

Champions 361

Chapter 361: The War Between Two Men 2 Part 2

Kerslake clearly saw the fire in the players' eyes. It had been a while since Tony had spurred the players that way in the locker room. Against most teams, there was no need to boost their morale; Forest's capabilities no longer needed to depend on such psychological victories to win matches.

However, against Chelsea, against Mourinho, Tang En whipped out his trump card. A match like this was worthy of such an opening speech.

Even though Tony would often claim that the media only spun stories and exaggerated them without any understanding, they were right about this: Tony was unwilling to lose to Mourinho. He valued the victory of this match even more than the one in the following Champions League Group Stage match.

"In three days, Chelsea has a group stage match in the Champions League. Yet, Mourinho still sent out his strongest line-up. What does this mean? It means that they are afraid of us; they dare not conserve any strength even before such an important match!" Tang En said.

In truth, he had also sent out all his forces before another crucial match, but he would never say that he was afraid of Chelsea. The players themselves also did not care if Chelsea truly feared them, but they would gladly believe all that their manager said. In other words, right here and now, they believed their manager; they believed that Chelsea was well and truly frightened of them.

And it was extremely effective. Everyone's spirits were greatly uplifted and energized.

"Oh, right." As if Tang En had suddenly remembered something, his tone took on a change. "We have a special guest in the luxury box for today's match: Freddy Eastwood."

Although it had been a long while since they heard the name, it was endearing to the team.

"Ah!"

"Boss, he came to watch the match? Didn't the doctor bar him from watching Forest's matches?"

Tang En nodded and said conspiratorially, "That's right, the doctor didn't allow it. That's why I secretly let him come..." He pointed upwards. "By now, he should be sitting in the luxury box above us. So, you guys better perform well. Don't give him the chance to laugh at you – 'Look, just because I'm not there, they can't beat Chelsea! They've still got to depend on me!'"

Tang En imitated Eastwood's shrill voice, mumbling quickly just like he would, prompting loud bursts of laughter from his audience.

The moment was just right. Tang En put out his right hand, showing everyone his five fingers, saying, "I only have one request." His fingers snapped together. "Defeat them!"

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Eastwood was panting. He had gotten to the top of the stairs. Smiling at the man beside him, he said, "Look. That was easy, wasn't it?"

The man looked at the thin beads of sweat lined up on Eastwood's forehead and nodded. "Yes, Mr. Eastwood."

He was only a normal doctor from the hospital. Accommodating to the Forest Club's request, he had accompanied Eastwood to the stadium just so there would be a professional doctor around in the case of an accident.

The image and reputation of Romanis in the eyes of the English had never been good. Many treated the group of wanderers with contempt and animosity. There were even old sayings about how "Romanis were not to be trusted." However, Eastwood's earlier performance filled the doctor with respect for the Romani.

Up on the platform, after a short corridor, was the luxury box.

"Let's go. I think the match should be starting soon."

The cheering from outside suddenly intensified. Eastwood started walking towards the luxury box.

The doctor continued following beside him, but he was no longer watching Eastwood as if looking over a poor patient who might slip and fall at any time.

He was healthier than everyone else.

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"The players for both teams have entered the field! Albertini, who just recovered from an injury, is not a starter for this match. Tony has arranged for him to sit on the substitutes' bench. George Wood continues wearing the Captain's Armband, walking right in front. Look at how proud he is. He's a completely different person from when he first represented the team as captain! The boy is improving incredibly fast!"

Motson did not try to conceal his bias towards Wood at all. On the BBC web column, he had, in his numerous writings, appealed for Sven-Göran Eriksson to recruit the youth into England's National Team. However, Eriksson was more fond of the big, established stars. He had no intention of recruiting young rookies for a midfield that was already saturated with stars.

But there was good news. Eriksson had come to City Ground for this match. He was observing both the performances of Chelsea's players as well as those of the English footballers on Forest. George Wood was, naturally, included in that observation. As long as his performance was outstanding and eye-catching enough, even if Eriksson stuck to his guns, England's media would be advocating for Wood to join the national team.

The English had good reason to be anxious. Rumour had it that the other nation Wood belonged to, Jamaica, was also considering inviting him to join their National Team.

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Only after all players had entered the stadium did Tony Twain lead his managerial team to walk to the technical area from the locker room.

As the host, he had well and truly put on airs, making Mourinho wait for him for several minutes after Mourinho first entered.

On the field, both teams got in line and shook hands as part of the necessary procedure.

After Forest's managerial team and other members had settled down on the sidelines, Tang En walked to the away technical area and shook hands with the members of Chelsea's managerial team. Of course, this included Mourinho. It was also a necessary part of the procedure.

While shaking hands with him, Tang En smiled genially.

"Mr. Mourinho, shouldn't you consider the Champions League Group Stage match in three days?"

Mourinho smiled as he answered.

"That is my question for you, Mr. Twain. Shouldn't you consider your group stage match in four days?"

"Oh. In my opinion, beating Chelsea would allow me to bring the team to Portugal in a good mood and a great condition; it would be very helpful to the Champions League matches."

"Change 'Chelsea' into 'Nottingham Forest,' and that's my answer, Mr. Twain."

"Ha! Let's hope this will be a good match..."

"I hope so too."

The two let go of each other's hands. Tang En turned and went back to his own technical area. Neither of them had gotten an edge in the verbal battle, but they had not been hoping to crush their opponents in that aspect anyway. Regardless of what their mouths said, they still needed to look at the match results.

The television broadcast captured the scene of both managers shaking hands and sent it before the tens and thousands of families watching. Motson said, "Look at the brilliant smiles on Tony and Mourinho's faces. They look like old friends who have known each other for years."

Lineker chimed in, saying, "Do you really think so, John?"

Following that, the two commenters began laughing uproariously.

Chapter 362: The War Between Two Men 3 Part 1

From the very beginning, the game was highly confrontational and fast-paced.

Mourinho's and Twain's teams did not feel out the situation first. They just directly exchanged fire.

The Forest team was awarded the right to kick off in the pre-match coin toss. From the moment the referee first blew the kick-off whistle, the Forest team quickly drilled the football towards Chelsea's goal.

The game's starting center-forward, Mark Viduka, fought John Terry for the header shot in front of the goal. Finally, he successfully headed the football, but he was also obstructed by Terry and was not be

able to head the ball at the right angle. The football skidded past the goal, which scared the Chelsea fans into a cold sweat.

There was a loud collective gasp from the stands.

“The first attack from Nottingham Forest threatened Chelsea! It’s completely different from the team’s challenge against Arsenal in the away game. Neither team intends to hold back in this match.”

“This game is going to be a terrific one to watch.”

“That’s right, it’s very exciting. Both teams’ speeds of transition from defensive to attacking positions are very fast. As we speak, Chelsea’s counterattack has already reached within thirty meters of the Forest team’s area... And Frank Lampard kicks a long shot! And struck the beam! What a pity!”

Lampard held his head. He could not believe that his shot had bypassed Van der Sar’s fingers only to fail in front of the beam. The stands in the City Ground stadium gasped loudly again.

Still feeling unnerved, Edwin van der Sar laid on the ground as he looked at the trembling beam overhead.

He had thought this Chelsea main midfielder would choose to pass the ball, so he was unprepared for the long shot.

Edwin van der Sar was not the only one who was spooked; Twain’s heart almost popped out of his throat on the sidelines. He saw the football fly past the unprepared van der Sar and thought that it was going in.

“In the first two minutes, both sides each had a brilliant attack. I hope the two teams can slow down a little. Otherwise, I won’t have the opportunity to introduce the starting lineup and substitutes for today’s game.”

Next to him, Gary Lineker laughed into the microphone. “I don’t think they’ll do as you wish, John. You’ll have to make use of every second and divide the list into several sections for the introduction!”

