

## Champions 261

### Chapter 261: A Show of Genius Part 2

The Forest team's attack on Old Trafford was a bit monotonous. They could not break through from both flanks, which was what they were best at. Albertini was restrained in the back and the Forest team could not even attack from the center. In that way, the flanks could not break open, the center was a no-go, and the Forest team's two strikers had become completely extraneous, not being seen in action for a long time.

At that point, Twain had a desire to have an attacking midfielder on the team who could share the responsibility of organizing the offense. It did not have to be an attacking midfielder, but it did have to be a midfielder who could organize.

Ribéry dribbled the ball across the flank to break through, but his pass to Eastwood soon after was suddenly intercepted by a figure behind him.

"Cristiano Ronaldo! He rushed back from the front field and cut off Ribéry's pass!"

The impatient kid had actually acted on his own to snatch the ball.

The Forest team's offense was suddenly terminated, and the entire team hurried back to their positions. Ronaldo would not give them time to return to their defense set up. After his successful interception, he turned and broke through along the flank, hoping to use his speed and skills to dribble the ball directly to the Forest team's penalty area.

After poking the football out, he saw a figure appear to his side.

It's that boastful number 13! It's good you're here... block me if you can!

Ronaldo dribbled and charged towards Wood, then made a dazzling scissor move that was fast and lethal. Wood was swayed until his center of gravity became unstable.

This is it!

Ronaldo jabbed the football to the side and accelerated. When he tried to immediately cut inside and use his back to block against Wood, he suddenly felt his body leaning against a barrier.

"Ronaldo wants to make a breakthrough! But George Wood has a tight grip on him."

After running a few paces alongside Wood, Ronaldo found that it was difficult to rely purely on his speed to break through number 13. It looked like he would need to use his best step-over move to seek a breakthrough.

Ahead of him was the Forest team's center back, Matthew Upson. Ronaldo came up with another plan. His back would push against Wood while he ran, and then he would cut inward to make Wood think that he was going to force a breakthrough; that would cause his opponent to speed up.

Wood was fooled. After feeling that Ronaldo was going to break through, he immediately sped up and raced to Ronaldo's front; he then looked back and saw Ronaldo use his right heel to knock the football

on the outside of his foot towards inside of his foot. At the same time, he did a sudden stop and pivot and bypassed Wood.

“Look at that! What a thrilling breakthrough... This is Ronaldo’s moment! At the Theatre of Dreams at Old Trafford, a genius play is being staged!”

Seeing how easily Ronaldo shook off Wood, the commentator heaped all the praise he could think of onto the Portuguese player, as though he were in a theater tossing flowers at an actor.

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The Nottingham Forest fans booed loudly in the south stands of Old Trafford.

Skinny Bill took off his headphones and said to Fat John, “The commentator said this was the moment for Ronaldo’s genius performance!”

“Bulls\*\*t! We have a genius too!” John hurled an empty paper cup that he had in his hands. He was fed up with the commentator’s nauseating adulation. “Come on, lads! Don’t let those Manchester United bastards look down on us! Sing with me!”

“Wood! Wood! Wood Wood Wood! Grow into a Forest! Wood! Wood! Wood Wood Wood! Let your opponents struggle! If you want to bypass, the ball stays! Stays! Stays! Wood! Wood! Wood Wood Wood! Grow into a Forest! Forest! Forest! Victory! Go, Go, Go! Forest Forest!”

Ronaldo heard the loud cheers coming from the Old Trafford stands. He liked to hear spectators cheering on his performance. This really is The Theater of Dreams.

Matthew Upson was up ahead. When he saw Ronaldo bypass Wood as he knocked the ball some distance away from himself, Upson wanted to rush up and intercept the ball. But he underestimated the Portuguese’s speed. He was just a half step earlier than him to touch the football, and then he leaped and did a Marseille Turn, dragged the football, and brushed past Upson!

“Ah! It’s beautiful! A genius performance!” The commentator was shouting uncontrollably, as though he had seen the unveiling of a good passing performance by several players, like the scene with Thierry Henry’s shot into Tottenham Hotspur’s goal. That terrific goal had been exciting enough to repeatedly broadcast as an opening title on the BBC for a year.

Ronaldo, who just used the Marseille Turn to rotate past Upson, thought that he already had a clear expanse ahead of him. But he was suddenly caught unawares and was hit, almost losing his balance. Fortunately, he reacted quickly, and the ball at his foot scuttled to the left flank from the force of the impact.

It was then that he was free to see who had knocked into him. He was startled by who he saw: George Wood!

The Forest team number 13 had taken advantage of the chance to chase him again when he had used the Marseille Turn to rotate past Upson and had had to slow down!

This guy... Is it over yet?

Seeing how he had gone from directly facing the goal to facing the flank with just one knock from Wood, Ronaldo was now competing with Wood. Even if van Nistelrooy was not far behind him and was coming up to assist him, he would not pass the ball. He was bent on fighting it out with number 13.

With a sudden halt, he stopped the football with his heel, turned around, and looked up to see George Wood again!

There was no other way. He turned again and simply kicked the football to continue towards the end line and break through. At first, he was ahead of Wood, but after two steps, Wood was parallel with Ronaldo.

In terms of running ability, Ronaldo was not as good as the man in front of him. His stamina was horrifying!

The secret to Wood's defense was using his supernatural physical fitness, firmly sticking to the opponent, not letting him break through easily, and shooting into the goal with ease. So, in reality, to deal with him, one needed to handle the ball immediately. Once the football stayed at their feet for too long, it would get increasingly difficult to manage.

That was Ronaldo's mistake.

Even though he could see the end line getting closer, he was getting farther from the goal and could only cross the ball.

The brilliant one-man show that he had wanted to perform was no more.

The commentator's interest had also gone from lavishing Ronaldo with praise to marveling at Wood's defensive ability.

"This is unbelievable! Ronaldo was completely unable to get rid of George Wood!"

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Watching the game with his headphones on, Bill screamed, "Of course he can't! Because George is a genius! It's just that you guys don't understand a genius like him at all!"

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Close to the end line, Ronaldo discovered that the other player had no intention of slowing down. So he simply accelerated, and then swung his leg to cross!

This was his last opportunity to lose his opponent. After all, only Upson was in the Forest team's penalty area. As long as he could trick Wood, he could still find the perfect opportunity to be one-on-one with the Forest goalkeeper. He was not willing to exchange a beautiful breakthrough for a corner kick in the end....

When Wood saw that Ronaldo was going to cross, without thinking, he extended his leg to block the ball's path. Ronaldo was waiting for him to do that; he immediately stopped and used his heel to place the football on the end line, because he and Wood were going to slip.

The only difference was that Wood's whole body slid out, and Ronaldo's center of gravity was not lost, since he was already prepared for it. He only needed to adjust himself with two steps, and he was back in control of the ball!

As for Matthew Upson, who had sprung forward? He had at least ten ways to break through those blocks.

Wood saw that Ronaldo did not cross. Instead, he left the football inside the field, knowing that he had been fooled. So, when he slid out, his hands became claw-like and grabbed the turf to slow his pace. He clawed ten gouges on the field! It was like tire prints left on the road when brakes are applied.

In the end, Wood's hands were stuffed with chunks of turf.

Ronaldo finally stopped his dash. He took a small step, preparing to stride forward and kick the ball.

Wood's hands pushed hard and he sprang back into the field again.

Ronaldo's second step was bigger than the first; he was still adjusting his center of gravity.

Matthew Upson rushed up recklessly.

Van Nistelrooy ran towards the goal, raising his hand to call for the ball. Currently, the Forest team did not have any defenders in front of their goal. As long as the ball was passed there, a fatal blow could be dealt. At that point, it would be 3:0, and the Forest team would be finished.

Wood raised his hands and tossed the turf he had gripped in his hands onto the photojournalists' camera lens behind him. He seemed to shoot out like a bullet and while he still at a distance from the football, he flew across with a tackle!

Ronaldo finally stepped back on the field. The football was closer to him. It didn't look like Wood had a chance. Looking down at the football, he did not notice Wood's movements at all, and extended his foot to kick the ball. Suddenly, a leg appeared in his vision; that foot was closer to the ball than his!

Who the hell is this?!

The yellow-clad figure charged like a train into his field of vision, and the football was kicked off!

"George Wood! Incredible steal! No one expected that he would seize that opportunity when everyone had given up!

The number 13 streaked past Ronaldo, who had completely forgotten what he was going to do. He lifted his leg in that spot, but did not respond.

From the beginning to the end, he had never completely gotten rid of number 13, and his opponent had successfully intercepted in the end! He could not believe his eyes.

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When they saw Wood steal the ball from Ronaldo in advance, the singing and applause of the Theater of Dreams vanished everywhere except in one spot.

The Nottingham Forest fans in the South Stands were reaching fever pitch. They loudly sang the song written for Wood, and finally shouted together at the end of the song, "He's the real genius!"

#### Chapter 262: The Lead of the Theatre of Dreams Part 1

Ronaldo made a fake pass that he thought looked quite authentic. He gracefully got past his defender, George Wood, with a fake pass and a kick that switched his movement direction. With the camera tightly focused on Cristiano Ronaldo, the genius from Portugal, Wood rapidly disappeared from the screen. Any fan of Manchester United who watched the scene could not help but sigh. "He got past another person beautifully!"

The commentator was already waving both hands, preparing to cheer for Ronaldo's breakthrough.

Right at that moment, another leg suddenly appeared on the screen followed by a person dashing in. Ronaldo had just lifted his foot when the football in front of him vanished.

"Ronaldo, Ronaldo! Rona... Woow! What is this?! George Wood! Where did he come from?"

As Tang En watched from the sidelines, Wood flew back into the scene from outside and intercepted Ronaldo's ball. As if the team had scored a goal, Tang En pumped both his fists victoriously into the air.

"An incredible defense!" The commentator continued in surprise. He even used a famous line from the English former commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme, "When they think it's all over... George Wood comes back!"

When Wood cleared the ball Albertini, who had just returned, gave him a tight hug. "Great job!" Without another word, he clearly expressed the feelings in his heart.

