The person who could do so was probably not born yet. Furthermore, when both parties signed the agreement, there were no stipulations for how often Tony would hand in articles; Tony had complete freedom.

The second day after the match was a day off for the team. The players had no training and plenty of time to rest at home or to go out with friends.

When Tang En woke up, he saw Dunn watching the videos again and frowned.

The weather was not especially sunny, but it still wasn't right for Dunn to always stay at home without interacting with anyone. Moving closer, Tang En realized that Dunn was watching a recording of the Youth team's match. In Tony's time with the Youth team, he had not done any sort of match or training recordings. However, through occasional chats with Tang En after Dunn had joined the Youth Team, they discussed the reason behind Ajax's high level of youth training: the recording of their trainings and review afterward. The discussion that day had inspired Tang En, who had then brought Dunn to find Evan. He suggested equipping the Youth Training Camp with more modern equipment to implement a modernized training model. Of course, Tang En did not forget to continually emphasize that the idea had come from the Chinese man beside him. Evan agreed to Tang En's proposal, furthering the tradition of valuing youth training and bringing it to greater heights.

"Hey, Dunn. You're such a shut-in. Stop hiding at home; go out with me!" Tang En stood behind Dunn and washed his face as he said this.

"A shut-in?" Dunn looked back at Tang En.

"You stayed in China for a while. Haven't you heard that term?"

Tang En only responded when Dunn shook his head. The term “shut-in” had only become popularized in China in 2007; the term was less well-known in 2004.

“Oh. It refers to being overly obsessed with something and constantly staying at home without going out to interact with others. It isn’t a healthy way of living. Look at you; other than going to the training grounds to work, you’re always at home watching these videos.” Tang En pointed to the huge number of videotapes scattered all over the floor.

Before Dunn’s arrival, Tang En had always tried to maintain the cleanliness of the living room because Yang Yan would come for lessons. Now, the whole area had been overtaken by all sorts of recordings with various titles: Forest’s First Team match videos, Youth Team training and match videos, English Premier League match videos from various teams, UEFA Champions League match videos, UEFA Europa League match videos, and National team match videos. Any video he could possibly want could be found there. Even Tang En himself did not know where the surplus of videotapes had suddenly come from but found himself sighing at Dunn.

Dunn turned back to the screen and pressed the pause button. “What do you want to go out and buy?”

Tang En shrugged. “I’m not buying anything.”

“If you’re not buying anything, why do you want to go out?”

“You can’t go out if you’re not buying anything? We could go out to breathe in some fresh air, meet some new friends. Look at the sky outside, it’s so clear!” Tang En said, lying blatantly as he pointed to the grey skies outside the window.

Rather than complying and looking out the window, Dunn turned to the television screen. “That’s not part of the plan.”

Tang En strode in front of the television and switched off the power. “You’re always stuffing your life into a planner and following it to a tee. Haven’t you had enough of those days? If everything had to be planned, life would be missing a lot of surprises! Do you ever need to plan to go to the washroom? Let’s go, let’s go.”

At last, Tang En managed to successfully drag Dunn out of the house.

Tang En chattered happily as he stood at the door watching Dunn, who was just leaving the house.

“There’s a saying in China: to balance between work and leisure. Did you know?”

Dunn ignored Tang En’s excitement. He squinted and asked, “Where are we going?”

“Somewhere lively,” Tang En said, spreading his arms.

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George Wood was different from other boys. Not only did he enjoy shopping, he hardly ever slept in. On the afternoon of the second day after the match, while the other players were all still in bed and unwilling to get up, he was already out accompanying his mother shopping.

Due to Tang En’s connections with Professor Constantine, Forest had reached out to the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University to help with Sophia’s treatment. Over the past half year, she had undergone a

major surgery and had since been in the adjustment and recovery stage. Tang En rarely went to disturb Sophia. He had only asked Constantine about her briefly and received scattered bits of news. Apparently, the results of the surgery were fine, although she still had to undergo a few others to continue the treatment.

