

Champions 271

Chapter 271: The New Sponsor; An Ambassador Part 2

“Tony? Tony?” Evan’s voice sounded out.

“Ah? Evan? What’s the matter...” Tang En, who was jolted into awareness, saw Evan smiling at him mysteriously.

“Do you still remember the present you gave us last Christmas? The concept of a player database?”

Tang En nodded. At the mention of that, he became furious. The American company had made a product that was completely incompatible with his demands. He had known at one glance that it was created by someone who had no understanding of football. After a period of trial usage, he had tried to get them to revise the program, but the result of the revision still failed to satisfy him. At that point, he had simply terminated the partnership with them and temporarily shelved the plans.

“We know that the previous one was terrible... So Allan went searching again and found a company. They promised to make us a data system.”

“Do they have any proof of their competence?” asked Tang En.

Evan indicated for Allan to take over. Allan nodded at Tang En. “Tony, I think you’ll be satisfied with this company. They’re a local company, SI.”

Tang En was stumped for a second upon hearing the name. SI? SI! Was that the production team that developed the Championship Manager series as well as the FM series (Football Manager series) – Sports Interactive? He could not believe that Allan had managed to find them! Tang En admired the old American even more now.

Looking at Tang En’s expression, Allan knew he must have found the right company.

“They’ve agreed to start cooperating with us not only on the database system but in other areas too. When I approached them, they made some co-op requests that you might be interested in.”

Tang En looked at the somewhat bored Shania beside him and said, “Shania, do you want to get more signatures? If you use my name, no one will dare to refuse you. Actually, you just need to smile at them and they would definitely listen!”

Evan and Allan laughed.

Shania astutely realized that Tang En must be discussing some important matters and that her presence was inappropriate. She nodded and turned, walking into the crowd.

At that, Tang En pointed at some sofas ahead of them. “Let’s sit there and discuss.”

The three sat down and Tang En launched into a question. “Concretely, what are their proposals for cooperation?”

“They hope to become one of our sponsors; not by way of monetary funding, but technical sponsorship. In other words, there will not just be a single version of this database. They will be in charge of maintenance and further developments of better and more comprehensive abilities...”

Tang En nodded in understanding.

“And they also hope for you to become the game ambassador for the latest Football Manager game, FM2007.”

That request came unexpectedly to Tang En. He paused for a long while before realizing that he did not hear wrong and that Allan was not joking.

“Me? An ambassador?”

“Yes. There’s no monetary remuneration because it’s a cooperation. This will be their take-away from the sponsorship; they won’t be getting any money from us.”

Tang En went silent and delved into deep thought. In his mind, he was searching for all the information he could remember about SI and the FM series. Since it was a manager series that he considered up to standards, he had played from the earliest FIFA96 developed by EA until CM and FM. He was also aware that the FM series was a product after the split of SI and EIDOS.

Back then, SI had always overseen the development of CM while EIDOS had handled only the distribution. Later, both parties chose to go their separate ways for unknown reasons. EIDOS had inherited the title CM and the familiar operating interface. They chose a development team which previously oversaw “Gianluca Vialli’s Football Manager” to continue the production of CM. Meanwhile, SI inherited the gigantic player database as well as the source code of the game.

The two companies should have gone their separate ways the year before. The classic CM0304 would be the final version of the game that they would produce. After that, they pursued separate paths.

EIDOS was an old hand in the gaming industry; they had access to plenty of resources. Their inheritance of the name and the CM logo was equivalent to their continuation of the series. Meanwhile, SI was restarting their business. Other than the player database and source code, they had nothing else. Their initial steps would be crucial. Last month, SI had released “FM05,” a brand-new football manager game that took more than a year of development for retail sales. In comparison to CM, this was a completely unfamiliar game to both the players and the market. They urgently needed better advertising to promote the title.

At this point, Allan had coincidentally found SI and hoped for them to create a soccer database for the Forest team. SI then saw a new position from which they could advertise.

To SI, who held a network of more than 2500 researchers all over the world, it was more than simple for them to create a database based on Forest’s requirements. On the reverse, it was much more important for them to make use of this chance to establish a strategic partnership with an English Premier League team. Despite having once sponsored the newly established AFC Wimbledon team, that was only driven by a desire to show support for a club that was completely established by fans themselves; it could not be considered part of their business interests.

After putting together all those factors, Tang En more or less got the picture. Although he was a football manager, wasn't it also interesting for him to use some of his free time to be a game ambassador?

So, he nodded. "It's no problem; but how do they want me to represent them?"

"Oh, for now, there are plans to advertise through print media. You will also need to attend a press conference held by their company to announce our partnership. In addition to that, the cover of the new game will be using your image."

"They aren't planning to film a TV commercial?" Tang En was a little disappointed.

He remembered the television commercial filming of the current manager of the Japanese National Football Team, Zico from Brazil. It was for Pro Evolution Soccer. The timing for that seemed to be earlier; it appeared that Tang En would not be able to get the title of "The First Manager to Get on TV as a Game Ambassador."

Evan chuckled. "Tony, are you already thinking of switching careers? That would depend on their budget. As a new company, they probably don't have much money at the moment."

Tang En scratched his head. Although he was unable to get on a TV commercial and experience the feeling of being an actor, his vanity was somewhat appeased by his soon-to-be appearance on the cover of a game that would be known throughout the world.

"Other cooperative ventures could be slowly considered at a later stage. Now that you've agreed, I can reply to SI after Christmas. I think you'll definitely be happy with the database they come up with."

Tang En laughed. "It seems like you know quite a bit about SI, Alan."

"I did some special investigation. I can't make another mistake like the previous time." Allan answered with a grin.

Seeing that official business was concluded, Evan Doughty raised his wine glass. "Alright. Let us all forget about that for now. Tony and Allan, Merry Christmas. Thank you for the hard work you've put in this year."

"Of course. We've got to be working since you're paying us." Tang En raised his own glass. "Cheers. Merry Christmas to everyone. Next year, I think we'll be celebrating Christmas with an even better mood."

The three glasses gently clinked together, making a clear, crisp sound.

Chapter 272: Mr. Two Trillion Dollars Part 1

Allan's Christmas present for Twain was a large package. Twain did not even think about the collaboration with Sports Interactive. Surprisingly, had Allan clinched the deal. This not only brought a new sponsor for the club, but it made him a spokesperson for the game as well.

Obviously, the collaboration with SI would need to wait until Christmas was over, when there would be more things to do. This would include the press conference for the announcement, the cover, the

production of the new cover, packaging of the game, the shoot of the print, advertising for the game publicity, and so on.

The English Premier League was different from the other European tournaments in that there was no winter break. Although the English national manager, Sven-Göran Eriksson, had proposed a winter break a few years ago, the English Football Association did not adopt it. Not only was there no winter break, but the schedule for the Premier League was at its the most intensive directly before and after Christmas. The Forest team would be playing two consecutive games on the 26th and 28th. Such arrangements were common every year during that period.

The Forest team's Christmas party was over, and the calendar had turned to the new year. In a blink of an eye, 2005 had arrived. Tang En had been here for two years, which was not too long. But it was not short either. The current Twain and who he had been in January 3, 2003 were completely different. At that time, he had been pretending to be a manager; now, he had gradually developed into a qualified manager.

At first, he had not known anything. He had just relied on his past gaming experience in the Football Manager Game, watching all kinds of football-related news reports, and his own imagination to pretend he was a football manager. Due to good luck and coupled with a little talent, he was not dismissed halfway and ended up destitute.

Now, he no longer thought of himself as an impostor. He had faith in his ability and believed that he could lead the Forest team towards success.

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On January 1, before the Forest team played against Bolton Wanderers in a home game, the Forest team introduced the first player of the winter transfer period. The goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar came to report, and Twain attended the press conference with him. Naturally, before meeting the press, as the manager of the team, Tony Twain had an exchange with Edwin van der Sar in his office.

Van der Sar was brought by his agent. At the door of his office, Twain saw the Dutchman, who had come from London and who looked exactly as Tang En had guessed; tall, quiet and steady.

"Welcome to Sherwood Forest in Nottingham, and welcome to the Red Robber Gang. I'm the boss of this gang of robbers; you can call me chief, you can also call me boss or Tony, or whatever else you like." Twain's self-introduction was refreshing for Edwin van der Sar. He had been to many teams in his career, but he had never seen any football manager introduce their team and welcome newcomers in such a manner.