If not for Wood, who gave his all in chasing the ball back and not giving up even when he was thrown out of the end line, Forest could be behind three goals by now. They would have been smashed by the home team on the away field with 0:3. At that point, the match could practically be considered over.

But Wood had saved a glimmer of hope for Forest team. Perhaps it wasn't much. But the match was yet to end. Who knows? Perhaps his defense would become a turning point.

While Ruud van Nistelrooy was complaining about how Ronaldo had not passed the ball in time, the Portuguese man ignored him and stared at Wood's back in a daze. He still could not understand how Wood had managed to dash in from the outside. If it was because of his reaction speed, that would have been unbelievably fast.

It was not just beautiful goals that could raise morale; seemingly impossible defenses could too.

Wood was someone like that; rarely would he use words to encourage his teammates. He also did not know how to speak like Tony Twain to rouse the team's fighting spirit. In fact, he did not know what it was to "boost morale." He only knew that he had to complete the mission he was given. Regardless of how the mission may appear to be impossible to accomplish, he would still find a way to do it. Wood did not think about how he may influence his teammates because of this, but the truth was that his actions had shone a light of hope for the others.

The defense against Ronaldo's rapid entry this time was comparable to the goalie's defense against the penalty kick at score 0:2. Manchester United's probable goal was, to much astonishment, eliminated by George Wood. All of Manchester's people had already gotten ready to stand and cheer for such a stunning ball, but Wood shoved their cheers back down their throats.

"George Wood. It's hard to believe that he has only been playing for two years... Where did Tony Twain find such a genius? His shooting may be terrible enough to make someone vomit, he is a true genius in the realm of defense!"

Following the praise of the commentator, the camera pivoted and shot a close-up of Wood. His face was expressionless and as cold as an iceberg. Behind him was Cristiano Ronaldo, who looked somewhat lost. From the shot, it was obvious that Ronaldo was still staring at Wood as if he wanted to see right through him.

Tang En waved his fist wildly and turned to Kerslake, who was similarly happy. "Look, David," he said. "When I first brought him to you, neither of us thought we would see this day."

Kerslake nodded. "That's right. We found someone amazing!"

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Thanks to Wood's successful defense, the morale of Forest skyrocketed in an instant; they had all seen the hope of a graceful retreat from this match.

On the field, they also gradually became able to go toe-to-toe with Manchester United.

Piqué, in his new position as a defensive midfielder, performed commendably. Roy Keane's bids to assist during their offense were reducing, and Manchester United appeared to have the intention of shifting their focus to defense for the match.

Ronaldo received the pass again with George Wood still guarding him. Ronaldo had learned his lesson and did not wait for Wood to come forward and press on him. He surged ahead with the ball and tried a quick breakthrough via the sidelines without allowing Wood an opportunity to get close. Wood's defense was even simpler this time. He fiercely tackled Ronaldo, sending both Ronaldo and the ball out of the sidelines.

Amidst the loud jeers from the spectators' stands of Old Trafford, the referee's whistle sounded. Yellow card.

Wood did not care about the referee's warning with the yellow card. He also made no attempt to help up a grimacing Ronaldo. Wood simply got up and ran off after dusting himself down.

Since a long time ago, after Tang En told him that the players on the field were all his enemies, he had never shown any friendliness to his opponents. To be amiable to his enemy was to be cruel to himself. Wood had taken his words to heart.

Ronaldo lay on the ground and did not get up. Upon seeing this, the referee waved for Manchester United's team doctors to approach. It seemed like he needed some simple treatment...

By the time Ronaldo returned to the field again, he seemed a lot tamer.

When Ferguson saw this from the outside, he signaled from the sidelines for Ronaldo and Giggs to swap places on the wings. The lofty Portuguese man made no protest to the decision. His ribs were still throbbing from Wood's earlier clash with him. Somewhere in the depths of his heart, he felt that it was probably better for him to avoid that wild kid for now.

As Tang En watched Ronaldo and Giggs swap places—the Portuguese moved to the left and the Wales veteran shifted to the right—he knew that it was an adjustment made with Wood in mind. So he also waved his hands and moved Wood to Forest's right side. Leighton Baines moved back to the position of left back while Chimbona retreated into the penalty area. This gave Wood the mission of defending against Ronaldo on the right; Tang En wanted the Portuguese guy to stay uncomfortable.

With a significant amount of pressure off the defense, Forest began to think about retaliating. The opportunities for Albertini to advance started increasing, and he patiently kept a look-out for chances to capitalize on loopholes at Manchester's end.

Wood has already done his utmost. Now it's our turn to make a contribution!

When Forest was in possession, Albertini did not kick the ball forward in search of Viduka's head as he had done previously. That mode of attack was much too simple and would be easily defended by Rio Ferdinand.

This time, Albertini chose to fake a pass, creating space for him to move. He then accelerated suddenly and cut forward with the ball.

Scholes failed to defend in time, not expecting Albertini himself to breakthrough with a dribble. He could only watch as his opponent ran past him.

Roy Keane came up to defend against Albertini, but the intelligent Italian had already given the ball up to Ribéry. Although Gary Neville approached Ribéry to box him out, he had no intention of making a break. Instead, he took a kick that sent the ball flying to the other wing, where Ashley Young took over.

As soon as Young got the ball, Forest's right back Chimbona followed the routine attack pattern they practiced in training, cutting forward in response.

This was originally a very basic mode of assist for the full backs. However, Chimbona only managed to do it once within the duration of the match. Manchester United's pressure on the flanks was much too strong; this caused him to struggle with just defense alone, not to mention taking part in the offense.

But now, he did not worry that the space he had left behind upon cutting forward for assists would be made use of by a Manchester player; he had George Wood behind him. Even though Wood did not talk much, he was truly dependable.

Chimbona's advancement was so resolute and rapid that it attracted Ronaldo to return for defense and distract Heinze at the same time. Seeing Chimbona run up to help, Heinze retreated a few steps in preparation to prevent Ashley Young from passing the ball over to the full back.

The gap from those few steps was fully seized by Ashley Young; he did not pass but took the chance to suddenly nudge the ball inwards; a breakthrough!

He was heading straight for the penalty area!

Rio Ferdinand hastily moved forward to fill in the gap for defense once he caught onto Ashley Young's movements. He planned to stop his opponent from even entering the penalty area.

But just as Ferdinand dashed forward, he saw Ashley Young glance down at the ball he was dribbling and pass it out to exactly where Ferdinand had originally stood.

Viduka received Ashley Young's diagonal pass. Thanks to Ferdinand being pulled outwards, there was not a single Manchester United player near him; it was a beautiful assist.

The goalkeeper for Manchester United in the match was the American Tim Howard. Last season, his performance could be said to be perfect, and he had taken the main position from Fabien Barthez, the goalkeeper for the French national team. However, his performance in the current season was extremely unstable. Ferguson would not have fielded Howard if he had been able to find a more stable candidate.

Viduka killed the ball and looked up at where Howard stood. Staying where he was, he followed it up with a chip shot.

The football drew an arc in the air and, at an unexpected moment, dove straight into the corner of the goal!

Howard did not even attempt to save the ball. He had not expected Viduka to be left unguarded, and to score so easily.

The goal came so suddenly, the audience in front of the television could not react in time. In fact, because of the lack of cheering from where it had happened, Forest's fans thought the ball did not go in. Only when they saw Viduka running with raised arms towards Ashley Young, who had given him the pass, did they know for certain that Forest had scored.

"The ball... the ball went in!" Not only the audience, but even the commentator himself was taken aback. Forest was constantly suppressed by Manchester United and did not have many good opportunities. But this single attempt at offense had unexpectedly resulted in a goal. The commentator seemed unprepared for it. "Rio Ferdinand made a mistake! He lost his own target... and Nottingham Forest wins back a point! There are still 17 minutes before the end of the match. What a dramatic moment in an originally one-sided match! Might we be able to see a completely different end to this?"

"Yes!" the Nottingham Forest's fans in front of the television screamed.

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Tang En was not as excited as people expected him to be as he watched Viduka make his goal. He stood on the sidelines and clapped for the players in the field but did not raise his arms to cheer for them. To him, there was no difference between a score of 1:2 or 0:2. He had already seen what he had most wanted: George Wood's growth.

Instead, it was his assistant beside him who exclaimed, "Tony! There's hope!"

"Of course." Tang En nodded. "But it depends on if Ferguson will react in time. It will be impossible for him not to make any adjustments, David."



Kerslake calmed down. Tony was right. With barely over ten minutes left before the match ended and the loss of a ball, Ferguson would not stand by and do nothing. Kerslake looked over at Manchester United's technical area; the hale and healthy Scot had indeed stood up.

Just a minute after Forest scored the goal, Manchester United made a substitution.

Cristiano Ronaldo walked off the field with a disgruntled look. Substituting for him was a Brazilian defending midfielder, Kleberson. Ferguson intended to keep the one ball advantage they had.

Ronaldo, who had gotten changed out, did not go to the home team's substitution bench. Instead, he walked straight back toward the locker room. Even a fool could tell that he was upset by the substitution. Maybe he thought the others did not perform as well as he did and questioned why it was he who got substituted and not someone else. Take Rooney, for example. His performance in the match was average, and he had made few threats to the opponent's goal. Why not substitute him?

Other than the cameras, no one cared about the disgruntled Ronaldo. The match was still going on, after all. Forest was high in morale. For a whole, unbroken five minutes, they bombarded Manchester United's goal.

If Ferguson did not adjust in time, the goal guarded by Howard would truly be in danger.

Now, Manchester United amassed their players before the penalty area, resolutely eliminating any opportunity for Forest team to bring the ball into their penalty area. They could not care less about the ball being passed around within 30 meters outside. But they would not even let Forest dream of entering it.

#### Chapter 263: The Lead of the Theatre of Dreams Part 2

The match was at a stalemate. Forest team was furiously trying to go on the offense to even the score before the end of the match; getting one point was better than getting none.

Meanwhile, Manchester United steadied their foothold and maintained a stable defense. They also went on the attack whenever there was an opportunity, keeping Forest's defensive line constantly on their toes. This prevented the whole of Forest from being able to press forward. Although Ronaldo was off the field, George Wood still had to remain at the back to deal with the attacks from Ruud van Nistelrooy, Paul Scholes, Rooney, and Giggs.