Tang En knew very little about matters of medicine. Since Constantine had told him that Sophia's health was slowly improving, his mind was set at ease. He was not willing to attend a third funeral in the UK.

Despite becoming Forest's main defensive midfielder and performing more and more outstandingly with each match, Wood still had not learned how to be a celebrity. While accompanying his mother out to shop, he still dressed in the most ordinary of clothes and wore no sunglasses or a pulled-down cap. He wore the same clothes he always did.

The main defensive midfielder of Nottingham Forest seemed no different than any other ordinary kid. As a result, when he was recognized by Forest's hardcore fans in the heart of downtown and got surrounded, He appeared lost and even nervous. He put himself in front of his mother, an instinct bred from having lived for a long time in areas with security concerns.

"Look, it's Wood!"

"Wood! Wood!"

The more ardor the fans presented him with, the more nervous Wood got. Sophia, who was protected behind him, laughed at the scene. She gently rubbed his back and reminded her son softly, "Don't worry, George. They're only expressing their fondness for you. Smile. Smile at them."

It was a little difficult to expect Wood to smile under the circumstances, but his body was not as stiff as it had once been. Some fans took out paper and pens in hopes of getting Wood to sign for them. With the reminder from his mother, Wood took the pen and wrote his name on the papers. Unlike other celebrities, his signature was not at all flashy. It was slightly lopsided and looked like it came from a small child who had just learned how to write.

But the fans did not care. They took Wood's signature and left delightedly.

After he satisfied a few more such requests, the crowd surrounding Wood eventually dispersed. Wood's forehead was covered in beads of sweat. Seeing this, Sophia dotingly wiped the fine beads away. "You have to get used to this, George. You're a star now."

Faced with his mother's praise, George became slightly embarrassed.

At this moment, a well-dressed middle-aged man stepped in front of Wood. He first politely bowed to Sophia. Without knowing why Sophia returned the gesture. Following this, the gentleman turned to Wood, who was next to her, and beamed a smile wide enough to dazzle the females around him. He said, "Do you have any interest in joining the entertainment circle?"

If this had been asked to any girl or a handsome guy, they probably would have answered the question with eagerness. But for George Wood and his mother, their first reaction was to wonder if they had heard him wrong.

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Tang En and Dunn walked along the lively streets, with the former feeling pretty good because of his win over Mourinho, while the latter thought that it was a waste of time to walk meaninglessly, aimlessly.

Tang En was the same as George Wood and did not like putting on a façade in public. So, even though he would still put on dark sunglasses and keep up a cool appearance at some places, he would not burden himself that way when he was out to play. As a result, he always ended up being recognized by someone. However, with Tang En's supporters being older, they were not as fanatical as the younger fans, like Wood's. At most, Tang En's fans would wave and greet him. Tang En would just return the gesture.

It was just like two friends greeting each other when meeting on the streets.

"Look at this, Dunn. Isn't this nice?" Tang En turned to say to him as he sent another Forest fan away. "Have you heard of 'The Man in the Case?' You're almost becoming that. You need to communicate and interact with different people. Do you want to become an outstanding manager? This is an essential quality!"

In front of Dunn, Tang En would often ramble. Dunn was long used to it, so he just kept silent, neither disagreeing or agreeing. Tang En was also used to his silence and continued chattering away, figuring that it would somehow get into Dunn's head.

As the saying goes, "many a little makes a mickle."

Just as the chattering Twain and silent Dunn reached Victoria Shopping Mall, Tang En noticed a familiar figure in the crowd... No, it was two familiar figures: George Wood and Sophia. There was also another middle-aged man whom he did not initially notice, but who quickly attracted his attention.

Since their backs were to him, Tang En suddenly became very keen on eavesdropping on their conversation. He signaled to Dunn and crept up near to them.

Following that, he heard the man say to Wood, "Your appearance and demeanor are both very suitable for a career in the entertainment circle. Don't you think you should consider it?"

So, it was a poacher!

"I'm afraid not, Sir." Tang En could not help but interrupt, shocking Sophia.

"Mr. Tony!" Her voice was filled with surprise.