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Of course, Motson still found the chance to introduce both teams’ lists of appearances. However, the rate of his speech was faster than usual. Otherwise, he might have missed a wonderful scene.

Chelsea still remained in Mourinho’s traditional 4-3-3 formation with the Czech goalkeeper, Petr Čech, and the four defenders. They were Paulo Ferreira, John Terry, Ricardo Carvalho, and William Gallas. The three midfielders were Frank Lampard, Tiago Mendes, and Claude Makelele. The three strikers were Didier Drogba, Arjen Robben, and Damien Duff.

The Forest team’s formation was still the traditional 4-4-2 with the goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, and the two center backs being Gerard Piqué and Pepe. Both of them had relied on their actual performances to stabilize their positions as the main force in the team. The Forest team had only conceded four goals so far this season. The improvement in their defense was very obvious. Pascal Chimbonda was the starting right back and Leighton Baines was the left back. The parallel positions in the midfield from left to right were Franck Ribéry, George Wood, Mikel Arteta, and Ashley Young. The

two strikers were a combination of tall and fast players, the center forward Mark Viduka and the speedy second forward Nicolas Anelka.

Mourinho was very focused on attacks through the flanks. Robben and Duff were both good at breakthroughs at the flanks. While Shaun Wright-Phillipson, still on the bench, was a similar talent. Attacking through the flanks was the guarantee of their victory.

Twain's Nottingham Forest was also similar to Chelsea. Even though there were no wingers like Robben and Duff, the Forest team's two side midfielders had garnered much attention since last season. Many teams coveted Ribéry and Ashley Young. Twain had rejected many teams' offers for the two players that summer. The two extremely fast side midfielders could dribble, break through, pass, and shoot. They could advance to attack and retreat to defend, which made them more useful than wingers.

As a matter of fact, in today's football world, the line between a winger and a side midfielder was becoming blurred. Ribéry and Ashley Young could be side midfielders as well as the occasional wingers. It was completely dependent on the team's tactical needs.

In the face of Chelsea's winger tactics, Twain's response was to cement the defensive line firmly at the back. The two full backs were not allowed to assist. They must not give Robben and Duff the space to accelerate. When necessary, they could use foul as a tactic. At the same time, Twain did not intend to just focus on defense. To tame Chelsea's flanks, the simplest way was to let Chelsea's flanks attack first and then push them back.

Both sides of Ribéry and Ashley Young would be the Forest team's main attacking corridors. Most attacks would be sent to their feet to be passed on to the forward line.

Unlike Lampard, Arteta would organize the offense more in the middle backfield rather than dribbling the ball to the front to shoot and score goals, even though his own scoring ability was not weak and he was outstanding at place kicks.

The most important part of Chelsea's defensive system was not the team captain, John Terry, or the world-class goalkeeper, Petr Čech, but the 32-year-old French veteran, Makelele. His blockade in the midfield was the key to Chelsea's successful defense.

Chelsea had Makelele and Nottingham Forest had George Wood. Makelele's body was not very strong. His defense relied heavily on experience, whereas George Wood's defense was based on his supernatural strength. Wood's importance to the Forest team needed no elaboration. With him around, the entire Forest team, regardless of whether they were the front field players or backfield players, would feel assured.

Chelsea's three midfielders might appear to be less than the Forest team's four midfielders. In fact, it could be seen that two out of Chelsea's three midfielders were the defending midfielders and Lampard was an attacking midfielder. Robben and Duff could be seen as the two wingers. In this way, Chelsea had five midfielders.

However, the number of players did not represent strength.

So far, the game had been going on for twenty minutes, and the Forest team and Chelsea were on par, which was clear from the midfield. At the moment, the game situation was in a delicate balance. Both

parties' attacks were very fierce, and their transition between offense and defense was rapid. It looked like there were plenty of opportunities, but neither could grasp them.

The score was still 0:0.

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"The display on the big screen shows that the game has been going on for twenty minutes.... The twenty minutes went by before you knew it! Time really flies. The fierce competition between both sides made us forget the passage of time. Other than the score, this is a perfect game!"

"But it's just a matter of time before someone scores a goal in a game like this. It will be an irony if this game ends with a score of 0:0. Let's see who will break the deadlock first, and whose favor the balance will tip in..."

Just as Gary Lineker ended his speech, Chelsea launched an attack. It was a surprise attack, a direct long pass from the back straight to Robben on the flank. Robben's first stop was perfect. The ball halted just in front of him not far ahead. He immediately accelerated and dashed past without any hindrance from Chimbonda, who had rushed up to defend against him!

The Forest team's defense was breached, and Edwin van der Sar's save was critical!

Robben glanced up at the direction of the goal and then turned to speed up. In the middle, Drogba raised his hand as he followed up. Piqué and Pepe did not dare to slack and closely marked in the front and back. George Wood quickly chased from outside the penalty area. His target was Robben.

Since the angle was very tight, everybody thought that Robben would pass the ball. After all, even if Drogba was closely marked, there was still Lampard outside the penalty area. George Wood chose to return to chase after Robben, which meant that Lampard would be unmarked for a while.

As long as Robben was selfless enough, he could create a chance for the unmarked Lampard to take a big shot. But would Robben pass the ball?

It was a bit difficult for Robben to pass the ball to someone else after he had dribbled to break through to the penalty area when he was unmarked.

Robben looked up again. He was not looking for someone but confirming the goalkeeper's position and the angle of the shot. He slowed down his pace and adjusted the football at his feet.

George Wood was already close at hand. He already did not care if this was the penalty area. He threw himself forward and slid sideways to tackle the ball!

At the same time, Robben's calf quickly shot out and fired!

The football tore past Wood's toes, and drilled past the unprepared van der Sar into the goal!

When the ball went out, Robben jumped and dodged Wood's lethal tackle.

"What a goooool! What a goooool!! Chelsea is the one to break the deadlock! The first team to score is the visiting Chelsea, who now leads against Nottingham Forest by 1:0!"

"The balance is now tilted toward Chelsea!"

“This is an unexpected blow. The Forest team’s two side midfielders are still standing near the center line, and Robben is already celebrating his goal!”

After he saw Robben’s goal, Mourinho ran wildly with his arms wide open along the sidelines for about ten meters. He was so excited that it was as if he was going to hug Robben, the hero who scored the goal. In fact, all the Chelsea players were celebrating on the field. He did this for Twain. He almost rushed across the center line and ran to the front of Nottingham Forest’s technical area.

Twain twisted his head to look at the electronic scoreboard and turned a blind eye to Mourinho.

He knew what Mourinho had mind. He refused to yield.

Chapter 363: The War Between Two Men 3 Part 2

Robben’s speed was still too fast. But that should not have resulted in the goal. If Chimbonda did not rush up when he saw Lampard’s long pass and left behind a large gap, and if after Chimbonda was bypassed, Pepe could fill the gap in time instead of defending Drogba in front of the goal, it might not have happened.

Unfortunately, there were no “ifs” on the football field. Hindsight was 20-20.

Twain turned his head and said to Kerslake, “Record the goal. We’ll break it down during training.”

After that, he got up and hurried to the sidelines. He whistled first for the team’s attention. Then he raised his index finger and shouted loudly, “It’s just one goal! No big deal! Equalize it and then overtake them!”

He could only pretend to ignore Mourinho now, or he really did not know what his expression should look like. What else could he do when his team was lagging behind?

Mourinho was asked by the fourth official to return to the technical area. He told him not to bother the opponent. If he wanted to celebrate, he could do it over at the other side. The fourth official pointed to the direction of the Chelsea substitutes bench.

Mourinho simply explained that he was just excited for a moment and had gone in the wrong direction. He then returned to his seat in the technical area.