The difference between now and earlier was that Forest could daringly make full use of the two full backs in offensive assists. They did not have to worry so much about leaving gaps behind for Manchester United's players to work with.

Roy Keane's withdrawal to defend also reduced the stress on Wood; he no longer had to face two Manchester players at a time and could roam the entire backfield, becoming Albertini's bodyguard.

At the 80th minute of the match, Tang En made a substitution. He put in a forward, Crouch, to take the place of center back Matthew Upson, further enhancing their offensive power. The Forest's formation became 3-4-3. In reality, their backfield was only left with three people—Piqué, Wood, and the goalkeeper Darren Ward—whenever they went out on the offense.

The players of the Forest team were going all out, and so was Tang En. To say “I wouldn’t feel angry if we lost” was a matter for after the match ended. Right now, so long as there was a glimmer of hope that they would not lose, they must not give up.

“Time is running out. The players of Forest are looking as though they can no longer run... Manchester United still hasn’t given up on the offense, and George Wood is being kept busy in the backfield. He can be seen all over their half of the field. Does this kid know what it is to be tired?”

The commentator was right. The match was about to be over, but the limelight was on neither the offensive players of Manchester United or Forest team. It was on George Wood.

On Ferguson’s command, Manchester United did not give up counterattacking. Whenever they got an opportunity, they would rush forward determinedly.

So, Wood had no choice but to frequently fill in the gaps left behind by his teammates, who had moved forward to assist. He would turn up momentarily at the position of right back, a little later stand in for the left back, and follow up with guest-playing as the center back, clearing the ball with a header.

Under Forest’s offense, Manchester United’s defense refused to yield. Compared with the ball he had lost earlier, Ferdinand had become much more cautious. Wood, while defending the back, was also paying attention to the situation in the front. Seeing no change to the score after a long time, impatience inevitably seeped in.

The time left in the match was only getting shorter, and Forest’s players were tiring. Even a player like Ribéry found it difficult to dash forward. Most of the time, the team could only try to utilize long passes to Crouch or Viduka, but such simple tactics were not very effective against Manchester United.

When the Fourth Official raised the sign for an additional four minutes of play at the sidelines, Tang En turned his back on the field. It looked like they could only accept the result.

Now, regardless of who got the ball, Forest or Manchester United, the air of Old Trafford was filled with jeering. They were not jeering at either of the teams or their players but at the four minutes of injury stoppage time. For Manchester United, who only had one point of advantage over their opponents, four minutes of additional play was far too long.

What could happen in four minutes on the field? An offense, a head-on crash, or meaningless passing of the football...

Manchester United held possession of the ball, and they were not at all eager to pass forward. Instead, they dilly-dallied in the hopes of wasting some time. In terms of ball control, the Forest team was no match for Manchester United. Eastwood, Viduka, and Crouch were all trying their best to steal the ball at the front but were powerless; their ability fell short of their wishes. They ran hither and thither thanks to the passing among Manchester United’s players.

Time ticked down rapidly.

It seemed like there was nothing else Forest could do.

Matches were like that. Despite all of the effort Forest team had put in in that time, their effort came a bit too late. At this point, that mere difference of a single goal became a barrier they could not cross.

Ferguson walked down from the technical area and stood at the sidelines. He was preparing himself for a handshake with Tony after the match ended. Regardless of the result of their squabble before the match, he was the victor of the match now. Even though Tony was not a renowned or highly-regarded manager within the English football scene, there was an even greater satisfaction in defeating such an untameable, unruly opponent than in defeating Kevin Keegan.

Queiroz stood next to his boss, waiting along with him for the handshake. They seemed utterly convinced of their victory. With Manchester United in possession of the ball, would it be possible to intercept their ball?

Three minutes of the injury stoppage time had already passed. The end of the match was only a minute away. The players from Forest were already prepared to give up. The ball was under the foot of their opponents, after all. If they simply passed it around in the backfield, they would be able to prevent Forest from stealing the ball.

They did not care about wasting their energy to press for the ball, only to be played around with like fools.

After Rio Ferdinand got hold of the ball, he found that even Crouch, who had entered the field last, made no attempt to come up and press on him. At that moment, he knew that the match had ended; they just needed to wait for the referee's early whistle to signal the end of the match.

He looked up at the referee ahead of him. Good, the referee was looking at his watch.

Wait up!

What was that?

A streak of shadows abruptly appeared within his field of vision.

"Oh, God!" Even the commentator himself exclaimed. "This is... where did he spring out from?! George Wood!"

At that moment, Ferdinand's brain shorted out; he was shocked by the yellow figure that suddenly dashed in front of him.

No one knew how Wood had rushed all the way forward; even the Forest players themselves did not know. Only Piqué saw it... When Manchester United's players started passing among themselves in the backfield and Forest's members were already too drained to run forward to press them, there were several points in which Wood had wanted to rush up.

But this time, he had more resolve than he had the previous times. He had no intention of returning to defend once he moved forward.

At the 93rd minute, George Wood seemed as if he had only been on the field for 93 seconds. He was completely energized with a running speed no different from when he had chased after Cristiano Ronaldo. Just like the wind, he flew across the field, passing Albertini, passing Scholes, passing Eastwood, passing Roy Keane, passing Kleber, passing Viduka, and finally emerging swiftly from behind Crouch!

Ferdinand was standing before the penalty area when he started paying attention to the referee's actions. At that point, he did not expect there to still be a Forest player who had the ability to press forward and steal the ball!

As Tang En turned, preparing to return to the technical area, collect his tactical board, and shake hands with Ferguson, he heard loud yelling from Kerslake beside him. "Wait! Tony! Wait... Oh God, it's Wood! He rushed forward!"

Tang En spun and saw Wood run in front of Ferdinand. Just how he would defend in the penalty area, he stretched his leg out to steal the ball...

The jeers that erupted from the spectators' stands of Old Trafford were louder than ever before.

"Ferdinand lost the ball!! He completely failed to see Wood!"

The biggest problem with England's most expensive midfielder was that he would, from time to time, lose his focus while on the field. Now he was caught by the ever-persistent Wood; he only felt a brief stumble of his feet, and the ball was gone!

Wood had jabbed the ball away, leading to another surge in the jeering.

He had no one in front of him. There was only the goal and Manchester United's goalkeeper, Tim Howard. There were no teammates who could come forward to support him; it was impossible for him to make a pass.

When Tang En saw this, he was immediately reminded of the scene just a while after the beginning of the first half: Wood's attempt to score. His position then was about the same as now. Previously, Wood had booted the ball straight up into the sky... and the results of his shooting drills in the usual training were not the best either. To entrust all the hope of Forest to someone like that...

Why wasn't it Viduka, Eastwood, Crouch, Albertini, or even Chimbonda who had stolen the ball? It just had to be George Wood, who was the worst at shooting!

He suddenly regretted not getting Wood to do more shooting drills during training.

Regardless, he still blurted, "Shoot!"

Wood stared at the rolling ball beneath his foot. The steal he had pulled off in one breath was successful, but what was he going to do next? Pass? There was no one to pass to. Shoot?

Shoot...

He remembered what Albertini told him before the match. "At times, you need to rush into the opponent's penalty area and do a powerful long shot!"

Isn't that time now?

A voice suddenly rang out from the sidelines and drifted into his ears, "Shoot!"

His gaze sharpened as he looked down and lifted his right leg.

I have no other choice but to shoot.

With an arched heel, pointed toes, a mighty swing of his arms, a twist of his waist, and a follow-through with a swing of his leg... Shoot!

Under the gleaming lights of the Theatre of Dreams, the yellow Nike football transformed into a streak of a shooting star, streaking past Howard's outstretched fingers and slamming into the net!

Ferdinand turned around only to see the football fly into the goal. His half-turned body abruptly lost momentum and collapsed onto the ground.

Roy Keane, who was running back to defend, stopped in his stride, breathing heavily as he stared wide-jawed at the shamefaced goalkeeper, Howard.

Tang En pounded his fist on the floor.

The smile on Ferguson's face stiffened, and the outstretched hand towards Queiroz stopped in mid-air as if paused.

The jeers stopped.

On the television, a high voice could be heard from the receiver, "This is incredible! Incredible! 93 minutes 47 seconds! 2:2! Defensive Midfielder George Wood dashed madly across half the field, stole the ball from Ferdinand's careless handling, and took a shot... And he succeeded! Tonight, the lead of the Theatre of Dreams, just as the curtains were about to close, made another grand appearance!"

Chapter 264: Wood Learned to Be A Star Player Part 1

At Forest Bar in Wilford, Nottingham, the beer in the cups was all splashed upwards, and everyone raised their fists up and yelled. The sound from the television set was drowned out by their yells, but no one wanted to hear the commentator clearly at that point.

"Even though it was a draw, the Forest team's single point was as precious as three in terms of the process. They forced their way into an equalizer with Manchester United in this away game. As a newly promoted team, it's extremely difficult to get results like that! George Wood is undoubtedly the hero and leading player of this evening! Whether it was the process or the result, this goal was perfect!"

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At the Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, George Wood stood at the spot where he had shot the goal. He did not run with open arms, did not take off his jersey and throw it to the sky, did not even do a fist pump. He just stood in the same place, turned, and saw his excited teammates dashing towards him.

He had never scored a goal in a game, nor did he know how to celebrate after scoring a goal. Should I yell and swear to express my feelings?

"Well done!" Ashley Young rushed up, grabbed him, and shouted in his ear, "What a beautiful job!"

Then more teammates swarmed round him; even the goalkeeper, Darren Ward, had bolted from the backfield. The exhausted-looking Forest players now looked as energetic as when they had first come onto the field.

Twain knelt on the ground and smashed the turf. An excited Kerslake pulled him up. "He did it! He really did it!"

The Forest players on the field and the substitutes huddled together. The referee looked down at his watch and blew the whistle three times to signal the end of the game.

The Manchester United team continued their "bad luck" for the season, allowing Nottingham Forest to equalize the score in the last ten or so seconds on their home ground.

Even though the Forest team had only gotten a draw, they looked like winners as they celebrated Wood's last-minute goal.