The Dutchman did not react because he was a little surprised. Next to them, the assistant manager, David Kerlake, laughed. "This is his style. You'll get used to it."

Van der Sar came forward to shake Twain's hand. "Hello, boss." The Dutchman was not used to calling a man who was only a year older than himself "Boss."

"I'm very glad you chose the Forest team, Edwin. I'm sure you didn't come here with the idea of retirement, did you?" Twain came straight to the point after shaking hands with Van der Sar.

Van der Sar nodded, "Of course not. If I wanted to retire, I could just have gone to Ajax."

When he heard Edwin's answer, Twain nodded and pointed out the door. "Yes, I agree. We all know why you made this choice. There's lots of media outside now. Did you just see? The car park is full."

Van der Sar nodded in confirmation.

"Many of them people questioned this transfer. They said that the Forest team would only spend money to pay for old guys who no one wanted, or that Edwin van der Sar is preparing for his retirement... that kind of stuff. They seemed to take their talk very seriously. We just need to prove that they're wrong in the future. I'm an ambitious manager. What about you, Edwin?"

Van der Sar smiled. "Me too, boss."

"Very good, then we're going to work well together! I'll take you to meet your teammates in a while. The press conference is very short, and we won't arrange to meet with the fans this time. After the press conference, you can go to the locker room and familiarize yourself with everyone. Then... do you need to go back to the hotel for a rest?"

Van der Sar shook his head. "No, I can start training right away." He believed that this was Twain's tiny test for new players. He had to impress the new manager, so he showed that he was making effort.

As expected, Twain was satisfied with Van der Sar's answer. He clapped his hands and said, "In that case, let's go to the press conference first. If we let that group of reporters wait, who knows what they will write in the newspaper?"

Van der Sar found that Twain was different from every other manager he had ever met. He was humorous and young; barely older than himself.

After that, Twain introduced Kerslake to the Dutchman, and then took him to the press conference.

Although it was the new year, there was still a lot of media because it involved the transfer of the most famous player in the English football for this winter transfer period so far. The 34-year-old Dutchman chose Nottingham Forest over Manchester united, which would be news in itself in any case.

Indeed, as Twain had said, most of the media's questions were focused on van der Sar's decision to change clubs at the age of thirty-four.

Edwin's response was in line with Twain's expectations. He appeared to say some nice things on the surface, but it was really just fluff. He did not give to the reporters who liked nothing better than to tamper with others' speech and take advantage of others.

Twain sat there smiling the entire time. He had solved his most troublesome problem. There was nothing else he had to be worried about.

On the forward line was the stable partnership of Mark Viduka and Eastwood. Even though Bendtner and Crouch could only be substitutes for both of them, everyone had enough ability to appear in the starting lineup in Twain's eyes.

Not to mention their strength in the midfield, with George Wood on the rise and the veteran, Albertini, still robust. There was also Ribéry, Ashley Young, Aaron Lennon... Maybe the weaker players there were Kris Commons and Brynjar Gunnarsson.

On the defensive line was the veteran, Hierro. Even though his number of appearances had slowly diminished, his experience was still the team's most valuable asset. Piqué was gradually developing into the main center back, and Twain had abided by the promise he had made to him when he first signed the contract with him and given him chances to play. Piqué quickly seized those opportunities and gradually showed his strength.

Now, the goalkeeper position had enlisted a strong player too. Edwin van der Sar might have been thirty-four years old, but his condition was still very good. Twain did not have to worry about goalkeeper problems again within two or three years.

After the press conference had ended, Twain led van der Sar to the locker room, and the players who had been training came in one after another. Along the way, Twain gave van der Sar an introduction about the team and the players. "As a whole, everyone gets along well. Have you heard any negative news about the Forest team's locker room?" He saw van der Sar hesitate a little, and knew what he was thinking. "That was just a story the press made up. You'll see for yourself. I promise, you'll like the team before long."

Before they even got to the door of the locker room, the two men heard loud laughter coming from inside.

Twain smiled at Edwin, then pushed open the door and appeared in front of everyone.

"Guys, let me introduce you to your new teammate, Edwin van der Sar." Twain beckoned to signal for van der Sar to come up and greet his teammates.

"Hi, everyone." van der Sar greeted his new teammates openly. As team captain, Albertini was the first stand up and welcome him. He smiled and said, "I didn't expect us to become teammates, Edwin."

Edwin van der Sar had played for Serie A's Juventus for some time, and had often played against Albertini from AC Milan. Although it was rumored that Juventus and AC Milan had a sacred alliance in Italian football, there was no alliance or friendship between the two teams in the fight for championships.

Van der Sar was very happy to be able to meet an "old friend" here. Even if they had not been before, they were now.

Obviously, Albertini should not just step up and assume the responsibility of assimilating new players into the team. Accordingly, when everyone came up to say hello to van der Sar, he quietly left the room.

The mood was congenial, except for Ward, who would be replaced. He politely came up to shake hands with van der Sar before retreating into a corner.

As for the depressed Darren Ward, Twain had other plans. During the winter break, he would find out if there was any football club which would be interested in him.

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Twain did not receive any offers from interested clubs for Darren Ward, but he received a great deal of inquiries about quotes for George Wood.

In the 21st round of the English Premier League, which ended on January 2, Nottingham Forest obtained a small victory of 1:0 over Portsmouth on their home turf. Wood's state of play was still stable, which was always the case, but the goal he had scored against Manchester United changed all that, and he had attracted more attention.

It was ironic that no one had praised a defensive player who had done his job seriously, but had just nitpicked him a lot. But when he scored a goal, he immediately received praise from everywhere, which almost put him on a pedestal. Defensive players had to rely on goals to prove their ability because most people believed that football was most exciting when goals were scored.

Chapter 273: Mr. Two Trillion Dollars Part 2

There were a lot of teams interested in Wood, but very few which could make Twain feel nervous.

Could anyone imagine George Wood, who was the main force in the Forest team, going to a lower-ranking team in the league?

In the past, there had been a lot of clubs asking about prices just like that; there was even an English championship team asking if they could loan Wood! Twain thought that they should really check their intelligence before coming to him about Wood.

However, on the morning of January 3, the Nottingham Forest Club received two offers from two different clubs, giving Evan Doughty no choice but to call Twain from his house. Together with Allan, they gathered to discuss the two offers.

Evan sat behind his desk with two faxes on it, one with the Manchester United team emblem and the other with Chelsea's.

"Tony, did their men get in touch with Wood?" Allan asked Twain.

Twain shook his head. "I don't think so, but I'm not certain. I don't have twenty-four hours to watch him."

"Tony, what do you think of this?" Evan looked at Twain.

"Refuse both of them." Twain answered without hesitation. "We won't sell, no matter how much money they offer."

Manchester United's offer was four million pounds, which was a big investment for Manchester United's tightfisted board of directors.

The rich and imposing Chelsea was even more excessive. Abramovich had not yet realized how foolish he was to throw away his money. He continued his strategy of burning cash to buy players. Their offer was ten million pounds!

It should be said that Evan Doughty, as a businessman, was stunned at the first glimpse of Chelsea's offer. George Wood was just a newcomer to the Premier League. It was only because of his steady play and his beautiful key goal in Manchester United's game that he was put on a pedestal by the media.

Evan was the owner of the Forest club, and he knew his player's real price was absolutely not ten million.

He did not think that Abramovich and Mourinho were fools. So what did it mean that the first offer for a rookie defensive midfielder was ten million pounds?

Twain lit a cigarette, took a puff, and then shrugged. "We can interpret it as flaunting, or as a show of force. The Russian is using it to tell us that there are no players they can't buy. Chelsea ranked second last season, and they spent one hundred and ten million pounds. They are ranked second in this season for now, and have spent eighty-nine million just in the summer. Take a closer look at the prices they offered to buy players. They're much higher than the average market price, and they always get the players they want."

Evan and Allan might not fully understand the way the Russian oligarch and his manager, Mourinho, spent their money, but Twain, who had been around the block, was certain.

In the 2004-05 season, Mourinho's Chelsea had won their club's first Premier League title in fifty years and created a series of records. This championship title was the most expensive in the history of the English Premier League, built on the foundation of one hundred and ten million pounds used by Ranieri, and achieved by Mourinho, who had spent eighty-nine million.

When Chelsea won the league title, Abramovich had been in the Chelsea club for six hundred and seventy days and had invested up to 683.40 million pounds, averaging more than one million a day! In 2004, Chelsea's annual financial loss was 87.8 million pounds, which created a new record in the football world. However, just a year later, Mourinho raised the figure by 60%. It reached a staggering 140 million pounds!