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The game restarted. The balance had been broken, and the Forest team faced an unfavorable situation. Since Twain had stood by the sidelines and shouted, he had not gone back to his seat since. Instead, he stood on the sidelines with his arms across his chest. He believed this could give the team a hint of self-confidence.

Of course, he did not stand on the sidelines like some managers who anxiously paced back and forth or fidgeted non-stop. He stood there with a straight back and stared at the field with a firm gaze as if standing at attention during his university military training.

It really did have some effect. After the kickoff, the Forest team's fighting spirit did not deflate due to a conceded goal. On the contrary, their offense became fiercer.

Anelka began to retreat to aid the midfield frequently. Makelele's defense in the middle was so strong that the Forest team's strikers could not receive the ball for some time.

After the French striker's return, the situation improved. The Forest team now had five midfielders, but Anelka was freer in his position. In addition, after his withdrawal, his speed advantage was also brought to play. Now that Makelele had run into the swift Anelka, it was not so easy.

Makelele's positioning was very good. He was experienced and reasonably skilled in defense. However, those factors were a little weak in the face of a player who relied on speed to force breakthroughs.

After Anelka successfully broke through Makelele twice in a row, Tiago came to help with the defense.

When he tried to forcefully break through again, he was intercepted by Makelele, who grabbed hold of the opportune moment. Chelsea took the opportunity to launch a counterattack. Makelele passed the ball to Lampard, with Robben and Duff simultaneously advancing on the two flanks. But Chelsea's rapid counterattack did not materialize as the ball at Lampard's feet was stopped by George Wood.

George Wood passed the football to Arteta. During Albertini's absence, he had gradually learned and became accustomed to his cooperation with the Spanish midfielder. In fact, he was the same with whomever he coordinated with. He would try to intercept the ball and pass it to another player after his successful interception. Then he would prepare for the next interception.

Anelka cut diagonally across the field. It seemed that he wanted Arteta to pass the ball to him. Makelele and Tiago closely watched Anelka's movements. The French striker, who had just returned to the Premier League, had been performing so well lately that they dared not underestimate him. Moreover, Mourinho had also listed Anelka as the number one dangerous player in the Forest team before the game. He required the rear defensive line to raise their vigilance and be careful of his speed and unexpected shots.

The Frenchman's positioning tore apart Chelsea's midfield defensive line and disturbed their rear defensive line at the same time. Arteta took a look at Anelka, who ran and looked back at the same time; he had sent the ball directly to the left, which was the opposite of his running direction. It was Franck Ribéry's side.

This was almost a replica of Chelsea's goal before. The difference was that Chelsea's goal was unexpected, and the Forest team's attack was traceable. Anelka ran towards the right side, which spurred Chelsea's defensive attention. There was naturally a lack of defensive strength on Ribéry's side. Arteta delivered the ball in a very timely and accurate manner.

Ribéry was also determined to do his best as if he was in competition with Robben on ball-stopping skill. He stopped the ball firmly with one foot! But unlike Robben, who stopped the ball in front of himself to facilitate his acceleration and seamless action, Ribéry directly parked the football at his foot and remained still.

“This stopping of the ball...” Lineker wanted to say Ribéry’s stopping was not ideal, even though it might look impressive to be able to stop the ball securely with a more than thirty meters long pass. But what of it? It was not conducive to his next move, and could be considered as having “stopped him dead.”

Paulo Ferreira must have thought so too. He reckoned that this was a good chance to intercept the ball, so he rushed up without hesitation. At that time, Ribéry suddenly lobbed the ball at his feet forward!

Ribéry’s volley strength was so powerful that the football went far!

Was this a pass?

No!

After the football went out, Ribéry quickly got into action and bypassed the stupefied Ferreira!

This was a complete surprise to Ferreira, and also to Lineker’s surprise. Normally speaking, this was a stop-dead ball. Ribéry basically had no space to make his next move. But Ribéry had unexpectedly chosen the most direct method, which was to kick the football far away and then, while Ferreira could not respond in time, he suddenly started to accelerate and bypass the Portuguese full back!

“What a terrific breakthrough! There was not much technique required, but it was very effective!” Motson shouted out what Lineker wanted to say. There was indeed no technical skill to kick the football as far away as possible from the opponent. It also put the ball far away from oneself. He would have to then rely on ultra-fast speed to pursue to take advantage of the full back’s slow turn.

“Nottingham Forest has a chance! Ribéry single-handedly cut through the middle and into the penalty area!”

Carvalho dropped Mark Viduka and went to aid with defense, but Ribéry suddenly stopped the ball. Then he urgently spiked the ball the other way and swung past him. After he swung past, Ribéry did not continue to dribble the ball. He shot a volley on the spot!

Čech judged the direction of his shot correctly. However, Ribéry shot was a fast rolling pass, which was the most annoying for a goalkeeper. The tall Czech goalkeeper landed on the ground at a slower speed than the football rolling forward... and the result was—

“A genius shot! Franck Ribéry! He has equalized the score to 1:1 for the Forest team!”

“This is the best comeback for Chelsea’s goal; the same method, but way more exciting! Even after he bypassed two players in a row, Ribéry’s speed and skill were at the top of the game! As the latest star player of the French national team, he has once again proved his ability!”

The atmosphere of the City Ground stadium was ignited by the goal. The torrential currents of red in the stands smothered the Chelsea fans’ blue squares.

Tony Twain, who had been standing erect on the sidelines, did not jump when he saw Ribéry’s goal. Instead, he vigorously pumped his fist.

The moment he had waited for was finally here. From the moment Mourinho wildly celebrated in front of his eyes, he had been waiting for this: the moment of revenge.

Now we're even again, Mr. Mourinho!

Chapter 364: A Dedication to Eastwood Part 1

When Forest equalized the score, Mourinho sat unmoving on his seat without any expression while the broadcast television gave him a close-up. Mourinho knew that there was going to be a camera turning his way to join in the fuss, so he kept his facial expression unchanged, not giving the TV station or commentators anything to talk about.

Even so, John Motson and Lineker, watching the scene from the broadcasting seats, could not stop laughing.

Tang En's celebration at the sidelines was highly exaggerated. Mourinho, who was nearby, simply treated him like he was invisible, looking straight ahead without giving him a glance.

More than ten minutes ago, the two were in the exact same situation but with reversed roles.

Because of that, the scene seemed irrepressibly funny no matter how one looked at it.

With the restart of the match, both parties resumed some sort of balance. A stalemate in the field. Neither side was able to break through; in fact, neither side was willing to try and break through. They were only left with a few minutes before halftime. Neither intended to waste their energy on these last few minutes. Compared to their usual matches, this was much tougher.

Neither of the two managers said anything about making use of the last moments in the first half to go at their opponents. Tang En, who had celebrated the goal, continued standing by the sidelines while Mourinho stayed on the manager's seat, not getting up.

The match time proceeded to its 45th minute, and the referee blew the ending whistle for its first half.

"1:1! It's a very fair score. In the first half, both teams had their chances and took them. The performances of all the players were excellent. This matches our predictions from before the match. It is indeed turning out to be an exciting and intense match."

"John, I think we can regard this as a rule. As long it's Mourinho and Tony Twain's teams clashing, it's hard for it not to be this exhilarating."

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The members of Forest swarmed into the locker room. Ribéry started shouting, "Clothes off! Clothes off!"

With half the match past, it was a common occurrence for players to take off their sweat-soaked jerseys and change into their spare, fresh ones; but Ribéry's purpose for shouting was certainly not that.

"Singlet, singlet... Wes, marker."

Ribéry took the marker from Morgan and bent over the players' bench, writing a line of words on the singlets, starting with his own.

The others gathered behind him, watching as he wrote on every one of their singlets.

Anelka made no motion to stop them, even when he saw them writing and drawing on his.