Twain fist-pumped as he looked at his players. Then he remembered that there was somewhere important he had to be. He turned toward the middle of the two technical areas, and Sir Alex Ferguson was waiting for him there.

"It was really a good game." Despite losing, Ferguson still had a smile on his face. It was not easy to restore his expression back to normal in such a short period of time. "Your team is terrific, Mr. Twain."

"Thank you very much for your compliment, Sir Ferguson." Twain's tone was not as sharp and unkind as before. After all, for him, a draw was a victory. There was no need to be ungracious.

Ferguson nodded and left. Just as he turned around, the Scottish man's smile completely disappeared. The question that he had in his mind over the summer now had a definite answer: will they pose a threat to us? Yes, they are already a threat.

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Twain stood on the sidelines as he watched Ferguson leave. Then he looked back at the players, who were still celebrating. A smile emerged on Twain's face as he saw George, looking stunned while surrounded by a swarm of people.

He believed that if Wood were to repeat exactly the same shot, there was a 99% chance that he would not be able to make the goal.

In fact, it did not matter how the goal was made; what mattered was the outcome. Wood had become a real superman for once. A hero. The one.

I think he'll remember this game for a very long time.

Nice work, kid. Keep on playing like this, and your future will be bright.

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Wood finally managed to break free from the hugs of his teammates after much difficulty. Everyone went on to the players' corridor and back to the locker room one after another. Wood was about to leave the field when he ran into Roy Keane on the sidelines.

Apparently, the Manchester United captain was waiting for him.

When he saw Wood coming, Keane took off his jersey and handed it to Wood. "You've done a good job, lad."

This was the first time Wood had ever encountered a situation where his opponent had voluntarily requested to exchange jerseys. He was a little overwhelmed. Twain happened to see it. An exchange between players would usually have nothing to do with a manager, but he walked over anyways to remind Wood, "Why are you staring like that? Swap your jerseys!"

Wood heard Twain and looked back at him. Twain winked.

Accordingly, Wood bent his head to take off his jersey and exchanged it with Keane's number 16 Manchester United jersey.

When Keane touched Wood's jersey, he could feel that it was completely soaked with sweat; it was damp and heavy. This kid really uses all his physical strength to run. He thought of that last goal. Only a jersey like this would be worthy of that goal.

It was an opportunity borne out of ninety minutes of running.

He saw a shadow of his former self in this young man. How he had worn the Nottingham Forest jersey for his appearance at Anfield to play the most powerful team at that time. On that day, his career had begun.

Looking at Wood, he nodded. "We'll play against each other often in the future. Don't let me down, lad." After that, Keane turned and walked to the corridor.

Wood did not say anything; he did not know what to say. Twain patted him on the shoulder. "How're you feeling, George?"

Wood looked at Twain and said, "Very good."

"You're really not humble at all..."

"What do you mean?"

"No, nothing. This is good." Twain smiled. "Do you know who that person who exchanged jerseys with you is?"

Wood nodded.

"It's not easy to get his admiration or recognition... Go, get back to the locker room." Twain pointed to the left of the fork, which led to the visitors' locker room. Continuing straight led to the press conference room, which was Twain's destination.

"Another thing, George. You should smile at times like this." Twain pointed to Wood's face and said before he left, "You performed really well. Why don't you smile?" Twain grinned.

Wood moved his lips and finally smiled. Well, it would be more appropriate to say he just imitated Tony Twain's expression.

Twain laughed happily when he saw Wood's odd smile.

"Remember, George. Don't get discouraged when you fail. Enjoy your victories to the fullest. We're going back to Nottingham tomorrow morning, so enjoy tonight!"

After giving a pat on Wood's shoulder, Twain went straight to the press conference room.

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At the post-match press conference, Twain made the reporters present laugh when he spoke.

"A football match is like life: full of ups and downs." He shrugged and said with a smile, "I'm very happy with my players' performance. It may have been a draw, but there was nothing more that I could have asked them to do. This really is perfect. Manchester United didn't lose on their home ground, and we didn't return empty-handed."

Ferguson glanced at Twain.

"I'm very satisfied with the result of the game, and even more satisfied with George Wood's performance. I think... those reporters, the ones who were so excited about the Forest team's internal conflicts a few days ago, must be feeling stupid now." After he praised the team and finished talking about the game, Twain changed the topic and his fighting style returned again. "And, to those who think that I favor Wood without grounds... After watching this game, would anyone still dare to say that I trust him for no reason?"

The reporters did not laugh, nor did they utter any reply.

Looking at them, Twain smiled again. "That's why I said I'm very happy with the performance of my players in this game. Very, very satisfied."

After saying that, Twain stopped talking. He just leaned against the back of the chair and listened quietly to Ferguson's speech with a relaxed smile on his face.

The pleasure of his retaliation against the media was intense; he was afraid that if he continued to speak, he would break out into laughter. If Wood's last goal hadn't happened, he might be in another mood now. The reporters would pester him with endless questions about his failure. No matter how hard he tried, it would be useless once he lost the game. The media were always good at sensationalizing any matter which seemed normal, and turning it into something that looked like the end of the world.

There was nothing special about Ferguson's speech. Before the game, it was a trade of barbs with both parties sharply opposed to each other. Now, his tone was a lot milder. Without any thinly veiled insults or sarcasm, Ferguson praised the Forest team's performance in the game and specially complimented George Wood's spirit of perseverance. He then obliquely criticized the performance of Manchester United. He did not name names, but said that someone had not considered the whole team. As for the person he was referring to, anyone who watched the game should know.

Now, the media's attention had transferred to the Manchester United team's infighting.

When Ferguson was criticizing Cristiano Ronaldo, Twain gave him a glance. The red flush on the old man's face was even deeper, he had probably been venting in the locker room a moment ago.

Twain sat, remembering. Cristiano Ronaldo was temporarily expelled from Manchester United by Ferguson and returned to Portugal to recover in the middle of December 2004; now it was November 28, not far from that day.



## Chapter 265: Wood Learned to Be A Star Player Part 2

What directly triggered it in that timeline was the fact that their gap between Chelsea and Arsenal in total points had not narrowed due to the 1:1 equalizer by Fulham. As a result, in the locker room after the match, Alan Smith, the one who had scored the goal, accused Ronaldo of playing too independently and not knowing how to cooperate with his teammates. The two men's quarrel developed into a physical fight. Ferguson then announced that Ronaldo's condition was not good enough and that he needed to return to his hometown in Portugal for a period of time.

There was a smirk on Twain's face as he thought about this. Maybe the new trigger would be Nottingham Forest's 2:2 draw against Manchester United.

Of the history that he was familiar with, how much had he personally changed, and how much more would he still change?

Because Ferguson had inadvertently diverted the attention of the media in the post-match press conference, Ronaldo became the focus of everyone's discussion, and Twain was liberated. He watched the show happily from the sidelines and wondered if Ronaldo would be back in Portugal sooner than he remembered.

Twain, who fully understood the situation, felt that this was quite interesting compared to the history that he had experienced and remembered.

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The next day, a large photograph of Ronaldo's face was published in The Sun. Everyone was discussing the internal problems of Manchester United, and ignored Nottingham Forest.

More and more hot news items were dug up by the loathsome reporters, things like the fact that Manchester United team had long put up with the Portuguese kid; that van Nistelrooy and Ronaldo did not get along; that Gary Neville had criticized Ronaldo for not considering his teammates while playing; and so on.

The British tabloids were as lively as festive celebrations these days.

However, Nottingham's local media was completely disinterested in the drama between Ronaldo and Manchester United. Their focus was on the Forest team and George Wood, "the genius," "the prodigy," "the phenomenon." All of those titles were put on him.

At first, a player like Wood had a limited number of fans, people like Fat John and his group, with no female fans in sight.

However, when the Forest team was back in Nottingham on the first day training, Twain saw several young female fans outside the training grounds holding pictures of Wood and hoping for their idol's autograph.

The girls were young and full of youthful vigor. Whenever Wood was close to the wire fence on this side, they would shriek out his name.

As a result, the team whistled non-stop during training. Everyone was familiar with Wood after interacting with him for a long time, and knew that although this kid did not look friendly, his character was still good. He would not get mad at that kind of innocuous joking.

“George, you have female fans!” Wes Morgan was probably the player that Wood got along with the best, because they were from the Nottingham youth team and had partnered together before. Taking advantage of the break interval during training, the players sat around Wood and joked about him.

“Are you jealous, Wes?” Ribéry asked next to him.

“How is that possible? I already have a girlfriend...” Wes’s retort drew laughter from everyone.

In the video room, Twain and Kerslake had just finished analyzing the training. Dunn’s method of recording videos of the training on the youth team had produced excellent results. Because of that, Twain brought it to the First Team, and the results were equally good. When they came out, they saw that the players sat together, chatting and laughing. Twain and Kerslake smiled at each other.

The team was in a good mood. Even though their results were uneven, he did not have anything to worry about as the manager.

He went over and stood outside the crowd as he said to Wood, “Hey, George. Aren’t you going to sign your autographs for those pretty girls? Do you really have the heart to disappoint them?”

Upon hearing that, the players did not have to look back to know that their chief was there.

“I ...” Wood had never dealt with any female fans, not to mention the keen female fans who were waving at him from a distance and screaming whenever they saw him look over.

“What are you hesitating for? George, you’re a star now, and you can’t do anything to disappoint the fans.” Twain was egging Wood on. “Go and sign autographs for them! That’s part of training!”

Wood turned to glance at the serious-looking Twain and got up from the ground. Then he walked towards the overjoyed female fans. He did not look like he was on his way to sign autographs for his fans. He looked more like he was going to meet his maker.

Then someone laughed.

Twain nodded and commented behind him, “Don’t laugh, boys. I bet those girls will like him even more now. These days, girls all like unfeeling, cool guys!”

The laughter became louder.

Indeed, as Twain expected, Wood had a stern expression all throughout the ordeal of signing the autographs for a few girls, and also gave in to their request for a group photo. In the end, he did not make them unhappy. He actually became even more wildly popular with them.

After that one game, George Wood truly became famous. Twain knew that such scenes would become commonplace in the future. For Wood, this might be a good chance to gradually change his personality. Of course, Tang En would have to be behind him to give a push from time to time.