Looking at the world of football, which club would dare to burn more money than Chelsea? Even Real Madrid was not that daring.

Countless clubs had experienced Chelsea's deep pockets and surrendered before the Ruble legion. Take a look at the names in the list below and the clubs they once belonged to:

24 million for Didier Drogba, 19 million for Ricardo Carvalho, 13 million for Paulo Ferreira, 12 million for Arjen Robben, 8 million for Tiago Mendes, 7 million for Petr Čech, 5 million for Mateja Kežman, 8 million for Asier del Horno, 21 million for Shaun Wright-Phillips, and 24 million for Michael Essien.

Before the Russian man arrived at Stamford Bridge, English football did not have a clue about spending and pointless squandering of large sums of money. The total investment of the three-time Premier League champion, Arsenal, was no more than 39 million for three seasons, whereas Mourinho's lowest spending in Chelsea for a season was "only" 53 million.

That was the earth-shattering change that the Russian had brought to the English Premier League. Now, everyone used the default "championship rule" of "No money, no champion." If a team wanted to win the championship, large sums of money would need to be spent. If a team was reluctant to spend, the team would face ruthless elimination. It was the football version of Darwinism.

“They think that no matter how much we value Wood, we won’t hesitate to accept it if they open with an unimaginably high price.” Twain opened his hands. Roman Abramovich did exactly think this way in the first few years of his arrival in Chelsea.

After hearing Twain’s words, Allan pondered for a moment, then looked up at Evan and Twain. “That’s right. Now there are two options before us: ten million and George Wood. Which one do we choose?”

They had automatically ignored Manchester United. Four million to buy Wood? There was no need to even talk about it.

“I don’t think those are the options we need to think about, Allan.” Twain shook his head. “I also think that there’s nothing in the world that money can’t buy, and if no one can buy it, it’s only because the price isn’t high enough. But I think that the Russian can’t afford the price I gave to Wood.

Evan smiled, “I’m interested to hear your price for Wood, Tony.”

Twain nodded. “Just as well. Chelsea’s offer reminded me to hold a press conference to make a statement specifically for the clubs that are always harassing us.”

Allan seemed somewhat hesitant. After all, he was responsible for the club’s finances. Ten million was not a small number for the current Forest team.

Evan did not immediately answer Twain either. He was thinking about it, just like Allan.

Twain knew that there was bound to be some hesitation in their minds. After all, the offer... Well, from an objective point of view, Twain thought that it was completely worthwhile. But he was unable to view the offer objectively. Wood had been personally cultivated by him. You want to buy him for ten million? Mr. Abramovich, you’ve underestimated me!

Evan recalled what Twain had said to him one time in an alley in Wilford, when he had told Tony to sell Michael Dawson and Andy Reid.

Now that the team was on the rise and Wood had just won the best rookie of the team award, it would be truly a pity to sell him for ten million. So, he nodded. “Wood is a new star that we personally cultivated on our own. From the standpoint of the team’s image and achievements, I don’t agree to selling him.”

Both men agreed not to sell, and Allan did not need to insist, so he nodded.

In that way, the Nottingham Forest Football Club held a small press conference that afternoon. Although it was small, there was a lot of media there because everyone knew that Chelsea had just made an offer of ten million pounds for Wood.

With regards to the recently popularized focal figure, his every movement, and any information about him, would attract public attention. The small City Ground conference hall was crowded with reporters, packing the space.

At the press conference, Twain smiled at the reporters and gave the official response from the Nottingham Forest Club to the transfer request.

“I’ve never said that George Wood is not for sale, and I won’t say that in the future either.”

The reporters were delighted. Could this deal really be happening?

“Wood can be taken away from the City Ground stadium as long as a club can make a price that we think is right.”

It’s true! The reporters were excited and got ready to raise their hands and steer the topic to its climax.

“Excuse me, Mr. Twain, what is George Wood’s value?” There were already reporters who could not wait to get up and ask questions.

“Whatever Britain’s GDP was last year. That’s George Wood’s value.” Twain answered the reporter’s question with a smile.

As soon as he finished speaking, not only all the reporters present, but Evan and Allan, who sat next to Twain, were stunned.

Although the British government had not announced last year’s gross domestic product number, from the data and growth rate of the first three quarters, the past year’s number should not have been less than two trillion US dollars...

Two... trillion?

When they finally reacted, Allan and Evan glanced at each other. That price... not even Mr. Abramovich could afford it.

The press conference exploded, and the reporters scrambled to raise their hands. Someone even directly asked aloud from their seats, “Mr. Twain, are you joking?”

“No, I’m serious. George Wood is worth that price. If anyone can afford it, I’ll allow him to leave. But if you can’t, then don’t come back for a quote from us and waste all of our time. Also, Nottingham Forest doesn’t accept installments or loans for the player. This is the official stance of the Forest club.”

Just like an auctioneer in the auction house, Twain’s decision was final.

Chapter 274: Derby Part 1

Tony Twain’s words again put George Wood on the cover page. Already, the media gave Wood the exaggerated epithet of “The World’s Most Valuable Player.” Even more of them gave him the moniker of “Mr. Two Trillion.”

From the outsiders’ perspective after the press conference, regardless of whether or not Twain’s words were true, there was one thing that was certain; George Wood was Nottingham’s, and he was not for sale.

Could anyone in the world afford to pay two trillion dollars? A single player was almost equivalent to a nation... Since no one could afford that price, what was he but a non-saleable commodity?

Due to that situation, Nottingham Forest’s performance on their home grounds against Newcastle in the 22nd round of the League match garnered much attention. Everyone wanted to see if the performance of “Mr. Two Trillion” lived up to his value. They also wanted to know if George Wood would be crushed under the pressure. Some had criticised Tang En, saying that his words showed irresponsibility to the

players under him. They questioned if he had considered that giving the status of “World’s Most Valuable” to such a young player did more harm than good. After all, no one could withstand such pressure.

But Tang En did not seem to care one iota about the matter. He knew that Wood did not care for the status of “World’s Most Valuable” or “Two trillion.” If it were another player, Tang En may not have chosen to say that during the press conference. However, George Wood was different. The mental condition of the lad was much better than others in his age group.

The match against Newcastle was also the first time the Dutch goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, would be representing Nottingham in the English Premier League. While there were still some adjustment difficulties with the team, primarily on the side of the defense, Edwin van der Sar was greatly experienced and could reduce such negative impact to a minimum. Since Tang En had purchased a world-class goalkeeper, he was not about to let him sit on the substitutes’ bench. The conditions also did not allow for Edwin van der Sar and the team to continue adjustments on their training grounds.

Edwin van der Sar, who wore jersey number 33, stepped onto the field and started his performance in the last phase of his professional career.

Tang En’s reformation of Forest’s defense was still in the works. Although Newcastle was playing as an away team in the match, they had every intention to get three points out of it. Souness had held a grudge against Tony Twain for their loss on Newcastle’s home ground. In this away match, he fielded his strongest line-up. And what was the result?

0:0.

The performance of the new goalkeeper and Mr. Two Trillion was flawless. No one dared doubt the ability of the 34-year-old veteran Edwin van der Sar or say that George Wood’s title of “Mr. Two Trillion” would be too much pressure for him.

Wood’s performance in the match was no different from any other. The media was awfully disappointed to realize that he had not failed to perform up to standards because of the tremendous pressure, nor was he particularly inspired to perform because of the excessive encouragement... nothing at all. He was much like his name: wood.

The media outside were crazily stirring up news of his apparent value, but he himself looked as if nothing had happened!

After the match, the players had to go through a common area where they would often be stopped by reporters for interviews. Most of them surrounded George Wood and Edwin van der Sar.

The most common questions fired at Edwin van der Sar remained the usual few:

Why did he choose Nottingham Forest? How did he feel about this first match? Was he in sync with his teammates? What was his impression of the manager? How did he feel about Forest’s fans?

All these questions were handled with ease. He knew how he should answer to please the fans and close the distance between himself and his teammates.

On Wood’s side, most of the questions stemmed from his “two trillion value.”

Standing amidst the crowd, he waited until all the reporters had finished their questions before asking, “How much is two trillion?”

The reporters were momentarily stunned by his question. How could they explain the concept of two trillion to this person?

“That would be the entire GDP of UK last year...”

While that sounded very intimidating, it meant nothing to George Wood, who did not even know the concept of “GDP.”

“Is that a lot?”