"Ma'am, I'm sorry I haven't gone to visit you, but it seems like you're recovering well." Tang En smiled as he greeted her. Then, he stepped forward and stood between the man and Wood.

"If you are looking for some handsome dude to participate in reality TV, I advise you to change targets. He's mine," Tang En said as he pointed to Wood.

Wood frowned at his words but said nothing.

Seeing that someone had cut in, the middle-aged man looked at Tang En. After taking in his appearance, the man frowned as well and turned again to Wood. "Boy, I really think you have potential. You can try, or if not..."

Tang En, who was completely ignored, gnashed his teeth.

“Do you need me to remind you again, Sir? He’s mine.” Tang En moved and stood right in front of Wood. “He’s a main player for Nottingham Forest’s football team. He’s a professional football player, not some pretty boy. You’ve got the wrong guy.”

Now the middle-aged man had no way of ignoring Tang En. He said with a frown, “I don’t think being a football player means you can’t be a movie star or a model.”

“Perhaps others could; but with me, it can’t be done.”

The two started arguing.

“Maybe we should listen to what the boy thinks.” As if realizing how stubborn his opponent was, the man decided to bypass Tang En.

Tang En wanted to reply with, “I’m Wood’s manager. I have the authority to decide this.” But he thought better of it.

Wood should answer the question. He was interested to know what the kid thought about football.

Wood peeked at his mother, who was staring at Tang En, and then at Tang En himself. Finally, he shook his head at the middle-aged man.

“I like football.”

Hearing the reply from Wood behind him, Tang En finally smiled at the other man. “Alright, Sir. You have your answer.”

The man sighed. “What a pity... I’m sorry for disturbing you.” He even remembered to bid goodbye to Sophia with a, “Goodbye, Madam.”

On the other hand, Tang En waved and said, “No hurry; goodbye.”

He glared at Tang En and handed Wood a business card. “This is my card. If you change your mind, you’re welcome to come find me at any time, son.”

He watched Wood take the card from him before turning to leave. As he left, he made a point to say to Tang En, “I won’t give up.”

“That’s not up to you,” Tang En said, shrugging.

Chapter 240: Read the Headline Part 1

Since he had met Sophia on the street, Twain’s outing today naturally gained a purpose: he would introduce Dunn to Sophia and invite them to dinner.

“I really didn’t expect to meet you here, Mr. Twain.” Sitting at the dinner table while waiting for their food, Sophia spoke with barely concealed excitement.

“Me neither, ma’am.” Compared to Sophia, Twain was obviously more restrained as he replied with a smile, “I’ve been busy with too many things with too little time. I’m sorry I haven’t visited you.”

“Don’t be sorry, Mr. Twain. I’ve heard from George. He always tells me about what’s going within the team now.”

Sitting next to them, Wood gave a cough and Sophia laughed. Twain laughed too when he saw Wood looking uncomfortable. He finally had caught a hidden side of Wood!

“This is Dunn, my Chinese friend.” Twain introduced Dunn to Sophia. “He’s... well, a little shy.”

Dunn did not mind Twain’s comment about him. He just nodded politely at Sophia. “Hello, ma’am. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Hello, Mr. Dunn. Glad to meet you, too.” Sophia returned.

Twain had been secretly observing Dunn’s expression after seeing Sophia, and was disappointed with his response. Seeing how indifferent Dunn was to this beautiful woman, Tang En wondered if he was playing for the other team.

Then Twain and Sophia were conversing happily while Wood and Dunn sat in silence next to them.

The two of them talked about a wide range of topics, starting with their daily lives. Later, when Twain saw how quiet Wood was, he tried to pull him into the conversation by leading the topic of conversation towards the team. Sure enough, Wood had to join the conversation because his mother would always ask him, “Is that true, George?”

Then Twain also pulled Dunn into the conversation by beginning with his trip to China in the summer and then talking about the China as a whole. Dunn had no choice but to be part of the conversation. No matter how reticent he normally was, he could not ignore the queries of a lady.