Damn, Wood, you’re like a tube of toothpaste. Unless you’re squeezed, nothing comes out of you!

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In the next league match on December 4, Nottingham Forest won against Portsmouth in an away game by 3:2. The Forest team's defense had become the focus of their attention. They had conceded two goals even though they were only facing Portsmouth. It was hair-raising for Twain to watch the game while he sat in the technical area.

At the start of the game, things were very smooth for the Forest team. They soon led by a goal. However, a mistake from their defensive line gave the opponents a chance to equalize the score. Then, in a spurt of energy, Portsmouth scored another goal. If Twain had not adjusted their tactics during the halftime interval, they might have lost the match.

After their eventual complete reversal, and turning of defeat into victory, Twain was not as excited as he had been at Old Trafford.

On December 11, in the 17th round of the league, in a match which all analysts were quite confident in before the game, Nottingham Forest lost to Charlton in the home game with a score of 1:2.

Fortunately, next, on the 15th, at the final game of the UEFA Europa League group stage, the Forest team defeated Partizan Belgrade on Forest's home grounds by 3:0 and successfully advanced from the qualifying round group stage, which gave them a buffer.

However, just as they achieved their victory in the European tournament, when they returned to the league competition, the Forest team lost to Birmingham City F.C. by 0:2.

Twain knew it was time to make a change.

### **Chapter 266: A New Goalkeeper Part 1**

The team was practicing on the training field with assistant manager David Kerslake leading. Meanwhile, Tang En was in the Chairman's office with Evan Doughty. They were both watching the ongoing training through an enormous French window.

"Tony, is there a problem with the team?"

Evan was clearly asking the obvious. Currently, the team had two straight losses in the League. Furthermore, since Tang En had taken the initiative to approach him, even a fool would be able to deduce there was a problem. As if realizing that his question was silly, Evan continued, "I meant to ask what the problem is."

Tang En peered down at the training grounds and hesitated briefly before nodding.

"Yeah, Evan. We may need you to fork out some money again. There's a position that needs to be filled. Within the 18 rounds of the League, our team loses goals to the opponent in practically every match. Based on the recent matches, I have to say that Darren Ward is no longer able to fulfill my expectations."

"Darren Ward? Are you planning to buy a new goalkeeper during the Winter transfer window?"

“Yes. I already have a candidate, but we might face competition from elsewhere...” In fact, Tang En knew. The competitor that Forest would be facing was the opponent who had made George Wood an overnight star: Manchester United.

“So, in the financial sense, I really need the club’s full-hearted support.”

Evan did not immediately respond but lowered his head in deep thought.

Tang En was in no hurry. He stood at the side as if watching the training. He understood Evan’s difficulties.

After all, he had spent quite recklessly during the summer. The English Premier League was rather different from Serie A or La Liga. Spending several million pounds on transfer fees was a considerable expenditure for a club that was neither considered rich or powerful. Unlike the La Liga, it had once been practically unheard of for an English Premier League team to spend a hundred million in one summer buying players.

Due to a champion level manager, Mourinho, joining Abramovich’s Chelsea this summer, their expenditure also rose to a champion level. Abramovich drove the consumption boom in the English Premier League scene; this summer, the spending of English Premier League clubs on player transfers increased tremendously.

According to convention, Nottingham Forest, who had just been newly promoted and who had recently gone through a financial crisis, would be lucky to get a five or six-million-pound budget for the transfer. However, Tang En had asked for 12 million and basically squeezed the finances of the team dry. He also understood that the monetary request would not be as easily agreed to by Evan as during the summer.

“I’m very interested to hear your target, Tony.” Evan was in deep consideration and still did not agree.

“Fulham F.C. and Netherlands National Football team’s goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar,” said Tang En.

Evan dug around in his mind in recollection, seemingly having some impression.

“The tall lanky one? He’s pretty good, but I heard that Manchester United is also interested in him.”

Tang En laughed wryly. “That’s why we need to prepare more funds... The only condition we can appeal with is to increase the transfer fees and meet the salary demands of the Dutch man.”

“How much is his weekly salary in Fulham F.C.?”

“40 thousand pounds.” Tang En held up four fingers.

Evan frowned. If they wanted Netherland’s national goalie, their offered salary could not go beneath that value. But doing so would inevitably destroy the current pay structure within Forest Team. The most highly-paid in Forest player right now was Viduka; his weekly salary was only 40 thousand. Even for George Wood, who had recently shot to fame, his weekly salary remained the same as that of the contract signed last season: a sum of 2,500 pounds.

“How high of a transfer fee are you expecting, Tony?” Evan asked again.

"I think..." Tang En recalled briefly. Manchester United signed on Edwin van der Sar in July next year. How much did that cost them? Three hundred? Five hundred? I remember it was a rather special number... Got it!

"It should be no less than 2.5 million pounds."

"Why 2.5 million?"

"Well, if we go any lower, Fulham F. C. probably wouldn't agree. They spent more than five million pounds when they first bought the Netherlander from Juventus. Now that Edwin van der Sar is almost 34, he can't possibly be sold at a higher price than before. But it can't go too low either. After all, we aren't the only party interested in Edwin van der Sar."

Hearing Tang En's explanation, Evan nodded. "You're right, Tony. But surely your candidate list doesn't have just one name?"

Evan was not wrong; Tang En would not put all his eggs in a basket. "Of course... I have many names, but I'm afraid the most suitable candidate is Edwin van der Sar. Evan, do you know France's national goalkeeper, Frey? He's the main goalkeeper for Parma. Even with Parma in a financial crisis, we would probably need to fork out a much higher transfer fee if we want to get him. Plus, we'd also face competition from Manchester United. Their goalkeeper issue in this season was as apparent as ours. To save some money, we could consider loaning Toldo from Inter Milan. However, I don't think that would be a wise choice. His performances have been deteriorating tremendously... Otherwise, I also have several names of younger goalkeepers. But they are all much too young. They belong to the future and would not be able to solve our current problem."

Listening to Tang En's analysis, Evan had to admit that his proposal came from deep thought.

"Alright, Tony. We're currently in talks with the bank about renewing our loans. If we're successful, you wouldn't be lacking funds come January next year."

Evan Doughty finally gave a nod.

On hearing that there would be funds for him, the heavy worry in Tang En's heart finally dissipated. Forest was currently in the stage of a transformational change and funds were required in many areas. Tang En felt quite grateful for Evan's cooperation. A club chairman like him was becoming harder and harder to find. Perhaps it was due to his identity as an American who knew nothing about football, but he was able to delegate more authority to Tang En and tended not to overly question matters of the team. So long as Tang En gave a reasonable explanation, Evan would make no objections.

Although they were not as rich as the old Russian, Tang En felt grateful whenever he recalled the differences between Abramovich and Mourinho in the future.

Just as he relaxed a tad, Evan suddenly said, "Of course, Tony. Since we're investing more, we'll need to get higher returns. What's our aim for this season?"

Tang En understood the meaning behind Evan's question. As the team's chairman, it would be impossible for Evan Doughty to not have known the aim for the season; that was something decided upon before the season began. He nodded to Evan.

“We are not just aiming to avoid relegation. By the end of this season, I hope to appear in the list of teams eligible for the European tournament.”

Evan burst out laughing. “I’ll say. We are pretty in sync, Tony!”

Tang En scratched his head and chuckled.

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The League was still ongoing, but Nottingham Forest had already sent someone to get in contact with Fulham F.C. To Tang En, his greatest advantage was that he knew Manchester United’s cards. Ferguson had been making secret overtures to Edwin van der Sar for a while, and the media had long been reporting on the matter. However, Manchester United still had a lot of options, so they did not make any substantive contact.

Frey, who was unhappy in Parma; Juventus goalkeeper Buffon; and goalie Casillas from Real Madrid. As a rich and powerful team, Manchester United would always have some sense of superiority over Forest. The players they picked had to be of value. Although Edwin van der Sar was once numbered among the top few goalkeepers internationally, he was already 34 years old. It would be difficult for Manchester United to spend too much money on buying an older guy who would be retiring in a year or two; Manchester United’s chief executive, David Gill, would not agree to it.

In the end, after the reported failure of Manchester United’s attempts to bring in both Buffon and Casillas, they bought Edwin van der Sar over for only 2.5 million pounds. When Edwin van der Sar came over to Manchester United, very few people looked well upon him. After all, he was an old veteran. Everyone thought that Ferguson had bought Edwin van der Sar as emergency first-aid and that Manchester United would continue their search for outstanding goalkeepers in the transfer market. Indeed, the rumors of their involvement with Casillas never once stopped.

The financial situation at Fulham F.C. was not very good, and Edwin van der Sar was still drawing a salary of 40 thousand per week; Fulham could no longer withstand it. They would happily respond to an interested buyer, though they still needed to put up some show of reluctance.

In the face of Forest’s asking price, Fulham F.C. initially started with the position of “Edwin van der Sar is our primary goalkeeper. He’s not off-limits, it’s impossible to get him cheaply.”

Under Tang En’s instructions, Nottingham Forest replied, “We definitely wouldn’t be paying five million for an old player!”

Fulham F.C. also knew that. The buyer was no fool. So they brought up Manchester United. “Manchester United is also interested in Edwin van der Sar right now...”

Nottingham’s reply was, “Have they made an offer?”

The answer was a definite no. There were only three clubs that still had interest in Edwin van der Sar. One was the rumored Manchester United – notice the “rumored.” The other was a Netherland football team, Ajax. However, Edwin van der Sar had lived in England for four years and had gotten used to the football and lifestyle here; he no intentions to return to the Netherlands. After all, the English Premier League was considered a top-level League. The third club was Nottingham Forest, who had come knocking at their door.

Of the three, the only club who had made an offer was Forest.

## Chapter 267: The New Goalkeeper Part 2

After analyzing the situation, Fulham F.C. agreed to discuss terms with the Forest team regarding Edwin van der Sar. When Forest first offered 2 million pounds, Fulham turned it down without a thought. They felt that if Forest team was truly hoping to acquire Edwin van der Sar, they should at least show enough sincerity.

As such, Forest team upped the offer to 2.5 million. This time, Fulham hesitated for a while and made no prompt reply.