“It is estimated to reach and even go beyond two trillion US dollars!”

“How much is two trillion?”

And the question comes around again...

Someone amid the reporters wailed. This topic was clearly a juicy piece of meat for them, but in the face of such a player, they felt helpless with no inkling of where they could start.

Pierce Brosnan, who was among the crowd, took out his cell phone and opened the calculator. After clattering through some calculations, he looked up at Wood and said, “George. Based on your current weekly salary, you need to work for 7.692307 million years before you can earn two trillion dollars.”

Everyone gave Brosnan grateful looks. This numerical value was much more comprehensible in comparison to the intangible GDP concept. It was like telling someone who had never seen a yacht that it was expensive. Exactly how expensive was it? You simply had to convert the money needed to purchase a yacht into units of a familiar food, and it would become clear.

The reporters waited in anticipation for Wood’s thoughts, but he only nodded his head after hearing the figure.

“Oh. Well, I can’t live for seven million years, so that’s meaningless to me.”

Everyone except one was disappointed. Brosnan was laughing soundlessly in great delight at the back. He knew that Wood would say that; he understood the kind of person George Wood was.

George Wood indeed liked money very much, but that was when he had needed a large sum of money to provide treatment for his mother. Now that the treatment of his mother’s illness was overseen by the club and his living standards had improved more than a fold—he lived in a brand-new apartment and lived a life he could have only imagined or yearned for in the past—he had nothing else to pursue. What was left was to work hard and play well enough to be worth the salary paid to him by the club.

To him, a weekly pay of 2,500 pounds was an incredibly high income. He did not even know how he could spend it all. In fact, there was no real difference between receiving 25 thousand and 2,500 pounds; both were high salaries that he had no idea how to finish spending. His mother’s and his living needs were only so much. Especially since he had no need to fork out money for his mother’s treatment, all the excess money was saved up and there was nowhere that needed spending. He bought no branded clothes, expensive sports cars or luxury goods. Furthermore, he did not have a girlfriend and

made no habit of visiting expensive entertainment centers. He had no vices that needed to be fed with large sums of money. Even though he was now earning much more than before, other than having a better quality of life, he and his past self were essentially the same.

Brosnan got why Tony looked so well upon the silly lad; he had a superior quality that many young players did not. This quality guaranteed that he would not lose his way and walk down the wrong path, causing himself to fall rapidly from a bright star into a shooting star.

Brosnan did not only get to know football from his work as a reporter. In his twenty years of experience watching football, he had seen more than enough genius players who came to a premature end. Often, it was not because they were lacking in ability, but because they could not withstand the temptations that came from beyond the football field.

Clearly, it was much better to entrust his hopes onto a player like Wood than onto those playboys.

Though George Wood did not come from a strong academic background and had never undergone any trainings for professionalism, he followed a very simple principle. That was something taught to him by his mother since he was young; once he had taken someone's money, he must do his best to work for them. Whether it was as a dishwasher in a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown or as a professional footballer, well-dressed with a bright future, there was no difference. To Wood, they were both just types of work.

Taking his chance while the reporters were flummoxed by Wood's reply, Wood turned and left the common area. He rarely took on interviews. In the past, he was not one of Forest's famous, big-shot players, so no one cared much about a young boy who did a tiring and dirty job on the field. Now, things were different. After he had scored a goal, he became a genius overnight and everyone started paying attention to him. Even his good looks became a reason for his genius. After practically every match, there would be reporters in the common area waiting to stop him. Initially, he was not willing to say a word before so many people; but when Tang En told him he had to, he complied. But he would never use two sentences if he could express himself in one, and would always take one word over two.

He was not as long-winded as Ashley Young. In any of his interviews, just his pet phrase, "you know," would be repeated more than 20 times...

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Although they only fought Newcastle to a draw on their home ground, Tang En was exceedingly satisfied with his players' performance. In the first place, he had intended to observe how Edwin van der Sar was working with the team. The result of having zero ball-loss was perfect and proved that Edwin van der Sar's assimilation into the team was progressing successfully.

The following match that Tang En had to face was a unique one.

In the third round of the English FA Cup, Nottingham Forest was playing as the home team against their arch-rivals from the same city: Notts County.

Nottingham Derby. In the history of world football, this could possibly be a derby in the oldest cities, or perhaps "one of the oldest." In the recent decades, due to Notts County staying consistently within the lower leagues, there were few opportunities for the two teams to meet. The so-called arch-rivals also

had little chance to go up against each other on the field. However, this would not in the least affect the mutual rivalry between the two teams.

The fans of Notts County insisted on calling City Ground “a place of sin,” and Nottingham Forest’s fans as “The F.”

It’s quite easy to guess what the F was meant to stand for...

Chapter 275: Derby Part 2

As an outsider, Tang En did not understand much of the rivalry that spanned close to one and a half centuries between the two teams. He was more willing to attribute it to Notts County’s jealousy of Nottingham Forest’s achievements. After all, Forest had twice attained the highest honor within the European clubs. Furthermore, they had also maintained a long-term position in the first group within the domestic league. The honors they had gained were so much more than those of Notts County.

Within Nottingham, Notts County had always represented the citizens of a lower tier. Black and white jerseys, a club that never managed to escape the clutches of a financial crisis, playing around in the lower leagues... All these were compatible with the image of poor miners. It was just like the two teams in Spain’s capital, Madrid: Real Madrid and Atlético Madrid. While Nottingham Forest represented the well-off middle-class citizens, Notts County was the ideological prop of the poorer, lower-classes.

Once soccer was elevated to a height of a class-struggle, Tang En could visualize and understand the heated clash that was bound to occur.

Reality proved his speculations.

The tickets for the match sold out early. It was not just on the day itself; the tickets were sold out two days before the match. When Notts County had successfully advanced into the third round of the English FA Cup and was scheduled to meet with Nottingham Forest, all the tickets were quickly snatched up.

To Notts County, whether they could become champions of the FA Cup was of no consequence at all. Even if they lost to a less worthy team in the next round, they would not be too upset. However, this was only true if they beat Nottingham Forest this round.

On the other hand, Nottingham Forest did not have any particular obsession with this match. If not in consideration for the feelings of Forest’s fans, Tang En was considering sending out a combination of the Youth Team and Reserve Team. There were hardly any players from Nottingham Forest that held a deep grudge against Notts County; most of them were “migrant workers.” Faced with a derby game in which teams came from different levels, there was just not that much interest.

The pre-match preparations progressed as per usual. Forest’s players did not care much about their opponents. In their eyes, both the Premier League and UEFA Europa League were much more important.

Just five minutes into the match, Notts County gave Forest a taste of their prowess, sending the ball slamming into their goalpost with a long shot from afar!

When it came to passion for “Derby games,” England’s fans were in the top three.

Once the match had begun, so long as Notts County had possession, the entire City Ground would be blanketed with loud jeers. But now, there were at least two seconds of silence that filled the spectators’ stands. For the Forest fans, they saw the victory of this match as a given; there would not be any incident.

Yet, Notts County’s first shot had almost scored them a goal. Forest was momentarily stunned.

In the previous round of the league match, they had played on their home grounds against Newcastle, who were also in black and white jerseys. The fans had taken that match as a rehearsal for today. Playing amid ear-deafening jeers, the players from Newcastle were completely discombobulated.

But this technique seemed to have no effect on Notts County.

In the first half of the match, Notts County was not at all disadvantaged and was fighting with Forest Team on even grounds. Though neither the abilities nor overall stamina of their players were on par with Forest team, they clearly had a greater fighting spirit than Forest’s players. They were more willing to run and give their all. This attitude made up for whatever else they were lacking.

The first half ended with 0:0. Both teams fought a bland battle for 40 minutes. Although there was not much technique involved, it was still effective against Notts County.

At half-time, Tang En told his players not to view this match as a simple match-up against a football team from a low-level league. The concept of “Derby” did not need further explanation from him. They had to face up properly to their opponents, especially their arch-rivals from the same city.

Forest’s players who returned to the field with the attitude of “this is an important match, and we have to do our best” were no longer as easily dealt with by Notts County.

After just ten minutes of resistance from Notts County in the second half, their goal finally took its first hit.

A direct free kick from Albertini 28 meters outside the penalty area shot beautifully into Notts County’s goal. The goal ignited City Ground and, at the same time, demolished the intangible wall between the two teams.

While spirit could influence a moment or two, it could not influence the entire match; on the soccer field, it was still concrete ability that spoke the loudest. Although Notts County was unwilling to lose, they knew that the difference in their abilities with the current Forest Team was too great.