Their captain, George Wood, handed over a white singlet when it came to his turn, stumping Ribéry momentarily.

“George? I thought you didn’t ever wear this?”

“If I don’t wear it, where will you write?” Wood asked with furrowed brows.

Ribéry chuckled. “What a pity. We planned to write on your stomach.”

Laughter rippled through the locker room.

Tang En was met with that scene as he pushed the door open and entered the locker room. The players were all huddled in a circle. George Wood was standing in the middle while Ribéry was half sprawled on the floor. Everyone other than George Wood, including Albertini and Anelka who rarely laughed, was chuckling in delight.

“What’s going on?” Tang En was interested too.

Hearing his words, the group turned to look at him. Ribéry stood up from the ground.

“Boss, this is your fault.”

“My fault?” Tang En was completely confused.

“You knew that the Romani was coming to watch this match, right?” Ribéry asked.

“Yeah, but I wanted to give you guys a surprise, so I only told you before the match.”

“Look,” Ribéry said, opening his hands up. “We’re utterly unprepared. If you had told us a day earlier, we wouldn’t need to be writing on our singlets right now...”

The crowd parted, and Tang En finally saw what they were busy with. Their white singlets all had “Recover soon, we’re waiting for you, Freddy!” written on them with a marker.

He rubbed his nose, feeling a little abashed.

“If I could have lifted up my jersey up like this when I scored earlier!” Ribéry said, making the motion of flipping up his jersey, “Freddy would have seen it! Alas...”

“Eh... it’s not like we won’t be scoring in the second half. At that point, you can lift it!” Tang En said, also following-up with the motion to flip up his shirt.

“He’s just above us, and he’ll still be there in the second half. He won’t be leaving before the match ends.” Tang En pointed at the ceiling. “So, until the whistle signals the end of the match, you will all have the chance to let him see the words.”

Everyone agreed with Tang En and nodded.

“You’re right, Boss.” Ribéry stooped again and wrote the same line on Wood’s singlet. Regardless of if they were on the field or sitting on the substitutes’ bench, everyone had the same line written on their clothes.

Wood stood beside Ribéry, peering down quietly as Ribéry worked through their singlets.

Tang En was more curious about the other aspect of the matter. He asked, “Franck, which one of you came up with this idea?”

“Do you even need to ask?”

Ribéry was busy with the writing and answered Tang En’s question without looking up.

“When I scored the goal, everyone came running over to celebrate. We felt we should show something to Freddy, but we had nothing underneath our jerseys. So, we thought we might as well write one.”

“Good...” Tang En nodded.

“Go busy yourselves, stop standing around.” With a wave of his hand, the players obediently moved back to their lockers and started changing, slipping the singlets over their heads.

While they were doing that, Tang En started talking about their gains and losses over the first half.

“Great job, everyone. Even though the loss of that first goal took me a little by surprise...” Without asking the players to stop what they were doing to listen, Tang En leaned on the front of the tactical board and casually continued. “But, our goal also certainly surprised Mourinho a lot.”

Chuckles filled the locker room.

“Keep playing this way in the second half. But, you two fullbacks...” Tang En said, pointing to Chimbonda and Leighton Baines, “Don’t move in too fast when you’re defending.”

The two nodded. Chimbonda understood that the ball loss was in no small part because of him.

“Other than that, I don’t have much to say. Overall, your performance was excellent. I can’t find any problems even if I scrutinize it with a magnifying glass. Are you guys this thrilled about going up against the number one team in the League? Against a team who’s had a no-loss streak for 10 matches?”

“Yes!”

“That’s right, Boss!”

“Good. Keep this momentum going. In 45 minutes, let’s come back here to celebrate a victory!” Tang En said, pointing to the spot beneath his feet.

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In contrast with Tang En’s light-heartedness, Mourinho’s current expression was extremely stern.

In truth, the situation of a draw now was not bad. However, Mourinho’s expression would probably be somewhat better if Chelsea had been the one to equalize the score at the end. Right now, he had to walk off the field feeling like he was the loser.

The truth was that his team had not performed badly; they were at their usual standards. But, who had asked for his opponent in this match to be Tony Twain? Mourinho was completely unwilling to be at a disadvantage against that man.

Mourinho stood before his players and raised a single finger.

“In reality, Forest’s midfield defense consists of George Wood alone. But, our offense is not pressuring him much. He’s relaxed in the midfield, and we can’t have that! He’s the core of Forest’s defense. I am requesting that everyone pile even more pressure on him. Continue charging at him and creating trouble for him from all positions! Left wing, right wing, center...”

He turned to the tactical board behind him and quickly drew three lines. “When George Wood collapses, it’s not just their rear defense that will collapse; it’s also their offense. Just look what happened when they did not have Wood; they could not even beat Lille!”

“Additionally...” Mourinho suddenly recalled something. “According to what I know, George Wood doesn’t have a good temperament. If you can... find some way to do him in.”

Drogba whistled.

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At the end of halftime, Mourinho held back Lampard, who was walking out.

“When I said to do George Wood in earlier, did you think it was a joke?”

Lampard was stunned, not expecting that a question from Mourinho. He deliberated about how he should answer but finally shook his head.

“No, Boss.”

Mourinho nodded.

“Good. I’m not joking. You know why I pulled you back to speak with you alone, right?”

Lampard nodded. “I know.”

“In this match, you have the most face-to-face interactions with him. You spend the longest with him... How much do you know about Wood?”

“I’ve heard some things about him. Just like you said, Boss. His temper isn’t good.”

Mourinho nodded as Lampard spoke. “Yes. Find a way to provoke him.”

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The second half began. All of Forest’s players wore the singlets with “Recover soon, we are waiting for you, Freddy!” on them, and worked diligently towards getting their second goal.

Because of Tang En’s words, they suddenly had a new aim that was just as important as winning the match.

“He’s just above us, and he’ll still be there in the second half. He won’t be leaving before the match ends. So, until the whistle signals the end of the match, you will all have the chance to let him see the words.”

They must score!

Chapter 365: A Dedication to Eastwood Part 2

George Wood realized that the opponent’s number 8, Lampard, who had been avoiding him throughout the first half, was actively engaging with him now in the second half. He was perplexed.

But, with such problems, if Wood could not think through it, he would simply stop thinking about it. Anyhow, Lampard approaching on his own initiative saved him trouble; he only needed to wait and defend.

In his mind, defending was several levels easier than going on the offensive.

He felt that Lampard was a little different from the first half; his hand movements were on the increase. But Wood was not at all bothered. When he defended, he also had additional movements like that. They were taught to him by the managerial team and his other teammates during training. In other words, while Lampard thought he was provoking Wood, Wood saw it as a very normal thing to do.

In the end...

Mourinho shook his head as he watched from below. He had miscalculated. He should not have gotten Lampard to do such a thing. Such an upright Englishman was not suitable for it...

There was no need to force it if it did not work; it was just a method he had come up with on the fly.

At that thought, Mourinho stood and walked slowly to the sidelines. He was prepared to signal to Lampard for him to stop whatever he was doing and to return his focus to breaking through Forest’s gates.

Simultaneously, Forest launched an attack. It began with Edwin van der Sar who threw the ball to Chimbonda. The Frenchman then passed it to Ashley Young, who had returned to follow up on their attack.

William Gallas approached to press him for the ball. In response, Ashley Young and Arteta pulled off a quick two-versus-one pass. Passing the ball to Arteta, Ashley Young turned and ran forward. Tacitly, the Spaniard immediately sent out a kick that went over Gallas’ head.

The ball did not land at Ashley Young’s feet, instead flying towards his front. That was exactly what he had hoped for. He could widen his steps and make full use of his speed advantage.