As they were hesitating, the Nottingham Evening Post published an interview article with Tang En. In the article, Tang En spoke of matters relating to the football team, one of which was their issue with the goalkeeper. While he did not deny the discussion with Fulham F.C., he still made no confirmation of Edwin van der Sar's transferral. Regarding goalkeepers, he made mention of Frey in Parma and expressed his admiration for a goalkeeper like him. Thinking of the goals lost by Forest and Parma's recent financial situation, everyone thought Tony Twain must be interested in Frey and hoping to bring him to England.

Forest's and Manchester United's expansive hunt for a goalkeeper was no longer news; Forest's goal losses in the first half of the season were ranked at the top. Everyone could tell that Darren Ward was done.

After lengthy consideration, Fulham finally agreed to Forest's offer of 2.5 million pounds. Now, Tang En could directly discuss terms with Edwin van der Sar.

Before this half of the season, Forest had held almost no allure for Edwin van der Sar. But the situation had taken a turn. Nottingham Forest successfully entered the knock-out phase of the UEFA Europa League and was in the top ranks of the English Premier League. Other than losing to Liverpool, Forest had the upper-hand practically whenever they played against a strong team. They exhibited abilities that were completely mismatched with their identity as a newly promoted team. Edwin van der Sar was an intelligent man. While there was not even a glimpse of a shadow of the promise with Manchester United, this was a real opportunity in front of him. He had long been eager to leave Fulham F.C, which was half-dead. Nearing the end of his professional career, wasn't it good that he could still join a club that aspired to something?

He did not know that after the summer transferral next year to Manchester United, he would not only help Manchester United win a league championship but would also become one of the most stable players in Manchester United.

Forest promised no adjustment to his salary and would maintain it at a weekly fee of 40 thousand. There were also additional rewards should he perform well. His contract would span two and a half years, and thereafter they would decide if the contract should be renewed after a review of his condition. After all, Edwin van der Sar would be 36 in two years, and no one knew how well he could still perform at that point.

Edwin van der Sar was extremely satisfied with the contract and signed it.

Before Christmas, the official website of Nottingham Forest and numerous media sources reported that the Dutch goalkeeper from Fulham F.C., Edwin van der Sar, had signed a contract with Forest team. The contract would take effect on January 1, 2005, until June 30, 2007. Concrete details of the salary were not publicised.

Tang En was delighted about Edwin van der Sar's final decision to join Forest. To him, although the Dutch veteran was not part of the plan for Forest, his arrival enabled Forest to pass through the next two years with some stability. With this time, Tang En could continue to unearth young and promising goalies in the transfer market. Furthermore, Forest's defensive line also needed Edwin van der Sar's experience. Hierro was already 36 years old. With his age and affected health, he would not get many chances to be fielded.

The goalkeeper was a position that would not be easily changed once it stabilized. Tang En felt at ease with Edwin van der Sar directing defense at the back.

Once again, Tony Twain successfully snatched a coveted player right from under Alex Ferguson's nose. It seemed that the feud between the two would only get bigger and bigger. After snatching away the supposed main goalkeeper for Manchester United, who would they pick in the future to re-enact their glory?

Tang En could not find the answer. On another note, Tang En had no way of knowing the expression on Sir Ferguson's face after hearing news of Edwin van der Sar getting stolen by Forest.

Secretly, Tang En did not think there would be any statements such as, "I greatly admire him" appearing between him and such a legend of a manager within the English Premier League.

Why so? It was not that Ferguson looked down on Tang En, or that Tang En was a snob. It was because, in the future, they would become each other's most ferocious opponents.

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Before Christmas, the League matches reached the 18th round. With seven wins, six draws, and five losses, Nottingham Forest was ranked eighth with a total of 27 points. At their best, they were ranked fourth. If not for their streak of lost goals in their recent league matches, they could have sat steadily at rank five.

Tang En was saddened by their two-match losing streak to teams whose abilities were only low to middle tier. Now that they have signed on Edwin van der Sar, he hoped it could change Forest's terrible ball-loss count.

The League's 19th round of matches was held on December 26. Nottingham Forest, who had lost two matches in a row, would be on their home ground welcoming the fight against Southampton, who was ranked second from the bottom. This was a great chance for the team to break out of their lull.

The day before the match, the team only trained for half a day. Tang En only remembered that it was Christmas when he saw another Christmas tree being put up in the living room of Building One and the presents piled up beneath it.



Another year had passed in a blink of an eye.

He stood beneath the tree watching the players engrossed in searching for packages with their names. Everything felt so familiar. Other than having changed a few people, it was no different from a year ago.

When he spotted Wood not participating in the fun but walking towards him, he immediately knew something was going on.

“Merry Christmas, George.”

“Merry Christmas, Sir.”

“How’s your mother feeling?”

“Good. She asked me to invite the both of you for dinner tonight at our place.” As Wood said that he looked around him, seemingly somewhat embarrassed.

“Both of us?”

“You and that...” Wood frowned as he recalled, and continued. “Dunn, the Chinese guy.”

Tang En scratched his head. He had forgotten about Dunn... Was his subconscious hoping that there wouldn’t be a third wheel? There was no way he could know.

“Sure. When training is over, we can go over to the Youth Training Grounds. I have to go call him.”

Wood nodded at him but made no move to leave. Instead, he dug out a small box from his coat and thrust it into Tang En’s hands. He then turned to return to the Christmas tree in search of his own present.

Tang En tore off the wrapper. A shiny ZIPPO lighter sat in the box. It was not a particularly valuable gift. But a small greeting card lay beneath the lighter, and on it was scrawled,

“Thank you. Merry Christmas.”

Tang En smiled.

## **Chapter 268: Merry Christmas Part 1**

When Twain took Wood to the youth training base to look for Dunn, Dunn had just finished his day’s work and was ready to go home as planned.

“Don’t go back, we have other plans for tonight,” Twain said to him.

Dunn looked at Wood, who was with Twain, and nodded. “I understand. But...”

“But?”

“This isn’t going to work.” Dunn pointed to himself.

Twain then noticed that Dunn was wearing an oversized sports jacket. He was not used to wearing such attire. Even in normal training, he was dressed more or less like a mob boss: a dark red suit to represent the Forest team's dark red color, a white shirt, and a black wool coat.

Tang En looked Dunn up and down and agreed. "Yes, we'll make a trip back first." He turned to Wood and said, "George, you go back first. We'll go over when we're ready."

Wood nodded and turned to leave.

Twain and Dunn left in the other direction, which was closer to Branford Garden Lane where they lived.

They passed through the youth training ground, where nearly all of the young players had left. And now, only the turf maintenance personnel were there, watering the training field that had just been used.

Twain paused for a moment on the sidelines to look around at the open training base. From behind, Dunn asked him, "What are you thinking about?"

"I worked here for half a season," said Twain, pointing to the training ground. "No, not even half a season. My time here was very short, but I've used what I learned during that time all the way until now. I've read all the notes and books that you put on the bookshelf at home." He turned to Dunn and said, "Your mentor was Paul Hart, and my mentor is you."

"Why do you want to talk about that today?" Dunn did not smile. He just continued his questions.

"No reason... Just, another year has passed. Feeling a little rueful."

Dunn, who stood behind Twain, wanted to say something, but in the end, he gave up the idea and remained silent.

"A year ago, George was still training on this field, and I had promised to put him on the First Team by Christmas. At that point, I still thought I'd let him train on First Team, play in the youth and reserves games, occasionally put him on the First Team's substitutes list, and then bring him on from the bench in the last moments from time to time to feel the atmosphere of an official game. And after a season, I thought I could slowly try to let him play more games... But the kid's performance far exceeded my plan, and my expectations..." Twain looked up at the overcast sky. "Now, Dunn, did you know? I get asked by several football clubs almost daily for prices, and they are all about him."

Dunn nodded. "When I was with the Forest youth team, there was no one like that on the youth team." He meant that Wood was a rookie of Twain's own discovery; it was a roundabout way of complimenting Twain's ability to nurture young players and unearth talent.

Twain smiled back at him in thanks. "Let's go."

When the two men came to the side door of the youth team training base, they saw Gareth Bale and his father, Senior Bale, who was putting a scarf of young Gareth.

Senior Bale faced the door and saw the two managers walking side by side. He quickly waved to say hello to them.

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Twain! Merry Christmas, Mr. Dunn!"

“Merry Christmas, Mr. Bale. Why haven’t you gone back yet?” Twain was surprised to see his first contract signing here.

“We’re just about to go back by car.”

Young Bale turned and said hello to the two coaches.

He was stronger and more confident than when Twain had last seen him, and he seemed to be doing very well on the youth team.

Dunn, who stood next to Twain, said to Gareth Bale, “Bale, don’t forget to come on the afternoon of the 29th.”

Bale nodded with delight.

Dunn was referring to a Christmas award ceremony held inside the Nottingham Forest Club. On that day, a number of awards selected from within the club, such as best player of the year, best coach of the year, best young player of the year, and rookie of the year would be presented. There would also be a few very interesting awards, such as the year’s most popular coach, the year’s most popular teammate, the year’s best turf maintenance staff, and so on.

As the manager, Twain already knew which of the awards belonged to whom, but the players themselves only knew who had entered the shortlist. Of course, whether they were nominated or not, they all would have to attend the event, which was also a Christmas party.

In the past, the Forest team had had a lot of ups and downs, and when they were at the lowest ebb of their fortunes and faced a financial crisis, the club was not in the state of mind to organize such activities. Now that Evan was in charge and their situation had stabilized, he wanted to start up the tradition again and make it more modern. It was also a great opportunity to create goodwill, cultivate the players’ sense of belonging to the club, and re-establish the image of Nottingham Forest.

After seeing Gareth and his father off, Twain and Dunn went home to freshen up and get ready for their appointment.

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The two men slowly walked back to 13 Branford Garden Lane, and Twain saw a person seated at the door of his house from a distance. He wondered who it was. He walked closer, and was astonished. “Shania!”

When she heard Twain’s voice, Judy Shania Jordana, who was sitting at the doorway and nodding off, suddenly looked up. Upon seeing that the man who stood before her was indeed Tony Twain, a happy smile appeared on her face. “Merry Christmas, Uncle Tony!”