A point behind Forest, Notts County continued struggling to retaliate with the intention of equalizing the score.

But five minutes later, the merciless Forest team scored another goal. Ribéry finally scored his first goal for Forest. Based on his capabilities, this goal came indeed a little too late. However, in exchange, he ranked first within Forest Team for his offensive assists.

In facing Notts County’s players who were evidently weaker than he was, Ribéry put up a good show of a tremendous struggle in the wing, dribbling past numerous Notts County players with the ball, and finally took his shot at the opponent’s goal from a corner of the goal area.

The difference between 2:0 and 1:0 was not merely a single goal. What followed was the complete collapse of Notts County.

Throughout the whole of the second half, Tang En stood at the sidelines. His action made Forest's players think he was supervising them; they did not dare to slack off.

At the end of the match after 90 minutes, the electronic scoreboard stopped at a score of 6:0. What was an intensely ferocious derby game transformed into a one-sided butchering thanks to Tang En's work "behind-the-scenes."

Looking at Notts County's fans giving him the finger from the spectators' stand, Tang En knew that the differences between the two teams would continue to intensify in his period of management of Forest Team. While there might not be an opportunity for them to meet again on the field, the score of 6:0 was enough to sear it into their minds for a lifetime...

He shrugged and smiled as he turned to walk towards the location of the press conference.

Being hated by his enemies felt good.

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"...We played a brilliant game. I am very proud of my players' performance. They didn't take their opponents lightly simply because their abilities were less than ours; they displayed great sportsmanship with their performance. I believe that the fans of Notts county will agree with me on this. They will not regret being defeated by an opponent that did their best..."

"Dog-s**t! Who likes being defeated by you guys?!" A Notts County fan spat in fury and threw the Nottingham Evening Post onto the ground.

"We sure would rather you serve up your Youth Team to lose to us!"

Looking at Tony Twain's happy, beaming face on the newspaper, he stomped on it. As if it was not enough, he spat on it again, right onto Tony's face.

Chapter 276: Poaching Part 1

After eliminating Notts County in the English FA Cup and winning his first derby since starting to coach the Forest team, Twain was in a good mood. And there was more to add to his mood. Sports Interactive was going to hold a press conference in London to formally announce its collaboration with the Nottingham Forest Football Club, as well as their appointment of Manager Tony Twain as a spokesperson for one of their company products, the "Football Manager" series, or FM.

After the press conference, without a break, Twain rushed to shoot his first personal advertising photo. It could not delay the team's normal training, so it had to be completed within a day.

Shania had returned to Newcastle before the FA Cup since her Christmas holiday was over. Otherwise, Twain would have really wanted to bring her to attend the press conference.

First, the guests from Nottingham were taken to the company's headquarters in Islington, North London, where they visited the developer of the small-scale but world-renowned football video game.

Evan Doughty and Allan Adams were just going through the motions. They followed their host and nodded, or expressed surprise and interest at the appropriate times. No matter how much they knew about the game series, it could not be more than Tony Twain did, who was there with them.

It was very gratifying for an FM gamer to be able to go inside the company that made the game, and see for himself how they developed the game. That was how Twain was. He showed a greater interest than Evan and Allan did, and did not seem to be faking.

As the group was heading towards the press conference, Twain and the others were introduced to the company's capabilities and were assured of the quality of the database that they wanted.

In the history of English football, this was the first time that a commercial collaboration between a professional football club and a football game developer was launched with such great fanfare; as a result, it attracted a lot of media attention. Moreover, the news about Twain serving as the spokesperson for the FM series was sent out in advance. With a game being endorsed by a Premier League manager, how could such a unique occasion not receive the British paparazzi's attention?

The press conference was packed.

After the routine statement, both sides announced a strategic partnership and signed a collaboration contract in the presence of the reporters. Although the collaboration was the first of its kind, there was nothing surprising about it. After all, both sides' interests were aligned with each other. The next part was the highlight of the media's expectations.

SI announced that they would engage the Nottingham Forest Manager Tony Twain to be the spokesperson for their newest Football Manager series, and there would be an additional image of a man on the cover and game display of FM, and that person would be Tony Twain. Furthermore, in the game, Tony Twain would become an active character. Unlike the other coaches, who were just amalgamations of data, he would have a higher degree of freedom and do a lot of things that were consistent with the true character of Tony Twain. For example, after the gamer played against Twain and defeated him, he might say "we've been raped." When the gamer wanted to buy George Wood in the game, Twain would inform the gamer, "unless you can fork out the United Kingdom's GDP from last year, there's no need for discussion" Of course, those changes would only be realized in the next game, FM06.

"I think I'll play the game and choose to coach Nottingham Forest to see which football club I'll be squeezed into in the game. It would be wonderful to play against myself."

Twain's words amused everyone present.

When asked why Manager Tony Twain was chosen as the spokesperson, the head of SI said, "We followed the Forest team's movements in the last summer transfer market very closely, and discovered an amazing coincidence: Tony Twain's picks were identical with our game developers' picks. At that time, FM05 was not on sale yet on the market, but the new Wonderkids inside the game were always the ones Mr. Twain had his eye on. Maybe that's not the right way to put it, but I can't think of a more appropriate statement. FM is about emulating the real football environment in the digital world, and Mr. Twain is playing FM in the real football world."

Twain smiled as he listened to the compliment, and said in his heart, "That's right, I am playing FM!"

At the end of the press conference, the reporters did not disperse. Instead, they followed Twain to the advertising shoot. SI did not stop them because it was an opportunity for free publicity. Why would they give that up?

When Twain was posing according to the photographer's requirements on the set, although the door was closed and nothing could be seen, there was still a large crowd of reporters outside, waiting to interview Twain after he was done.

Truthfully, Twain enjoyed this lifestyle now. Most of his desires that he had had when he had first arrived had been realized: to become a real football manager, to become a public figure, for his every word and action to be followed with interest, to be liked by some and hated by others... He remained calm throughout because he knew how everything came about now.

To solidify that life, he had to lead the team to win continuously and bring home championship trophies. He had seen too many examples of people who were glorious one day and forgotten the next; he did not want to be such a loser.

He still had a lot of victories which he had not achieved yet, and he still had not won a lot of championship trophies. He also had a lot of powerful opponents that he still had not played against, and his coaching career had just begun.

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Today was the first day of Forest team's resumed training after the FA Cup. The sun made a rare appearance in the sky. Twain was in a good mood, having just finished his first advertisement in his life. On his way to the Wilford training base with Dunn, he bought a copy of the newspaper with his photograph on it. They looked at it as they strolled along, and when they reached their destination, he also read the newspaper report about Twain's trip to London yesterday.

After parting ways with Dunn on Wilford Lane, one of them went northward, and the other walked southward.

The weather was nice, and his mood was good. Twain did not go directly to the training ground, but circled around to see Eastwood first.

"Hey, Chief! Good morning!" Eastwood beckoned to greet Twain, while holding a newspaper in his hand with Twain's picture on it.

Even though Eastwood had become the star player of everyone's focus, he still lived in a caravan in the training base and did not feel that it was at odds with his star footballer status. He did not care about how other people talked about or viewed him. Twain was very glad to have such clear-headed players in his team.

Chapter 277: The Red Forest Chapter 50 Poaching Part 2

"Good morning, Freddy." Twain noticed the newspaper in Eastwood's hand and laughed. "I thought you never read the newspaper."

"I do skim through, I just rarely read the sports section. But today, because of this..." Freddy Eastwood pointed to Twain's photograph in the newspaper and smiled, "I didn't recognize you at first. Chief, you look different from usual with makeup on."

Twain looked down at the newspaper in his hand. He did look different and more handsome from his reflection in the mirror. No wonder those stars had outstanding images. It was all due to the credit of the makeup artist, lighting technician, and photographer.

"You must have been mistaken, Freddy, I've always looked like this." Twain chuckled as he pointed to the newspaper. "Where's Sabina?" He realized that Eastwood was along in the caravan.

"She sent the kids to school."

"Sending the children to school while she's pregnant..." When he thought of the young mother who was pregnant and yet could not sit still all day, Twain smiled and shook his head. Was it because she had excess energy? Or was it because she was stubborn? "So, is your second child a son or a daughter?"

"A girl!" The Gypsy said immediately. "We always wanted a daughter, and we already thought of her name."

"What's her name?"

"Chardonnay."