Gallas’ chase after Ashley Young was certain to fail. Carvalho then took off into the wings while Gallas sprinted towards the middle of the penalty area to momentarily take over the position of center back, filling in the defensive gap created by Carvalho.

“It’s another rapid counterattack! The speed of Forest’s flanks is not at all inferior to Chelsea, who has Robben and Duff!”

Although the brilliance and abilities of Ashley Young could not be compared with Ribéry, he was, at the very least, still frequenting England’s National Youth Team. Things like flanking attacks were some of his best moves. His breakthrough was like a strong gust of wind, stirring up the red waves in City Ground’s spectators’ stand.

Carvalho leaped forward ferociously. With an abrupt knock with his back heel, Ashley Young took the ball inside, at the same time switching up the direction of his movement. However, the core center back of the Portuguese National Team was not so easily deceived. Seeing Ashley Young lift his foot, he hastily skidded to a stop. When his opponent stopped, that was when he would stop too.

“It didn’t get past!”

But it wasn’t over.

After changing direction, Ashley Young rapidly followed up with his right foot, kicking the ball in the direction of the end line, yet again changing his line of movement.

Carvalho’s reaction was quick. Whenever Ashley Young moved, he followed. Although he could not keep up in terms of speed, he still had his legs. They were extremely close to the end line now. According to experience, Ashley Young would try to pass center; of all the midfielders in last season’s English Premier, he had the highest count of passes to the center.

As expected, at the moment when Carvalho stretched his leg out to block Ashley Young’s pass to the center, the core side midfielder of England’s National Youth Team attempted exactly that.

Except that his pass route was a little higher than Carvalho’s raised leg.

The football drew a high arc in the air, descending to the front of Chelsea’s goal.

“A pass to the center!”

The pass was still affected by Carvalho’s defense; its path was a little too high, a disadvantage for the forwards who had burst forward in their battle to get into position.

The three from Forest—Anelka, Mark Viduka, and Franck Ribéry—entered. Adding to that three rear defenders and a defending midfielder from Chelsea, seven people were crowded before the goal.

Faced with so many players crowded before him, Čech calculated quickly in his mind and decided there was a risk of losing the ball if they continued trying to hold onto it; he might as well use a powerful strike to launch it outwards...

His fist landed on the football and successfully punched it out of the penalty area. But, the one who received the ball on the outside was not Chelsea’s player. It was someone in a red jersey—Arteta!

“Motherf...” Mourinho swore on the sidelines.

Arteta’s first contact with the ball could not kill it properly, and it bounced up in front of him.

“Makelele-”

The veteran French defensive midfielder dashed forward to intercept the ball, disregarding his own safety with the possibility of getting kicked himself.

Arteta was in a clear position to do a direct volley. The bouncing of the ball delayed him, but it was just as well. He could do a direct volley through the air!

Arteta did not see Makelele. His eyes saw only the football and the goal. Whatever was between did not exist to him.

“It’s- a volley!!”

Čech quickly reacted. As he landed, he saw that Forest’s player had received the ball and immediately jumped to his feet again, leaping in the direction where the ball had come from. But...

If Makelele had not stood between Arteta and Čech, the shot would have had an 80 to 90% chance of being blocked by Čech. As it turned out, when Makelele stretched his feet out to block the shot flying at him, the ball bounced off his kneecap and changed directions.

Even if Čech had been possessed by God in that instant, he could have done nothing to the ball that flew in the complete opposite direction.

Everyone watched as the ball crossed through the mob of players and flew into the other half of the goal.

Everyone—Tang En, the fans on the spectators’ stand, and the fans before their television sets—all jumped up with their arms raised.

“Nottingham Forest leads against Chelsea with a score of 2:1!”

“Forest! Forest!!”

Everyone, both at the live scene and before the television, started yelling.

“It looks like the psychological advantage that Tang En’s team has over Chelsea is continuing! Nottingham Forest does not fear Chelsea...”

“That’s right, they’re not afraid!!”

“Mourinho is in a pinch. From the beginning of the season until now, 10 rounds of the League have gone by. In that duration, Chelsea has yet to lose a match. On September 22 last year, in the seventh round of the last Premier League, they lost to Forest in this very stadium. From that point on, 41 rounds of the league have taken place. His team has not lost in the English Premier League since then! This is an incredible result. If they take down this match, they will create the second-best result of a no-loss streak in the English Premier League. They would be second only to Wenger’s Arsenal, and tied at second with Brian Clough’s Nottingham Forest. But now, Clough’s successor is taking actions to tell Mourinho, even if Forest’s previous record had already been passed, it’s still not that easy to catch up with it!”

“Forest’s previous glory has to be defended by Forest themselves!”

In truth, if Motson and Lineker had not brought that up, no one would have likely remembered that record. Anyway, it was already surpassed by Arsenal... Tang En had not used it to spur his team members before the match.

Especially after their goal, Forest's players did not bother thinking so much about it. They had finally gotten an opportunity to score again. They would not be letting go of this chance! All of them excitedly ran to the main spectators' stand as a group and faced the luxury box above. Under the lead of Arteta, who had scored, every one of them lifted their jerseys.

Including goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar, the not-too-sociable Anelka, and George Wood, all eleven players had this written across their chests:

"Recover soon, we're waiting for you, Freddy!"

Despite knowing beforehand what they were going to do, Tang En still felt moved when he was faced with the scene. Watching Anelka, who was usually distant from the entire team, and George Wood, who was always somewhat restrained, stand amongst the group with their unnatural expressions and their jerseys lifted to show the well-wishes written on their chests, Tang En felt that his team was already a cohesive unit no matter how it seemed on the surface.

When each person thought just a little more for someone else, that someone else would also think a bit more for them.

Tang En led the applause. Everyone in the technical area as well as those on the substitutes' bench stood up and followed their lead in applauding those 11 players in thanks.

Following that, City Ground erupted in resounding applause that lasted for a long, long time.

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"Freddy Eastwood, who was severely injured and absent from matches for seven months, is at this moment sitting in the luxury box. We don't know how he feels watching this scene, but I have to say, this is one of the most moving celebrations I've seen. Borrowing their words, I also hope for Eastwood to recover soon and hurry back onto the field. He's really a likable young lad."

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Eastwood, who had just been standing and cheering for the goal with the others, suddenly fell silent.

Sabina surreptitiously glanced at her husband and found him with a glimmer in his eyes. She smiled and said nothing, continuing to applaud.

Everyone in the luxury box responded the same way as did the 20 thousand fans beneath, in the spectators' stands. They did not cheer loudly or scream in excitement; they only smiled and kept clapping.

Chapter 366: It's Not Over Yet Part 1

Twain stood on the sidelines with his arms crossed over his chest. The camera lenses were focused on his profile gazing into the distance at the top of the grandstand, where the electronic scoreboard clearly showed the score of 2:1. The home team, Nottingham Forest, was ahead of Chelsea.

Mourinho also stood on the sidelines. Unlike Twain, he had put his hands into his pockets.

Taking advantage of the loss of ball possession, Mourinho grabbed hold of Lampard. He told him to cancel that plan and devote all his energy to finding the Forest team's defensive weaknesses.

The expressions on both managers' faces were very serious. The game was not over. Being in the lead, Twain did not want Mourinho to catch up. He did not want to repeat Mourinho's mistake. He knew that Chelsea was a tough nut to crack. There was nothing to be delighted about with a one-goal lead. Who knew what would happen next in the game?

Chelsea did not give up. There was still half an hour left in the second half of the game. They had time to equalize the score. They had not reached the end of the road yet.

What had they relied on to be unbeaten for forty-one rounds? It was not just Roman Abramovich's ruble. Strictly speaking, this Chelsea team did not have any players recognized as international superstars. Although their values were not low, it was Abramovich who hyped the prices up. The team had been able to win the league last season with its absolute advantage because Manager Mourinho had united the team's standard of fighting strength. He instilled an unyielding fighting spirit and a desire for victory in the "mercenary squad" put together by money. This point was very similar to Twain's Forest team. Therefore, they won several times in face of adversity and managed to get out of danger repeatedly.

