

Godfather Of Champions

Chapter 25: The Crisis Of Two Consecutive Draws Part 1

Everything was going according to Tang En's plans. Coventry City's offense remained underwhelming. So, they switched out the underperforming Pipe after 17 minutes, and the person to replace him was indeed Gary McSheffrey. The young player, who was only 20 years old, was the main scorer among the team's strikers to date, scoring three goals in 10 matches. If not for his injury sustained during the training two days before the match, McAllister would not have placed him on the substitutes' bench.

His hair was golden, slightly resembling Rooney. Of course, if he were as skillful as Rooney, Tang En would be crying.

Although he was not as skillful as Rooney, McSheffrey's presence on the field was still able to bring a considerable amount of trouble to Nottingham Forest's defensive line. He did not appear in the center, but instead was positioned at the left flank and faced against French defender Matthieu Louis-Jean.

Only when Tang En saw this change, did he discover that he had thought too simply of McAllister. Although a player-manager was unable to have a broad view of the match, unlike a manager who was outside the field, he still possessed a lot of first-hand information when it came to observing the minute details on the field. Nottingham Forest's right back was definitely a source of headache for Tang En. Only the French player was a right-back player. While Scimeca could also be the right back, he was much more proficient in playing as a defensive midfielder. Another possible candidate was the 21-year-old John Thompson. Although he could also act as a makeshift right back, the positions most suited for him were still defensive midfielder and center back.

While Tang En was observing Coventry City on the viewing platform, Coventry City's manager was observing Tang En's team on the field.

McSheffrey was no dribbling expert, but his breakthrough speed at the flanks put Louis-Jean in a tight spot. In addition, the floor was slippery from the rain, and thus he managed to easily pass by Louis-Jean. At times, Louis-Jean could only barely stop him with a foul. What was even more worrying was that this person's shots were evidently much more skillful than the previous two Coventry City's forwards, as both of his shots landed within the boundaries of the goalpost. Tang En was shaking his head on the viewing platform, because he had not foreseen this happening, and therefore had not prepped Walker for it during the halftime break. If they would only switch in Thompson, a much better defensive player, they would have a better chance of shutting down the injured McSheffrey.

A pity....

Only at this moment, did Tang En discover an even greater problem. Although McAllister was on the field playing and therefore could not make the timeliest adjustments to the team, Tang En, who was watching the match on the viewing platform, was also unable to inform the assistant managers at the sideline even if he spotted a problem and came up with a solution to it. The results were the same, with both of them unable to make the most direct and quickest adjustments to their teams.

Fortunately, 10 minutes later, Bowyer and Walker at the sidelines made the adjustments that Tang En wanted. They substituted Thompson in to replace Louis-Jean who had been thwarted by McSheffrey. The situation was once again balanced.

Time passed, and the fourth official raised a sign stating three minutes of stoppage time. There were five minutes before Tang En's first victory as the manager of the team. With non-stop singing and cheering all around him, the Forest fans excitedly came up to Tang En and congratulated him. In their eyes, the match had already been won.

Tang En's once again wore a smile on his face, and his mood, which had been fouled by the two disciplinary members and the security guard of Highfield Road Stadium, improved gradually. In this black and white world, there was nothing more appealing and uplifting than victory.

There's an old saying that had been mentioned countless times on many occasions, so much so that those who heard it had calluses from hearing it too many times. However, at that moment, there was still a need to re-emphasize the famous saying by German Football godfather Josef "Sepp" Herberger: The ball is round. The game lasts 90 minutes. This much is fact. Everything else is theory.

Just as the fourth official put down the electronic signage board, and as he turned around, Coventry City got a free-kick in the opposing half, positioned 25 meters in front of the penalty area. Coventry City had gotten a total of five of such free kicks the entire match, and the first four were all wasted by McAllister. He probably had the same complaints as Eoin Jess: The ground was too slippery, the soil was too loose, and the supporting leg could not exert adequate strength.

But this time...

When McAllister stood in front of the ball, the Forest fans beside Tang En were still singing and jumping. However, Tang En stood there without making any comments, solely focused on the field. It was precisely this kind of moment that made Tang En even more nervous. As long as they endured this shot, the rest of the match would be much easier. Nottingham Forest could control the ball under their feet and drag it out until the end of the match.

McAllister had his back against the cheering Forest fans, and there was no close-up on the big screen. Tang En could not see this player-manager's expression at that moment. In the match between the two of them, Tang En was about to emerge victorious.

The head referee blew the whistle. McSheffrey made a feint, while McAllister followed up and made his shot!

The ball tore through the rain, over the human wall. It spun and evaded Darren Ward's hand, before hitting against the net of the goal. The water beads splashed forth in all directions, even blurring Tang En's eyes.

Tang En blinked his eyes several times, to confirm once again. He soon heard deafening shouts resounding throughout the stadium. However, those sounds were not from the side of the Nottingham Forest fans, but the opposite side's sky blue faction...

McAllister was squashed under his excited teammates, while the commentator announced, "The eighty-eighth minute! Coventry City, Gary McAllister! A direct free-kick goal, beautiful! 1:1 Tie! They are already on an eight match no-lose streak!" The reply to his statement was the roaring shouts on the viewing platform, which resembled the sound of rolling thunder.

"God damn it!" Tang En forcefully punched the seat beside him, and the fans surrounding him also turned silent. This was a result that nobody expected. Coventry City, which did not have many chances to score throughout the entire match, had actually managed to bring it to a tie with a direct free-kick. Nothing was more infuriating than having the three points which they were about to get, reduced to one point. What was even more infuriating was that Tang En did not know where the problem lay. His team's performance was almost perfect, and yet with a lucky shot by the opponent, their eighty-eight minutes' worth of effort was down the drain.

Coventry City's players were still celebrating, while Nottingham Forest's players stood on the field, at a loss of what to do.

The rain was still ongoing, but Tang En could not care less about the effects of the weather on the match already. In his eyes, that was the end of the match, 1:1, with himself and McAllister's match ending in a draw. Although that player-manager guy was unable to use his adjustment of tactics to save the team, he managed to do so by scoring a goal on his own.

He turned around and looked at the disappointed fans, and started to regret his decision of choosing to sit there. Standing beside them and witnessing with his own eyes, the scene of the fans' joy turning into disappointment, was an unbearable feeling.

"When we return to our home ground, I will bring all of you victory..." he softly mumbled.

The match ultimately ended with the tenacious Coventry City bringing the match to a tie right before it ended, and with the away team, Nottingham Forest leaving with one point. Yet, they appeared to be even more regretful and dejected than the home team.

At the end of the season's twenty-ninth match, Nottingham Forest, which was one match down, dropped down to fourteenth place, with a cumulative of only 39 points. The only thing that could console Tang En was that fourteenth place and sixth place only had a difference of four points. It was merely a difference of two matches, and they were still down by one match.

His mentor had left behind a mess for Twain, and it was not easy for Tang En to ignite some fighting spirit in the team. Going forward, he definitely could not let them remain dejected. There were not many problems within the team, so Tang En only had one mission, and that was to lead the team and obtain good results.

Good results require good players, but Tang En's current situation was very awkward.