When Twain heard the name, he felt a little awkward. "It's a strange name... What is that?"

"It's a type of green-skinned grape and the most popular wine variety, it's precocious!" Eastwood explained earnestly.

"Oh..." The Romani Gypsy sometimes had a different mindset than ordinary people. After understanding this, Twain no longer wondered about Eastwood's strange words and actions. However, giving his daughter such an odd name was still an eye-opener.

He looked down at his watch; it was almost time.

"Let's go, Freddy."

The Romani Gypsy nodded, got up to put the newspaper back inside and turned to leave with Twain to go to the training ground.

The training base was gradually becoming livelier. The players and coaches, who were here for the training, continuously appeared on the training ground. George Wood was still the first to arrive, and the wire fence outside the field was surrounded by a lot of fans who had come to watch the team in training and seek autographs from the players they liked. Wood, currently the most popular, was the focus of their attention.

The weather was good today, and the number of people outside the training ground had naturally increased.

Twain walked behind them and could clearly hear the voices of the fans talking excitedly about Wood.

"He's so handsome!"

“So cool!”

“Look at his eyes!”

They were all female voices. Most of George Wood’s fans were women. Truthfully, George Wood did have the makings of an idol. He might not be considered handsome, but he was manly and strong-jawed with sharp and angular lines on his face. Furthermore, his position on the field and style of play easily gave a feeling of aloofness. But he did not realize that himself, and never deliberately tried to work that angle.

Suddenly a male voice emerged from the sea of female voices, which naturally attracted Twain’s attention.

“What a gorgeous man!”

Twain shivered slightly when he passed by the man. He stopped in his tracks and looked to see who had said it.

The man had his back towards Twain. His clothes were not flamboyant but were appropriate to the occasion and without creases. His blonde hair was smoothed down at the back and combed meticulously. His shoes gleamed like a mirror.

Such a person would not be a fan of a player like George Wood.

Twain stood behind the man, trying to make sense of him. The more he looked, the more he felt that the figure looked familiar.

“Such appeal is many times stronger than those sissy types. Why didn’t I discover you earlier? Oh, George Wood.”

Hearing this person muttering to himself, Twain suddenly remembered.

“You still haven’t given up.”

Twain abruptly spoke up behind the other man, startling him. His shoulders visibly shook, and then he turned around to look at Tony Twain, who was standing behind him. He said with a frown, “Didn’t anyone tell you that it’s impolite to eavesdrop and interrupt someone without permission, Mr. Twain?”

As expected, it was the same gentleman who had blocked Wood’s path on the street to give him a business card that day.

Not knowing why, whenever Twain encountered this man, Twain would suddenly feel dark, as though the sky had become gloomy.

“In that case, has anyone ever told you that it’s rude to always think about poaching someone else’s men, sir?”

The two men opposed each other measure for measure, neither willing to give in.

“Would you like me to remind you again? George Wood is Nottingham Forest’s core player. He will do nothing but play football. Don’t even plan on grooming your entertainment star.”

This man also knew that some things were hard to change. Right now, George Wood was in hot demand. He had no reason to persuade this kid to give up this seemingly promising career to try his luck in the entertainment industry.

But he just could not stand the man's overbearing attitude and the tone of his voice, because he himself was the kind of person who liked to be above others.

"Nottingham Forest welcomes everyone who supports the team, but if you want to take Wood away from Wilford I'm afraid I can't let you."

After saying this, Twain turned and walked away. Staying behind, the gentleman pursed his lips tightly and glared at Twain's back.

"We'll meet again, Mr. Twain... I promise you."

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On January 15, Nottingham Forest defeated Fulham, which had come to challenge them at their home ground by 1:0. With the 23rd round over, Nottingham Forest ranked sixth with a total of thirty-seven points, the same score as Liverpool, but with a slightly lower number of goals. Having played more than half of the league tournament, Tang En was very satisfied with the result. At the beginning of the league tournament, many of the two or three-tiered teams had been able to advance to higher than sixth place, but now Nottingham Forest was the only one that had remained at the top.

Tang En was not surprised that Everton was ranked fourth because he knew Everton's ability and Moyes' standards. This was a reasonable and fair result. But he also knew that the second half of the season was crucial for Moyes and himself. The Forest team was under great pressure to maintain their sixth-place position. Similarly, Moyes would also try hard to keep within the top four.

Tang En always subconsciously treated Moyes' Everton as his direct competitor in his mind because Everton and the Forest team were the closest in terms of ability.

Chelsea was high up in the ranking now. They had won eighteen games out of the twenty-three rounds with four draws and one defeat. The team was ranked first with fifty-eight points, ten points ahead of the second-ranked Arsenal!

Continuing with this momentum, Chelsea were almost certain to win the league title this season, the way Tang En remembered it; and the only game they had lost was the one against the Forest team.

Chapter 278: Agent Part 1

George Wood's value of "two trillion" was only a way to indicate that Wood was not for sale. While Wood himself may never be able to reach such a status in his lifetime, it clarified his current position in the team from another angle. Chelsea's reported offer of ten million for the rookie player caused some to see an opportunity for profit.

Before George Wood became famous, other than the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) kindly asking him if he needed them to represent him for a variety of his contractual discussions, no other professional agent had approached him. With the world soccer scene constantly producing innumerable

new professional footballers, there would not be enough agents to go around if every player was approached.

There was only a total of 170 professional football agents in England. In Europe, this was already the highest number of agents. Even so, not every professional player had an agent; that included George Wood. When Wood first signed on with Forest, there were no negotiations involved. He had also known nothing about the standard procedure. The club gave him a contract that he read through. He felt satisfied with it, and so he signed it.

It was that simple. Making use of Wood's ignorance, Forest team successfully got him to sign a contract that seemed extraordinarily worthwhile in hindsight.

It was not that Tang En had never considered finding an agent to take care of George Wood, help him manage his finances, and earn more money; but getting an agent was a double-edged sword. There were both pros and cons.

If the rules had permitted managers to also be players' agents, Tang En believed that 99 percent of the world's managers would fight tooth and nail to become exactly that for their players. This would give the managers a firm hold over them; something that every manager wished for. In this manner, they would not be bothered by the problems that came with signing contracts, renewing contracts, or raising salaries.

Unfortunately, that was not allowed.

Tang En hoped George Wood would be able to find an outstanding agent; one who did not simply excel at his work but was of an even greater character. Someone who would not quarrel with Tang En every two or three days to make presumptuous demands or make threats of Wood's transferral in demanding for a higher salary.

But such an agent was as rare as a world heritage.

Several footballers who became famous when they were young all but wasted their talents between frequent transfers and running counter to their clubs. And that was simply because they could not find a good agent. Such players were not in the minority; an example was the former forward for the France National Team, Nicolas Anelka, who was once hailed as a "child prodigy."

Tang En did not wish for George Wood to get involved with such agents. Unfortunately, in Tang En's position as Forest's manager, he had no right to help his players choose their agent. That would incur unnecessary trouble and jealous speculations. Whenever it involved a conflict of interests, the manager needed to stay away from it.

He knew that more and more people had approached Wood in hopes of becoming his agent. Just like flies which had spotted a butter cake, they were clamoring around Wood, buzzing.

Perhaps he should give Wood some suggestions... It was not against the rules for the manager to give some suggestions, right?

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After training ended with the players having showered and changed in the locker room, everyone got ready to return home. The leaving players saw Tang En standing outside the locker room and thought it a little strange, but still greeted and said their goodbyes to him. Tang En responded to them but made no move to stop and speak to anyone; clearly, it was not them he was waiting for.

George Wood was the last person to emerge from the locker room; he had been the last to enter. After he exited, Tang En called out to him, "George, have you met with any trouble recently?"

Wood shook his head, thinking it was odd for Tang En to ask such a question.

"Uh, I mean, have there recently been lots of people calling themselves agents looking for you?"

This time, Wood nodded. "Yes. But not a lot."

Tang En did not know if Wood's and his idea of "many" were the same, but that was not the issue at hand. He gently nodded and continued. "What do you think about it? What do you think of those agents?"

"I don't know. They told me many things, but I have no interest in them."

"What are you interested in?"

"Playing soccer."

Tang En laughed. It seemed like this lad had become fond of the game. Even so, Tang En needed to correct Wood's archaic view of the world.

"No, no. That won't do," he said. "It's not enough for a professional player to just play soccer. You still need to do many other things. I don't mind if you become a big star, if you choose to represent any number of international brands, or if you can earn even more money in a year. That is all what you deserve."