Today's game was just one of those times to them.

Mourinho's team never knew the meaning of concession.

After Chelsea lost the ball, they launched a frenetic counterattack against the Forest team, so much so that the leading Forest team had a hard time playing.

Mourinho let his team press forward to pressure the Forest team's defensive line. At the same time, they created offside tactics to trap Anelka and Mark Viduka.

In that way, Chelsea's formation was more compact, pressing and attacking layer by layer. Even if the Forest team used long passes to advance, the probability of the ball ending up at the feet of the Chelsea players was high. Then they would organize two, three, four strikes. This would give the Forest players the impression that Chelsea's offense was relentless. For the defenders, as the pressure increased until they could not withstand the pressure and crumbled, the specific phenomenon would result in them committing errors on their own.

George Wood was so tangled up by Lampard that he was too occupied to attend to the other attacks from Chelsea.

In turn, Chelsea looked for a point to assail and repeatedly struck the ball in that direction, which was their right flank and the Forest team's left flank.

Duff and Robben would occasionally switch positions in the game. They were not fixed to the left or right and the two players switched even more frequently. Leighton Baines was the weakest among the Forest team's four starting fullbacks. Mourinho knew that, and so did the Chelsea players. They constantly struck Baines' defensive zone to make him crack earlier than the other points in the Forest team.

"Push them out! Push them out!" Twain yelled on the sidelines and waved his arms vigorously, but no one noticed. Even if someone noticed him, it was of no use. It was not as if the Forest team's front line could push out the opponents just because he shouted, "push them out."

Chelsea pressed on too hard. The Forest team had completely fallen into their tempo. What good could come out of following the opponents' pace?

In spite of the critical situation, Twain did not intend to adjust by substitution. He did not have a suitable substitute player for the current situation.

Any game could face a situation whereby the opponents suddenly exerted force to form an absolute advantage and lay siege to a goal. But still, one should not panic at those times. Blindly making hasty adjustments would only give the opponents opportunities to take advantage.

Twain did not make any adjustments. He believed that the eleven Forest players on the field could withstand the waves of Chelsea's offense.

As long as they resisted, Chelsea would be dampened. Mental frustration would bring on physical exhaustion. At that time, it would be the Forest team's turn to counterattack.

The crux of the matter only had one point, which was to withstand Chelsea's tornado of attacks.

But the more crucial question was, could the Forest team withstand it?

They were not facing a team that was in the lower ranks of the league, but the top-ranked team, Chelsea, with the highest number of goals scored at twenty-four and the least number of conceded goals at only four in ten rounds of the league.

This was truly a tough challenge.

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Leighton Baines felt exhausted. Even though the game had been going for sixty-five minutes, he was not a player who was physically weak. In fact, he had good stamina and could run very well. However, if he had to face a team's offense, he would be worn down no matter how well he could run.

He had started out at Wigan Athletic, and he even received Wigan Athletic's greeting before the season's opening game with his former club. As one of the most successful players to debut at Wigan Athletic, he had become a standard brand name for Wigan Athletic's youth training, that a football star could also come from a rugby-obsessed town.

Although he had joined the Forest team, his favorite team was still Wigan Athletic.

At that time, Twain had used the "main position" to attract him to the Forest team and he quickly became the main left back. Although he was only twenty years old, he already had a complete Premier

League season experience. Now he was not considered an inexperienced rookie anymore. He was currently Nottingham Forest's main left back and England's under-21 youth team's main left back. He was rumored to be a future star whom Ferguson was interested in.

Still, he played appallingly in this game.

He certainly knew who he was facing: Ireland national footballer Damien Duff and the Netherlands' national footballer, Arjen Robben. They were the top players in European football. His ability was still far beneath theirs. But despite his opponents' strength surpassing his, he was not willing to accept that it was natural for him to play so appallingly.

None of Twain's players were willing to admit that they were inferior to others.

They were as competitive as their boss and did not like to lose.

Ribéry came back to help him defend, but the Frenchman was not good at doing that kind of thing. Not to mention, the Forest team was now overwhelmed by the pressure. They were most in need of using offense to turn the tides. If he came back again, who was going to counterattack?

Anelka and Viduka continued to fall into Chelsea's offside trap. With Ribéry's fast speed, the side midfielder could plug in to have more opportunities to break through the trap.

He did not want Ribéry to come back. Otherwise, even if he intercepted the ball, the ball would still be trapped in a tight loop and be unable to break through because the two players were too close. It could only be intercepted by Chelsea, and then he would have to repeat everything that had been done before.

It was too tiring!

Wood usually would support the defense on both flanks because he had good stamina and was fast. Twain also asked him to expand his defensive zone. But today, he was entangled with Lampard.

Just now, when he rushed over to help with the defense, Duff immediately passed the ball to Lampard in the middle. Chelsea's number 8 kicked a long shot that forced Edwin van der Sar to make a wonderful save, which also made the Forest fans scream.

The defensive barrier in the middle had hit an impasse. All offense on the flanks were done to find opportunities in the middle. If Wood ran to support Baines, what about Lampard? What about Tiago?

This time Robben exchanged positions with Duff. He came to face Baines' defense, and Duff went to the other side.

Robben's characteristics were small running steps with a fast pace and straight upper body. He almost relied on his two legs rapidly alternating and zigzagging to shake off his opponents.

Baines put all his focus to mark Robben, who dribbled the ball in front of him. He knew Robben was fast. Half a second of negligence and distraction could lead to his opponent's breakthrough.

Ribéry moved closer to Baines, but Baines had eyes for Robben alone.

“Mark him! Don’t make a move lightly! Stick to the inside line!” Even Albertini anxiously yelled on the sidelines.

Twain glanced at the Italian. Demetrio had said on more than one occasion that he wanted to be a manager after retirement. His favorite games which he was the best at were the CM and FM series. It looked like he had to cultivate his ability on the training field.

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The Chelsea fans were excited by the continuous bombardment. The massive amount of adrenaline pumping through their veins made them cheer their team with flushed faces. The Forest fans jeered at Chelsea.

In such a noisy environment, Baines could not hear Albertini’s roar. But it was the basic requirement of a defensive player to know what the seasoned captain was shouting.

Robben’s speed did not look fast, but Baines did not dare not take it lightly. This was not the first time he had encountered the “Flying Dutchman” in this game. He knew that this seemingly slow dribbling of the ball contained a very strong explosive power.

Robben moved the football to his instep and Baines moved ahead to block. The Dutchman suddenly pulled back the football. The inside cut was only a feint. The purpose was to deceive Baines into shifting his center of gravity inward. His real purpose was still to get to the byline and deliver a cross.

Chapter 367: It’s Not Over Yet Part 2

After he pulled back the ball, Robben suddenly accelerated and dribbled it towards the end line!

Baines anticipated Robben doing just that. He guarded against it when he tried to block the inside line. And now he quickly turned around. He brought up the fastest speed he could muster and closely marked Robben. He was still stuck on the inside and did not give the Dutchman the slightest chance of overtaking him. Robben was now ahead of Baines by about a quarter of his body length, but he was not confident of shaking him off.

Seeing that the football was going to be dribbled past the end line, Robben suddenly stepped on the ball at the end line and braked. He and the still running Baines slid out of the field together due to the sudden stop.

However, one of them suddenly stopped on his own accord, and the other one reacted to the sudden halt. Next, Robben had the upper hand with his reaction speed. He turned his body and shook off Baines, who was lying on the ground. He wanted to get the ball back and dribbled it into the penalty area. He was momentarily stunned when he turned: the ball was gone!