“Merry Christmas, Shania... What are you doing here?”

Hearing Twain’s question, Shania pouted. “Did you forget? I told you I’d spend Christmas with you.”

“No, I didn’t mean it like that. I mean... Aren’t you supposed to be with your aunt and family tonight?” Twain hurriedly explained, as he knew Shania had misunderstood.

"I spent Christmas Eve with them, and came here today. I specifically didn't call you, just because I wanted to surprise you. Am I not welcome?" Shania was still pouting.

"Why would I not welcome you?" Twain opened the door. "Come in!"

Shania picked up a backpack that was disproportionately large relative to her size, and smiled to Dunn next to him. "Merry Christmas, Uncle Dunn! I won't be in your way, will I?"

Dunn shook his head. "No, Tony already told me about this. He cleans your room every week..."

Twain cleared his throat beside him.

Shania gave Twain a sideways glance and her face finally revealed an impish smile. Then she entered with her head held high and chest puffed out. Behind her, Twain waited for Dunn to walk up and softly muttered, "Why do you have so much to say today?"

"Didn't you want me to be more outgoing around people?" Dunn asked.

Twain had no retort. Darn, I've no one to blame but myself.

"Hey, why aren't you both coming in? What are you talking about out there?" Shania turned back and found that Twain and Dunn were standing outside the door.

"Um, nothing..." Twain came in first, and Dunn went straight upstairs to his room to take a shower and change.

Shania was very much at home here. She went straight upstairs and opened her bedroom door. It was exactly as it had been in the summer. The room was very clean, and it seemed that Dunn was right. Tony did clean the unoccupied room every week. She let out a yelp of excitement, and then, with her backpack still in the doorway, dove onto the bed and hugged the big Totoro soft toy. She buried her face in it and rubbed its belly, making the toy squeak non-stop.

At that time, Twain was considering another problem in the living room.

Sophia had originally invited him and Dunn to her place to celebrate the holiday, but now Shania was here as well. He could not leave this young girl here alone and go to the dinner with Dunn. And he also could not refuse Sophia's invitation just to accompany Shania. The only real solution was to bring Shania to Sophia's home.

He did not know if the young girl would agree with that arrangement.

Thinking of that, Twain went upstairs to ask Shania's opinion. "Shania?"

"Yes?" When she heard Twain called her, Shania sat up from the bed.

"Are you hungry?"

Shania shook her head. "Not hungry!"

"Well, are you tired?"

Shania continued shaking her head. "Not tired!"

“In that case... let’s go out later for an appointment.”

“An appointment?”

“Um... Do you know George Wood?”

Shania nodded. “Of course! How can I call myself a Forest fan if I don’t even know who Wood is?”

Twain laughed; the young girl was so adorable when she spoke so earnestly. “His mother invited us to dinner this evening.”

“Fantastic, I’ll go too!”

“Of course, how can I leave you alone in a cold and dark house? Put on your best clothes.” Twain winked at Shania and then left the room, remembering to close the door behind him.

When he went downstairs, Dunn had already changed his clothes and was sitting down on the couch. He was wearing a dark blue jacket with a turtleneck sweater. He looked nothing like the football manager Dunn, who wore a sports jacket all day.

Seeing Twain come down, Dunn said to him, “I’ll admit it...”

“What?”

“The new Tony Twain’s life is much better than the old Tony Twain’s.”

Twain laughed. “Isn’t that good?”

Dunn nodded and muttered, “Yes... It’s very good...”

## **Chapter 269: Merry Christmas Part 2**

While they were chatting, there were footsteps on the stairs behind them. “Uncle Tony.”

Twain and Dunn turned at the same time, and then they both stood in amazement.

Shania wore a tight-fitting black dress. The dress hugged closely to Shania’s legs, and the layers of ruffles gradually fanned out from her calves, touching the floor. It made her look like a beautiful black lotus flower. She did not wear any other accessories, just that simple black dress. Standing on the stairs, she looked like the model she was.

“I didn’t bring any nice clothes, just this dress that I don’t usually wear. Is this okay, Uncle Tony?”

“Oh my god ... Shania, are you in a runway show? There’s no need to dress like that...” Twain regained his composure.

“You’re the one who asked me to wear my most beautiful clothes!” Shania whined.

“Well, it’s my fault ... I forgot that you’re a model. Honestly, you look good in whatever you wear. Just don’t wear that. You could catch a cold.” Twain apologized quickly.

Shania gave a huff, and then lifted the hem of her dress to run upstairs. Her rapid footsteps were incongruent with her dignified and elegant image.

Twain wiped the sweat off his forehead and turned to see Dunn staring at him till he felt somewhat guilty. "Do I have something on my face?"

Dunn looked away.

When Shania appeared again in front of the two men, she had changed out of her dress into a pair of skinny jeans and long boots, a light beige sweater with a red scarf around her neck, and a silver-gray coat, not yet worn.

"Well..." Twain thought if he had known earlier, he would not ask her to change clothes. After all that back and forth, she was back to her original appearance that she had worn when he saw Shania at the doorstep, except that she did not have that big bag with her now. "Good! You look nice!"

Shania rolled her eyes at Twain and then looked at Dunn.

Dunn also nodded. "Very pretty."

"Let's go, we shouldn't make the host wait." Twain wanted to quickly end this somewhat embarrassing situation, so he reminded everyone to set off.

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Wood's new home was close to the Wilford training base; he ran to get to the training grounds, unlike the star players, who drove. Therefore, Wood's house was not too far from Twain's place, and the three of them took a stroll over.

Along the way, Shania was very excited and chatty. Twain tried not to make it obvious that he was only half-listening to her, because he now had another headache: when they arrived at Wood's place, how was he going to introduce Shania to Wood's mother, Sophia?

'This is my friend, Shania.'

What is the relationship between me and Shania? It seems a little too unfamiliar to say we're friends. So, if we are not friends, then what are we? Relatives? That's a blatant lie.

As a result, Twain still had not figured out how to introduce Shania by the time they reached Wood's doorstep.

Wood was surprised to see another person when he opened the door. Twain cleared his throat. "George, this is Judy Shania Jordana. I think you already met in Newcastle?"

Wood nodded, then said to Shania, "Hello, Merry Christmas."

Wood was now the Forest team's big star player, but Shania wasn't intimidated. She greeted him with a relaxed smile. "Hello Wood, Merry Christmas! You'll have to give me an autograph later!"

In the face of such a lively girl, Wood could not refuse; not to mention, Twain had brought her. He nodded somewhat hesitantly. "Okay, okay."

Twain chuckled on the side, and Wood gave him a glare before stepping aside to let them enter.

Still busy preparing for dinner, Sophia came out of the kitchen, smiling and ready to welcome Twain and Dunn. She was a little surprised to see Shania, but her expression was fleeting, and no one noticed.

On the way here, Twain gave Shania a brief introduction about Sophia, including the process of how they met. of course, he omitted the part about how the two of them almost slept together within five minutes of their meeting. Even though they did not do anything, it was better not to confuse things by speaking about it. Twain simply buried the matter within.

Apart from him and Sophia, it would be best if no one else knew.

Shania was very happy to meet Sophia. Twain's story, combined with thoughts of her own parents, made her feel very envious of Wood for having a mother like her. Her parents always forced her to do things she didn't want to do, and Wood's mother always wanted Wood to do what he loved.

Because of this contrast, Shania's impression of Sophia was quite favorable. She even bought a shawl as a gift for her along the road there.

Sophia looked at Twain, and then at Shania, who had a bright smile. She smiled and accepted the gift. Then, after a few exchanges of pleasantries, she went back to the kitchen to get busy. Shania offered to help, but Sophia felt that as a guest, Shania should not be helping.

Then, Twain made a suggestion that nobody would feel awkward about. "How about this—Sophia can make us her best Jamaican food, Dunn and I will prepare Chinese food for you. And then..." He looked at Shania. "Shania can also cook pretty well."

"But Mr. Twain, you're all our guests, how can I let my guests ..."

Twain anticipated Sophia's words with a smile. "Ma'am, if you think about it that way, that means we're keeping each other at arm's length! I think it would be great for everyone to make their best dishes in the kitchen, not to mention festive. Who says we have to follow Christmas traditions? It's a holiday. What does it matter, as long as we're having a good time?"

Shania was the first to respond to his view. "That's right! Uncle Tony is right, I think it's fun! At my aunt's place in Newcastle, they always have rules like that, and I don't like it at all."

Looking at the lovely Shania, Sophia also laughed. "All right, Mr. Twain. I guess having a different kind of Christmas could be nice."

So the five people crowded into the kitchen. Fortunately, Wood and his mother had moved out of the slums. The kitchen in their new house was big enough for five people to be busy in it at the same time. Although it was still slightly crowded, they jostled each other and shouted happily.

"Ah! The water's boiling, Dunn! Quick, put in the meat. Be careful, don't let it splatter..." As Twain scrambled to instruct Dunn to put the meat into the pot, he also turned to look at Shania, who was watching over a simmering aluminum pot. "Smells good, Shania, what are you making?"

"Feijoada!" said Shania as she watched after the steaming pot.

"What is that?"

“Delicious food... Unfortunately, there’s no cream or tapioca flour here...” Shania smacked her lips.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Shania. I didn’t know we needed to prepare those ingredients...” Sophia hastily apologized as a host who had not adequately prepared.

“It’s okay, Aunt Sophia! It’s all Uncle Tony’s fault. If he had said so earlier, we could have gone shopping!”

“Excuse me, I only thought of this in the spur of the moment. Shania, you should compliment me for thinking quickly on my feet instead.”

“The meat is going to be overcooked,” Dunn reminded him, watching them chatting happily.

“Ah... scoop them out, quickly!” Twain almost grabbed the pot without mitts.

“What is this?” Next to him, Wood took the colander to block Twain’s hands.

“Thank you... It’s twice-cooked pork! Twain used a ladle to fish out the pork from the pot, and then prepared to slice it.

“Pork that is cooked twice?” From the name that Twain had said, Wood had a hard time understanding what this dish was.