"Isn't the duty of a professional footballer to play football?" Wood asked.

"Of course; their job is to play football, but that's only one part of it. You're a star now, George. You can't just play soccer... let's put it this way, when do you think you can play soccer until?"

Wood thought about it and shook his head. "I don't know."

"Okay. In general, it's normal for a player to play until they are 34 before retiring. But I think you can kick till you're 40." Tang En laughed. If Matthäus could do it, surely George Wood was not that far off?

"If you only think about playing soccer before your retirement at 40 and care about nothing else, the money you could earn would be limited. And what about your retirement after that? What will you be living on? Your mother has no source of income, and at that point, you'll have to provide for your wife and children... Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Wood understood. Tony was telling him that once he retired, he would not have any source of income. Just depending on his savings from playing soccer these years, he not only had to provide for his mother, but he was also likely to have his own family by that time... In that case, how could he guarantee the comfort of his family?

“So, you should still consider getting a trustworthy manager and employing him to help you manage your finances and earn more money. That way, you won’t have to worry about all those problems even after you retire.” Tang En said, revealing his aim for their talk.

Wood nodded upon hearing his words. “I’ll think about it.”

Tang En clapped his hands in satisfaction. “Go on home, don’t let your mum wait for too long.”

As he watched Wood walk away, Tang En breathed a sigh of relief. What was now left was to see the kind of agent Wood would find in the end... hopefully, the situation would not be too terrible.

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The condominium that Wood and his mother, Sophia, currently resided in was located just North of the Wilford Training Grounds. Wood only needed 20 minutes to return home from the training area, but he would rarely walk. He usually ran like a warm-up before a match, jogging throughout.

When he arrived at the front door of his house today, he found someone standing there. The door was opened, and his mother stood outside discussing something with the man. She waved to Wood in a hurry when he appeared. The man also turned to look over.

It was someone dressed meticulously. He seemed familiar. The man hastily greeted Wood when he saw him. “Hello, Wood.”

Immediately after hearing his voice, Wood recalled the man in question. This was the enthusiastic agent for artists that he had met when he accompanied his mother out to shop. Was he looking for Wood to join the entertainment circle again?

“I’m not interested in the entertainment industry.”

Before the man even said a thing, he shook his head in rejection.

Unexpectedly, the man did not seem disappointed to hear the refusal from Wood. Instead, he smiled in response and said, “I think you’re mistaken. First, allow me to re-introduce myself. I am Billy Woon, a professional football agent. I have just received certification from The English Football Association Committee. I’m not here today to ask you to join the entertainment circle. Rather, I hope to become your football agent and your legal representative in managing your contracts and business matters.”

Wood was stumped for a moment upon hearing him speak. He’d had a change of identity?

After his self-introduction, Billy Woon turned to smile at Sophia. “Madam, could we discuss more in the house? As you know, it’s winter now and the weather outside is truly...”

Sophia did not immediately answer but looked to her son. All the other agents had contacted him via phone. This one had come knocking on the door personally; perhaps he should speak to him. He nodded.

“Please enter, Mr. Woon.” Sophia opened the door to let them both in.

When Billy Woon, the gentleman-like man, stepped into the house, he covertly but thoroughly examined its décor. While being extremely simple, it was not crude. Other than the daily necessities, there were

few decorations or luxury goods. Before coming, he had specially analyzed Wood's income at Forest team. 2,500 pounds per week and that was before taxes. That salary could not be considered high at all...

Even though Forest Team took responsibility for the treatment of Wood's mother, and they had no need to spend his salary on surgeries, the female owner of this house was clearly used to their days in poverty and was very thrifty.

After understanding the situation, Woox knew in his heart what he needed to say.

Chapter 279: Agent Part 2

Wood sat in the living room with the visitor, Billy Woox, while Sophia was in the kitchen making tea.

Billy presented him with a new name card, with the title on it now changed to professional football agent. Wood looked up at him questioningly and received a smile from the man.

"I got tired of the entertainment industry," he explained.

Wood was not interested in understanding his backstory. He put aside the name card and looked at Billy in silence. He did not know how to start; he had never done anything like this.

Billy Woox saw through Wood's unease. As an agent, his duty was to consider all the factors for his client. Even the most minute detail could not be neglected; if he could achieve that, he would be able to garner the favor of the other party. It was the same whether he was facing a professional footballer or a big-shot celebrity.

Since Wood doesn't know what to say, I'll do it.

Billy Woox maintained a smile on his face and revealed his aim in approaching Wood. "It's this... I understand you have not found an agent, yes?"

Wood nodded. In comparison to agents who only called once or twice, this man, whom he had previously met, was clearly a more familiar face.

"Then, I hope to become your agent... Ah, thank you, Madam."

Woox took the cup of warm tea from Sophia and set it on the table. He continued. "I'll be entirely in charge of the contract negotiation between you and the club, and help you contact various sponsoring brands. I'll package you in the most comprehensive manner and work out a financial management plan that would benefit you the most. So much so that even if you stopped playing soccer, you would be able to continue earning money. But of course, I am not trying to encourage you to leave the professional soccer arena. However, no matter how well you play soccer, you won't be able to become famous and earn more if there is no one to package you. Look at David Beckham; he's a symbol of success.

Beckham's success was well-known throughout England. Wood knew it well. Even after Beckham went to Spain, his influence within the UK did not consequently lessen.

"And Beckham's success is inseparable from his team of agents." Woox took a sip of his black tea. "George, you have every single quality essential to becoming a star idol. Now, you only require an

outstanding agent.” Before he realized, he had started referring to Wood as George instead. This made the two seem even closer.

After making tea for the visitor, Sophia sat down beside Wood and quietly listened to their talk. She did not voice any opinions or ask any questions. In her eyes, Wood was already a grown-up and should make his own decisions on such matters.

After thinking for a long time, Wood finally asked a crucial question. “But you don’t have any experience in being a football manager.”

Billy Woon knew this question would come. It was true that he had just switched careers to become a football agent. He looked like a rookie just entering the industry, but he only looked like it.

“Of course, I won’t deny that I have never been a football agent. However, I am extremely experienced in being an agent. I think that the work as an agent for an artist and a footballer have their commonalities. If I become your agent, I would not need to be involved with soccer matters for a period... In other words, George, I’m asking if you have thought about leaving Forest?”

The question came quite abruptly, stunning Wood momentarily and causing his brow to tighten. Even Sophia was surprised enough to show a change in her expression. Billy Woon took all this in and realized that Wood had misunderstood his question. He hurriedly explained. “I’m not trying to instigate you to leave. I’m only asking if you have considered it.”

Wood shook his head. He had never thought about leaving Nottingham Forest. To him, it was everything to play soccer on Forest. Why would he go to other clubs?

“Look, it’s clear that you don’t have any thoughts about leaving the club. Basically, that means that I would have very little involvement with soccer. Our initial work involves expanding your influence and reputation beyond the field, and this is what my expertise is in.” Woon said confidently.

“I have a very wide network outside the field. And what’s most important to an agent is the network they establish. I know many other agents have approached you. I don’t know what kind of promises they made to you, but I have the confidence and ability to nurture you into a professional footballer who can earn the most money; the most successful football star. Beyond that, I will also help you plan and put the money you are earning now into investments. After you retire in the future, you will have no worries about not having income.”

His words resonated with Wood. This was exactly what Tang En was talking about. Once he retired, the money he earned from playing soccer would eventually finish. He had no other skills; surely, he wouldn’t go back to being a porter? Wouldn’t it be better if he could use the money he earned now to make more money in the future?

Wood asked, “If... If I sign a contract with you, what do I have to do?”

On hearing what Wood said, Billy Woon knew he had him. Now that there wasn’t an annoying Tony Twain around to be a hindrance, wasn’t it up to him how he wanted to deal with this inexperienced boy?

“You don’t need to do anything,” Woon said with a grin. “Just like now, you only have to play well. Your brilliant performance on the field will be the basis of my work to help you attain more benefits. Of

course, when you're not playing in a match, you may need to attend some sponsor events with me, like filming commercials..."

"Just like Boss?" Wood was referring to Tony Twain, who had just gone to London to film a commercial.

Billy Wox was initially stumped, and only later remembered Tony. He nodded. "That's right, just like that. You might feel a little busier, but in comparison with the profits you will get, becoming busier is but a trifle matter."

As if a devil from the abyss, Wox used his honey-coated words to seduce the boy before him to accept his conditions.