The referee blew his whistle. Robben saw the assistant referee raising the flag in his hand and pointing towards the corner arc under his feet.

“Corner kick! Just when he lost his balance, Leighton Baines stabbed out the ball, which Robben had stopped at the end line! Nice defense!”

Enthusiastic applause rang out from the stands.

Baines's chest heaved as he lay on the ground. He knew that the applause was dedicated to him. But he was not happy because he knew that this time he had done his best and yet his opponent was still awarded a corner kick. He did not know what would happen next.

He wanted to get up and go back to the goal to defend but suddenly found that his right foot had no strength. He tried to use force, but instead, a piercing pain came over him. A thought suddenly came to his mind: I'm done...

Lying on the ground, Baines raised both of his hands, extended his index fingers, and slowly circled twice. This was a gesture to indicate to the manager that he could not play in the game any longer and needed to be replaced. After he did that, he covered his face with his hands and stayed still.

"Dammit..." Twain saw Baines's signal and swore under his breath.

Fleming had already run over with the team doctor. Baines had fallen on the sidelines. They did not need the referee's permission to enter.

"Gareth!" Twain shouted without turning his head, "Go warm up! You only have one corner kick's time!"

Bale sprang from his seat, not looking surprised. Without hesitation, he took off his vest and ran to the sidelines.

Kerslake stood up from his seat and walked over to Twain. "Baines is done?"

Twain nodded. "I think it was a sprained ankle. I saw that his angle was a little awkward when he shoveled the ball... He used force to shift his center of gravity while moving really fast."

"F**k..." Kerslake also swore. Albertini had just recovered from his injury, and now another player on the Forest team was injured. There were almost no major injuries in the previous two seasons. This season, when the Forest team needed to compete in multiple tournaments, there was one injury after another.

The two coaches stood on the sidelines and silently watched the field.

The referee saw Baines make the gesture for substitution and ran over to inquire. Then he routinely followed up with a wave of his hand to let the Forest team doctors come up. After he saw that the Forest team doctors already ran towards here, he returned to the field and signaled for the Chelsea player to reposition the football. Then he ran back into the penalty area.

The game would continue and would not be stopped because of a player's injury. The Forest team could only play with ten players. One less player might be an important factor in breaking the balance for them.

Mourinho also clearly knew that the corner kick was an opportunity that he could make use of. He waved for the entire team to advance, leaving only Paulo Ferreira and the goalkeeper, Petr Čech, in the backfield. The trio of fullbacks, John Terry, Ricardo Carvalho, and William Gallas all rushed into the Forest team's penalty area.

The atmosphere in front of the Forest team's goal suddenly heated up.

“This is our chance to equalize the score! Don’t let go!” Terry shouted to rouse up his teammates.

“Defend! Watch them and mark them closely!” Edwin van der Sar also yelled at his teammates to mark Chelsea’s lanky player. “Push outward, push outward!”

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It seemed so near and yet so far. Nothing could better describe how Baines felt.

The Forest team’s crowded goal area was five meters away from him. He could clearly hear the voices of both teams’ players while they competed for positions. With his eyes closed, he could imagine what it would be like at this moment in the goal area. It must be chaotic.

But he was unable to do anything. His injury had caused the team to be short a player. Could they withstand the attack? Did they have someone to take over and stand on the right post?

Fleming squeezed his right ankle and asked him if it hurt. He did not even answer.

“It seems that the injury is serious since you can’t even feel it.” Fleming took an ice pack from the medical kit and pressed it on Baines’ ankle, which he then wrapped in a bandage.

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The rampage in front of the Forest team’s goal finally subsided, but everyone knew it was only temporary. Just like the calm before the storm, it was filled with pent-up anxiety and restlessness.

The referee blew the whistle in his mouth as he withdrew from the penalty area.

Lampard raised his right fist high in the air, which was Chelsea’s cue for the corner kick tactic. No one knew what it meant besides them.

The football shot out towards the goal. The two Chelsea center backs, Drogba and Carvalho, were still wrestling for control up until that moment. They had to jump to fight for the header, and the Forest team’s center backs were not going to let them. But those two players were just decoys. The desperate display they put on in front of the Forest team’s goal was just to attract the Forest team’s defensive attention.

John Terry sprinted from the penalty spot and jumped.

He leaped high without anyone guarding him!

“John Terry... and a GOOOOAL!!”

Edwin van der Sar hurriedly tried to save the goal. He jumped up and waved his hands only to watch the football fly into the goal.

Great cheers broke out in the visitors’ stands.

Hearing the unfamiliar cheer, Fleming, who was bandaging Baines, lowered his head and swore. “Dammit!” At the same time, he accidentally applied more force with his hands.

Baines finally reacted. He frowned and gasped.

Gareth Bale, who warmed up with sprints on the sidelines, also stopped in his tracks. He could not continue to warm up because the warm-up area was full of people now. The Chelsea players bolted to the area to celebrate the goal. Waving their fists at the Chelsea fans in the stands behind him, the Blues fans responded with cheers.

Bale coolly looked at the people. Suddenly he heard someone call his name. The assistant coach, Mr. Kerlake, waved at him. "Gareth! Come back! It's your turn to play!"

With another glance at the excited Chelsea people, Gareth Bale turned and ran towards the Forest team's technical area.

When he passed Chelsea's technical area, his eye was caught by the movements of Mourinho's wild celebration. The Portuguese manager even knelt and slid on the ground like a player who just scored! He wore a black windbreaker and glided with both knees on the ground!

He was once again the focus of attention.

Knowingly and unknowingly, the television viewers and the spectators in the stadium all turned their attention to the manager who never hid his feelings.

"Wow! That's is the best celebration from a manager that I've ever seen!" Motson shouted.

When Gareth Bale ran back to his team's technical area, he still turned to look at Mourinho.

"Don't look, Gareth." Twain's voice rang out from behind him.

"Ah, I'm sorry, sir..." Bale thought the manager must have been displeased.

Twain cleared his throat. "I've said many times that you shouldn't call me 'sir' on the First Team. Just call me boss or chief."

"Yes, chief..."

Twain glanced at Mourinho, who was still performing in front of the camera, and asked, "Do you think that's a cool move?"

Bale nodded at first and then immediately shook his head. "No. That's nothing, chief."

Twain grinned. "Now you have a chance to let me do the same. Baines is injured, so you're going to replace him as the left back. You have to plug in to assist when necessary."

"Not defense, chief?" Bale was a little puzzled. A left back's first responsibility should be to defend. After all, Chelsea had just attacked ferociously.

"If we keep defending, this is how it'll turn out." Twain pointed to the electronic scoreboard on the far side of the stand. "So, when you can, send the ball out."

Bale nodded to indicate his understanding.

"Go on then, play well! If you score, I'll give you a better celebration than that!" Twain winked at Bale.

The young man laughed. "What cool thing are you going to do, chief?"

“You’ll know when the time comes. Score a goal for me, and you’ll see!” Twain moved Bale towards the area just outside the center line.

After taking the lead in the first fourteen minutes, the Forest team was equalized, but it was not the end by any means. Mourinho, who caught everyone’s attention with an unconventional celebratory move in the blink of an eye, knew very well that Tony Twain understood that too.

It’s not over yet.

Chapter 368: A Goal to Fame Part 1

Without the formality of the outgoing player and the one entering high fiving or hugging, 16-year-old Gareth Bale ran onto the field. On television, John Motson was introducing Gareth Bale’s youth to the audience, and how he surpassed the record in the English Premier League as the youngest player to be fielded during his match with Man City.

On the other side, Leighton Baines had hopped back on one leg with Fleming’s support. An ice pack was wrapped around his right foot on his swollen ankle.

Upon seeing him “walk” back, Tang En hurriedly went forward to give Baines a hug.