“Um...” Twain did not know how to translate it properly. The name of the Chinese dish had always been a deeply profound question that had always bothered the local “experts.” He recalled how, in order to prepare for the 2008 Olympic Games, a series of specially translated names for the dishes was introduced. When he had read the list online, he had burst into laughter. He had not thought he would be in this position now.

“Well, it’s a delicious dish, the name is not important. The key is what’s in it ...”

“Hui Guo Rou.” Twain did not know how to say it, but Dunn used Pinyin to read it out.

Having been to China before and eaten this dish, Shania giggled next to them.

After an hour of cooking, the exquisite dishes of different countries were placed on the table. Twain’s twice-cooked meat did not look too presentable. Wood frowned as he looked at the dark substances.

“Is it really okay?”

“Stop talking so much!” Twain admonished him and said, “The food is meant to be eaten, not to be looked at.”

Shania was trying so hard not to laugh that her shoulders shook, making Tang En doubt his excuse. Sophie also bowed her head and smiled politely. Only Dunn did not laugh at Twain. He calmly said, “Let Tony have a bite first.”

Shania finally could not help herself. She just leaned over the table and laughed loudly.

Seeing that, Twain coughed and raised his glass. “Ahem! Well... Let’s make a toast to our gathering on this wonderful night. Um, come on, raise your glass. Shania, stop laughing! Laugh again, and you won’t have anything to eat!”



Shania looked up for her glass. Because she had laughed so much, her face was as rosy as the wine in the glass. "This is so much fun! I'll come again next Christmas, and we can all spend it together!" She declared loudly.

"Oh, it's so lovely that you all could come." It was rare for Sophia to have such a joyous occasion. The cold, bleak days of the past were over.

Wood was naturally happy when his mother was happy.

Dunn looked at the glass in his hand; it reflected five smiling faces, including his own. How long has it been since I've seen this look on my face?

"I agree with Shania. We'll be together next Christmas!" Twain nodded and said, "Come on..." he raised his glass. "Merry Christmas!"

### **Chapter 270: The New Sponsor; An Ambassador Part 1**

Perhaps it was because of the joyous Christmas dinner, but George Wood was performing particularly well. The voice of critics from weeks ago had yet to completely disappear, but Wood gave the critics slap after slap to their faces with his consistent performance.

On day two of the match, Forest won 2:1 on their home ground against Southampton. Despite the continual loss of goals, they still managed to win the match in the end.

On December 29, Forest challenged Man City in an away match. In that match, Tang En was resolved to improve their defense. In Maine Road, he arranged for the team's strategy to be defensive counterattacking. Under fierce offense from Man City, Forest did not manage to counterattack. However, their defense underwent a tedious examination. Defensive midfielder George Wood and Gunnarsson were partnered as starters in the match. In the after-match evaluation, Wood received good reviews for his performance. Facing Man City's bombardment and suppression in their half of the field, George Wood performed brilliantly and diffused threats to the goal on several occasions. This helped Darren Ward, whose skills were clearly falling short of his wishes. Wood's efforts allowed Forest to take away a point from the away match.

During the press conference after the match, Kevin Keegan indignantly told the reporters, "It's so unfair, we have 11 people playing in the match, but Nottingham Forest has 12!"

Of course, he was not talking about Forest getting a point due to aid from the referee. In truth, the referee would have been biased towards the home team, Man City. That would be the norm as well; after all, no referee would take the side of the away team, right?

The twelfth man Keegan spoke of was George Wood. The season was at its midpoint with the league matches on their 20th round and UEFA Europa League on its 6th. Including the matches for the EFL Cup, George Wood was present in all of them and for their entire duration. His body was not at all affected by his full attendance. In the match against Man City, his running speed remained the same from the first second to the last; he really knew how to use his body to compensate for his lack of technique and experience.

It was little wonder Keegan felt upset. His words echoed in the same way as a prior comment in the soccer scene referring a Brazilian right back, Cafu, as being a “man of three lungs.”

Since George Wood’s successful defense against Cristiano Ronaldo in the match with Manchester United and the equalizer he scored at the final minute, he was set on a steady path to becoming one of the hottest rookies of the English Premier League.

The topics regarding Wood had also begun increasing. The difference from before was that it used to be doubt; now it was all praise.

Tang En did not worry that such unrestrained and mushy praise would cause Wood to lose his composure and ruin his future. He knew the kind of person Wood was; he cared nothing for such praise. He did not yet understand how such an inflated reputation could benefit him.

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A day after the match, Nottingham Forest Club organized an internal Christmas dinner and gave out several awards in recognition of stellar performances, in various areas, of Forest’s personnel throughout the year. The method of selection was through a nomination vote held within the team. After that, an anonymous voting session was conducted. In other words, if a person was awarded as the best, he had surely received the recognition from the majority.

Based on Freddy Eastwood’s stable and outstanding performance since his entry into the team, as well as his repeated scoring in crucial moments, he received the honor of being the Best Player of the Year.

The Best Rookie of the Year award was also indisputably won by George Wood.

According to convention, award recipients were required to make an acceptance speech on stage. Eastwood was naturally glib, and making such a spontaneous speech was nothing more than chicken feed to him. He easily humored everyone, making them laugh in delight and bringing the atmosphere to a high point.

George Wood had never stood on the stage like this, speaking to so many people at once. Tang En was not sure which would trouble Wood more; handling such a situation or going head-on with Roy Keane again. When Tang En announced that “The Best Rookie Award of the Year goes to George Wood,” the entire place rang with enthusiastic claps. Some even whistled excitedly.

Wood, who sat beside his mother, was shocked at Tang En’s announcement. He looked around at the surrounding teammates cheering and whistling for him, as if in disbelief of his level of popularity.

Tang En stood on the stage and waved the translucent trophy at Wood. “George, if you don’t come to take the award, I’ll be bringing it home!”

Everyone chuckled in amusement.

Amidst the laughter, Sophia straightened the shirt collar inside her son’s suit. With tenderness and pride, she said to Wood, “Go ahead, George. It’s impolite to make someone else wait.”

It was only at that point that Wood stood to walk up to the stage. He received the trophy from Tang En and held it in his hands, the coolness of the trophy calming him down.

“Say something, George.” Tang En passed a microphone over to Wood.

Wood held the microphone in his hands, biting his lips as he gazed out at the anticipating looks toward him.

What should he say?

When he had still been working as a porter, the men around him were all football fans. During their leisure time, they would often passionately discuss the matches held the day before. Most of them were supporters of Nottingham Forest. At that time, he did not imagine that he would ever become a Nottingham player and become the new topic of their discussions. He felt that that world was too far beyond himself; until one day, when he had bumped into someone on the street. Everything had changed then.

“I...” After an extended pause, Wood finally opened his mouth. “In the past, in the past, I’ve never... I never thou- thought that I would become a professional football player.”

Could this really be a long speech? Tang En thought gleefully to himself.

“I don’t know what to say...”

The large hall was silent. Everyone waited quietly with bated breath. They all knew that George was not good at speaking; they had hardly ever heard him say so much in one breath. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to see him standing in front of everyone speaking like this.

“I don’t know what to say... this is even harder than asking me to score against Manchester United...” Wood said with a straight face. Meanwhile, the audience laughed themselves into stitches. Even Tang En, standing behind him, was chuckling to himself.

“So, I can only thank everybody...” He bowed to the audience and left the stage.

Applause followed.

Even though he said so little, Tang En did not request him to say more. For a boy who hardly interacted with anyone, this was already a tremendous improvement. Growth was a very long journey and one could not ask for more.

Wood, who returned to his seat, received an encouraging kiss from his mother, making him somewhat abashed.

The following award given out was ‘Best Player’ for the Youth Team. The person receiving the award was Gareth Bale, whom Tang En had brought over from Southampton. Even though he was only 15 years old, he had long ago become the exception and was moved to the Under-18 Youth Team. Now, Tang En was just waiting for him to reach 16 years of age to sign a professional contract with him, firmly tying his future to them.

With the main awards already given out, the atmosphere became relaxed, and of all sorts of other awards were presented. Tang En was an expert at setting the atmosphere. Whether it was in the locker room, on the sidelines of the football field, or here, he could always make everyone laugh.

After half a season of battling, both managers and players could finally put the opponents, points table, and aim of the season behind them and relax.

The dinner commenced after the award ceremony. Tang En became the busiest person in the room, dragging around Shania, who came to join in the fun, and searching all around to get signatures.

Without any mention of Shania's actual age, no one would believe she was just a child.

As everyone smiled and nodded at Shania, giving their signatures to her, they were gossiping. "Oh— So, that's the girl that went out for dinner with Boss that day!"

Tang En, of course, knew what the group of boys was thinking, but he pretended not to see anything and continued bringing Shania around, introducing her, greeting others and asking for signatures. From this side to the other, and back again; his head spun.

He unknowingly led Shania to where Evan and Allan were. He had only started saying, "The two of them are..." when he felt something odd. He looked up and realized the club's chairman and marketing manager were both grinning at him.

"Tony, do we have to sign too?" They asked with raucous laughter.

"Uh..." Tony scratched his head embarrassedly. He had better introduce Shania to them both. "Judy Shania Jordana."

Evan nodded. "I know you, Miss Jordana. The week before last, I saw you at a fashion show."

Both Tang En and Shania looked at him with wide-eyed surprise. While Shania was surprised that the club's chairman before her would know of such a small-scaled launch of an unknown brand, Tang En was taken aback by the fact that she was already modeling at such a young age.

"Hmm." Evan appraised Shania, who was dressed casually. "You are completely different from when you were walking on the runway. I didn't recognize you earlier until Tony introduced you by name."

Shania made a face and raised her head slightly. She glanced at Tang En beside her and said to Evan Doughty, "Is that true?"

Evan smiled. "Yes, I agree."

Shania's resumed her usual expression and stuck her tongue out. "I don't like that, but as a model..."

Evan and Allan both nodded in understanding. Beside her, Tang En was momentarily distracted by the cool expression Shania had suddenly put on. He had never seen this side of Shania before. It created a sense of cool aloofness that put miles of distance between them. Was that what the model Shania was like?

It was little wonder why Shania did not like being a model. She was born with a cheerful and bubbly personality. Making someone as young as she put on a face to intimidate people was... not ethical.

I don't like that Shania either, Tang En thought in his heart.