"You will earn so much money, you won't have to rent and stay in such a simple apartment. You can buy the most luxurious homes in the best locations with pools, tennis courts, and garages. If you're willing, you can even build your own football field. At that point, you could employ many domestic helpers, and your mother," Wox turned to smile at Sophia, "can relax and enjoy all this without ever having to work hard again."

Wood looked at Sophia, who was smiling at him.

Why did he initially, as a silly lad who knew nothing, run off to find Tony? Why did he agree to accept training at the Youth Team and accept only a meager allowance? What was he training so hard for? What was the reason he had stepped onto the path of professional football?

Billy Wox removed a stack of files from his bag and placed it on the table. "This is a report I made for you. It's an analysis of your advantages and market audience..."

This was Billy's final ace up his sleeve: a report detailing a bespoke plan to package Wood... but Wood appeared to have no interest in it. He interrupted Billy's stream of words and said, "You can be my agent."

That simple statement decided their future.

Chapter 280: A New Contract, A New Player Part 1

While Tony Twain was still worrying about whether Wood would be able to find an agent whom he could be satisfied with, a man who called himself "George Wood's agent" appeared in front of him.

"Ah, Sir. Are you here to observe our training?" Twain again encountered the middle-aged man who was in close pursuit of George Wood at the gate of the training base. He looked down at his watch. "There's still quite a while before training starts, you've come too early. Or are you still getting ideas about George Wood?"

The tall man standing in front of him was indeed Billy Wox. He smilingly (yes, Twain was not mistaken, this man, who used to look at him with a frown, was smiling at him right now) said to Twain, "I'm sorry, neither is the case., Mr. Twain. You've guessed wrong."

"Oh?" Twain looked at the man. He could not understand why he was being so amiable with him.

"I came to discuss the new contract with you, Mr. Twain."

Twain cocked his ear to the side, thinking that he had heard wrong. "What did you say?"

"My apologies, I wasn't clear. I'll say it again: I would like to talk to you about the new contract between George Wood and Nottingham Forest, which is quite different from the one you signed a year ago. A new contract," Woox said solemnly, his smile gone.

"It's still three months away from April 1..." Twain thought that the man must be pulling his leg, and he did not want to waste his time at the gate with a delusional basket case. He turned to walk away.

He heard the sound of flapping paper behind him. "Mr. Twain, I think you might be interested to see this."

Twain admitted he was curious, so he stopped and turned around to see a piece of paper in the other man's hand, gently flapping in the morning breeze. He could not see it clearly. "What is it?"

"A copy of the contract signed between George Wood and myself. From now on, I am his only agent, in charge of all of his matters, including negotiations with the football club to improve the terms of his original contract." Woox self-importantly held the piece of paper, as though he were a Scotland Yard policeman showing his credentials.

Twain snatched the paper away in a flash and looked at it carefully. It was indeed an agent contract, and the signature below was undeniably Wood's handwriting and, of course, his fingerprint.

The contract clearly defined the role of this middle-aged man. Billy Woox and George Wood's relationship was one of a professional football agent and a professional football player. It also stipulated the power that Woox had as Wood's agent. It almost covered all aspects, from the inside to the outside of the field. He could not only act in charge of his finances; Woox could even be said to be Wood's advisor!

Twain shifted his gaze from the paper to Woox's face. His smile had returned, but he no longer concealed his smugness.

Tang En lowered his head and swore under his breath. How did it come to this?

I told George Wood to look for a trustworthy agent. I didn't ask him to find this man! Isn't this... Isn't this going against me?

Wait a minute!

He suddenly thought of something.

"Well... Mr. Woox, I remember you were a former showbiz agent, right?"

Woox certainly knew why Twain was asking this. In order to let him completely acquiesce to this, Woox took out his license from his bag. "The English Football Association recently issued me a professional football agent license. I'm a football agent now."

Twain took it and scrutinized it, but he could not find any fault with it. It was indeed issued by the FA, but it noted that Billy Woox had not been accredited by FIFA, which would have meant that he was qualified to act as the player's intermediary for the international transfers.

“You’re just in England...”

“Of course. I’ve just become a football agent. I haven’t had time to submit my information to FIFA. But that doesn’t mean I can’t be Wood’s agent.” Woox shrugged.

“But you don’t have any prior experience as a sports agent.”

Woox grinned. He could tell from that remark that Twain was stubbornly resisting. “As for how I became a football agent, that’s not the point here. The important point is, I’m Wood’s agent now, and there’s nothing wrong with my credentials.”

Twain wordlessly looked at the certificate that was stamped with the official seal of the Football Association.

A hand reached out in front of his eyes.

“If you don’t mind, you’ll give it back to me now, thank you.”

Twain brusquely smacked the certificate into Woox’s hands. He did not know what deception Woox had used to gain George and Sophia’s trust. However, the facts, laid in front of him, could not be changed now.

When he saw that Twain was speechless, Woox revealed a triumphant smile. “Do you need me to repeat that, Mr. Twain? I came to see you today on behalf of George Wood and-”

Twain waved his hand to interrupt. “I get it, but not today. We’ll make an appointment for another time.”

Today really was not a good day. Twain’s mind was a mess. It was impossible to discuss the contract with this shrewd man. First, he needed to calm himself down. Then, he needed to find Wood to understand the ins and outs of the matter. After that, he could deliberate on how to discuss Wood’s new contract with Woox.

“Of course, I respect your decision. I have your number. In that case, we’ll talk about it another day. I’ll be in touch, Mr. Twain.”

Twain grunted and turned to walk towards Field 1 on the training ground. He could not wait to see George Wood now to ask him, What the f**k is going on here?

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Soon, Twain saw George Wood on the training ground. He looked the same as usual, and Twain called him to his side.

“George, have you found a new agent already?”

Wood nodded.

“Well... Can you tell me how you went about it?” Twain wanted to know how that man had become Wood’s agent.

Therefore, Wood faithfully recounted what had happened the previous night.

When Twain heard his explanation, he suddenly felt astonished of “how is it so coincidental that whatever I said, he said the same.”

Out of consideration for Wood, he had said those things to let Wood seriously look for an agent. He had not expected that that kind of “Mr. Five Percent” would also consider the perspective of the players, or say it so beautifully from the point of view that Wood cared about the most. But he still wanted to ask, “I think those things can be done by any agent. Why did you choose him?”

“He came to my house, and I thought he put it so well, so I signed it.” Wood’s deliberation was very simple on the matter. Since everyone is the same, then why should I call an agent whom I haven’t even met? Meanwhile, this person in front of my eyes can be my agent. It might as well be him.

Wood did not know about the matter between Woot and Twain. Obviously, he did not know that Twain was dismayed that he had chosen Woot.

“What’s the matter?”

Twain shook his head. “No, nothing. You can go for your training.”

Wood turned and ran back to the training ground. Alone, Twain lowered his head and rubbed his temples. It looked like he would have to deal with that unpleasant guy for a long time to come.

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In the days leading up to the 24th round of the league, Twain did not receive a call from Billy Woot. It seemed like the man knew that Twain was in a bad mood now.

Twain really was in a bad mood. Ever since he had found out that Woot was Wood’s agent, questions that he had never worried about before had come to the surface. Would that agent be able to manipulate George Wood like a puppet? Would he alienate Twain?

Most important of all, would George Wood leave him someday?

The player that he had personally cultivated, breaking away from him and leaving to transfer to other teams... This was not just alarmist talk. Before his marriage, Beckham and Ferguson were like father and son. And after? The two men almost turned against each other.

Twain did not want things to go that way with Wood. However, now that there was such an antagonistic agent, the future was uncertain.

He was a territorial person. He liked the feeling of being in control. But the truth was that not everything in the world could go as he wished.

On January 22, Nottingham Forest challenged Norwich City in an away match. The league’s sixth ranking team played against the second lowest ranked team. Unsurprisingly, the Forest team won 2:0 in a clean and decisive game.

The arrival of Edwin van der Sar had greatly reduced the Forest team’s number of concessions. He was far better than Darren Ward in terms of both experience and skill. Twain was very glad that he had made a quick move while Manchester United was still wavering; otherwise, he would have missed a

goalkeeper of such high caliber. He did not know what would have happened to the Forest team in the second half of the season.

Unquestionably, they still played well in this game and George Wood was as steady as ever. His performance was no different from that of any previous game. Nonetheless, it was not the same in Twain's view.

He knew that after this game, he was going to receive a call from Billy Wox.

As expected, when Twain returned to Nottingham the next day, his cell phone rang.