From hearing Dunn answer Sophia’s questions, Twain could tell that he had really made an effort to understand the unfamiliar country while he was in China. It seemed that he truly intended to live in China for the rest of his life and be the Chinese Tang En.

But who could predict fate?

If Tang En himself had not missed his parents in China and made that trip, perhaps their futures would not have intersected at all. And he, as Tony Twain, would continue to be a professional football manager, maybe accomplishing great things, maybe not. And he, Dunn, would have had a warm home and would have peacefully become an ordinary Chinese man, busying himself with his daily livelihood.

When he thought about it, it didn’t seem too bad.

But Tang En had changed Dunn’s life; he had changed it twice. If he had not run into Dunn, nothing would have changed. But as it happened, they did meet after all.

Watching Dunn, unable to refuse Sophia’s request, using a knife and fork to demonstrate to her the use of chopsticks, Tang En thought that the way they were now was not too nice...

After lunch, despite some reluctance, Sophia had to say goodbye to Twain. After all, she was still in recovery and needed to pay attention to her health. Because of her excitement in meeting Twain, her breathing had quickened a little.

After saying goodbye to Twain, Sophia turned to Dunn and smiled at him. "I've always felt that Mr. Twain must be very lonely living alone. But now, with Mr. Dunn around... you two both like football so much, you must have endless things to talk when you're together."

Dunn did not know how to respond to this. He looked at Twain and saw that Twain was just smiling and looking at Sophia, so he nodded and said, "Actually, most of the time, he's the one doing the talking."

Sophia covered her lips and giggled lightly. "Mr. Twain must have bottled up a lot when he lived alone."

Twain coughed and scratched his head, "That's right, I often talk to myself. It irritates him." And then, he pointed to Dunn.

"It's okay, after listening to him for a long time, it's no different from listening to rap. I just treat it like it's background noise and tune it out."

Dunn's earnest answer made Sophia laugh heartily with her head lowered. Both shoulders trembled, and her beautiful face was flushed.

"Mr. Twain, Mr. Dunn, I should get going. George?"

When Wood heard his mother's words, he said goodbye to the two men standing in front of him. He did not say much. He just waved his hand. "Bye."

After seeing the mother and son walking in the distance, Tang En looked back Dunn and said with some surprise, "I didn't know you were capable of cracking jokes."

"Listening to you talk all the time, I think any blockhead would have already gotten the hang of it by now."

"Isn't this nice!" Twain shrugged. "You have potential for dry humor! Rap? It's a good analogy, but I actually prefer British rock. Do you like the band Queen? I'm a fan..."

Tang En was jabbering on again.

"Right." Dunn extended his hand to Tang En. "I forgot to congratulate you. I watched that game at the stadium, it was very exciting. The tactics, I mean."

Glancing at Dunn's outstretched hand, Tang En smiled and shook it. "Thank you."

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Three days later, Dunn continued his work on the youth team, which was something he was already familiar with, and Twain led the Forest First Team and flew to the city of Ostrava, Czech Republic, to challenge their opponent in the UEFA Europa League qualifying match. This was a decisive game because the Forest team had already won 3:0 in the previous home game. As long as they did not concede four goals in this game, they would enter the UEFA Europa League official tournament.

The Forest team did not have any doubts about winning this game. They felt that even if it was an away game, winning would not be a problem.

They were the Nottingham Forest team that had just beat Chelsea! And what sort of team was FC Baník Ostrava? Could it compare to Chelsea? Could it compare to Arsenal?

With opinions like these, the Forest team was hammered by its opponent at the start of the game. They were behind by a goal.

The opposing striker, who the Forest players could not even name, kicked a long-range shot and struck into the goal that Darren Ward was defending within five minutes of the game's start.

Having conceded a goal so quickly, the Forest players did not react in time. They were completely stupefied and played terribly in the first half of the game. As a result, in the last moments of the first half, Ostrava seized another opportunity and scored another goal. The initial three-goal difference which had made Nottingham Forest so full of confidence had suddenly turned into a one-goal difference!

They had played amazingly in the last game, but played so terribly in this game that it was infuriating. With mostly young players, the Forest team could be very unstable.