“You did great, Leighton. Have a good rest now.”

After Baines returned to the substitutes’ bench, Fleming came up beside Tang En and reported on the injuries.

“The situation is better than I originally thought. It’s a sprain, but he didn’t hurt the bones. Just one to two weeks of recovery should do the job.”

Tang En nodded. “That’s certainly better than I imagined.”

In that time, Nottingham Forest only had two matches scheduled. Furthermore, they were scheduled within six days from the end of the match; it was not a particularly packed schedule. Forest would have plenty of time to breathe.

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“16 years old?” Mourinho flipped the notebook at hand. On it was the information for every player on the Forest Team listed with as much detail as possible. This was how Mourinho stayed a step ahead of the others. When he had been coaching in Portugal, the club had refused to assign him a scout. He had then used his own funds to hire one to help him investigate into detailed information on his opponents. Now, he had brought the same tactic into the Premier League.

“Doesn’t Tony have anyone else to use?” He threw the book to his assistant and stood at the sidelines, thinking.

“Tell them that the offense direction won’t change. Continue with that wing.”

He wanted to take advantage of the momentum after his team had scored to make another push, scoring yet another goal to complete the reversal. Mourinho understood what Tang En’s team was like.

Only at this time would it be the greatest blow to Forest's morale. A team like them would jump up and bite their opponents if they were not thoroughly beaten down.

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The match continued. Chelsea's shared consensus only increased. It was obvious to everyone; their target was still Forest Team's left-wing defense. After Leighton Baines's departure from the field, Gareth Bale was faced against Robben and Duff's alternating attacks.

Everyone was worried about whether the 16-year-old Bale could hold on. In the event that he collapsed as well, Forest would be finished for this match. As a result, many people began doubting if Tang En's decision to send Bale in was correct. Not only would it harm his own team, but it might also hurt young Bale; if he was crushed by the pressure of such an important mission in a crucial match like this, he would be embroiled in a nightmare of failure for a long time to come.

But Tang En was not worried in the least bit. He had seen Bale's recordings during Youth Team training and matches. It was he who had brought Bale from Southampton to Nottingham; he understood the inner strength of the kid. He was not shy anymore.

When Tang En called him back to get ready to enter the field, the boy showed only a leisurely interest in Mourinho's celebratory actions. From that, Tang En knew that he was not, in fact, anxious.

That's right, Tang En recalled. Bale's father was in the spectators' stands. Tang En turned and scanned the stands. In the crowd of people, he naturally could not find Bale's father, but Tang En believed he must have been in some corner. Ever since Bale had been formally transferred to the First Team, his father had made sure to watch the match live at the scene as long as Bale was informed of his selection as one of the 16 players on the team list, regardless of if it was a home or away match.

Although this was not Bale's first time appearing in the English Premier League, and he had even played as a starter through the whole match against Man City, that sort of match could not compare with this match against Chelsea.

This could be said to be a critical mission entrusted to him.

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Bale was truly calm. He was not in the least bit nervous. He greatly disappointed all those who were waiting to see him stumble because of his nerves. Just five minutes after he went onto the field, he successfully defended against Duff, blocking his pass to the center out into the sidelines.

On the field, Bale's mind was filled with only the match, his opponents, and Tang En's words: "Baines is injured. You're going in to substitute for him as the left back. When it's required, you also need to cut forward to assist with the offense."

Just that. It was simple. He did not need to consider what other nonsense there was; how strong his opponents were, how they were at a disadvantage, how he was entrusted a critical mission, or what heavy burden he carried on his shoulders.

He just had to play well.

Thanks to Chelsea's offense heavily leaning to the right, just six minutes after Gareth Bale entered the field, he had already been featured several times on the television monitor with numerous close-ups. Every one of the audiences could clearly see the serious expression and focused gaze on the youthful face of the young player who somehow looked a little like a monkey.

Chelsea came at them again. This time, the one charging was Paulo Ferreira. But his dribble went slightly wide. Bale, who was sharp enough to notice, suddenly cut in and intercepted the ball.

After intercepting, Bale boxed out the position to protect the ball. Unlike Baines, he did not immediately send the ball out with a powerful kick, instead continuing to fend off Paulo Ferreira, who was harassing him from his back.

Everyone worried for him as he maintained extensive possession of the ball on the defensive line; if he were to be intercepted, the opponent would obtain a fatalistic opportunity to directly go at their goal.

"A young player who does not know better" was the only evaluation some people had of Bale's actions.

Duff noticed that Bale had seemingly gotten himself into a pinch, being entangled with Ferreira. He then decided to move forward to pincer Bale and steal his ball.

However, as he ran forward, Bale unexpectedly kicked the ball towards the sidelines. Then, just as it was about to roll out of bounds, Bale again used his foot to gently send it forward. The football rolled along the sidelines, passing Ferreira's foot to behind the Portuguese full back!

And what about Duff, who had come forward to steal the ball? He happened to be blocked from advancing by Ferreira.

Bale swiftly turned and overtook them from outside the field, getting past Ferreira and Duff at the same time!

With the Portuguese fullback moving forward to assist in the offense, Chelsea's right wing, for a distance, was void of defending players.

Upon seeing Bale break free from the encirclement, Ribéry immediately rushed towards the middle, pulling Tiago along with him. In that manner, the entire stretch of the flank became completely empty.

Bale also chose not to pass the ball to his senior, Ribéry. Instead, he dribbled the ball forward and charged ahead.

"A beautiful breakaway!"

Tang En, watching from the sidelines, balled his fists and shouted, "Good lad!"

Newborn calves are unafraid of tigers! Bale's breakthrough was a great morale boost! In the situation where Forest had been thoroughly suppressed by Chelsea, so much so that they could not even raise their heads or kick the ball out of their half of the field, Bale beautifully and resolutely broke away from the two Chelsea players surrounding him, emerging from such a heavy encirclement. This was not just a mere breakthrough by kicking the ball out of Chelsea's encirclement.

George Wood, all the while having been quiet on the field, suddenly hollered, "Everyone, move up!"

The constant suppression from Chelsea had inflamed him. Having been in such a sorry state, and with one of their own getting injured, how could it be acceptable if they could not counterattack even once? Would they still look as if they were playing a home ground match? Constantly having their opponents press down on their heads... Who was willing to suffer that?

So, seeing his teammates in a daze, he could not help but erupt with the first roar.

As if awoken from a dream, every one of Forest's players pressed forward, sweeping the dark clouds from having been helplessly beaten by their opponents away.

Tiago realized something was wrong and hastily abandoned Ribéry, rushing towards Bale instead.

Anelka ran in towards the wings to support Bale, but the latter still had no intention of passing the ball. With a sudden turn, he turned his back to Tiago. Just as Tiago thought Bale would pass the ball to Anelka, or Arteta who was just a short distance away, Bale abruptly knocked the football backward with his heel, with the ball crossing over from between Tiago's legs.

Tiago did not see that happening. All he saw was Bale suddenly moving from in front of him and instantly disappearing without leaving behind even a shadow.

"A turn and another breakthrough! Beautiful! Beautiful! Gareth Bale's appearance has brought the entire Forest Team back to life!"

It was again an overtake from outside the field. Tiago hurriedly tried to chase after him, but he was unable to match up to young Bale.

Carvalho could no longer continue defending the middle. Now, there was not a single Chelsea player in front of Bale. He could go towards the end line and pass center or cut inward to shoot at the goal. Someone needed to stop him.

Bale, who was completely engrossed in dribbling the ball, could care less about who stood before him. He had only one thing on his mind: getting past him.

But the abilities of the Portuguese main center back could not be underestimated. Bale tried to abruptly change direction again, but the somewhat skinnier and weaker boy was abruptly slammed into by Carvalho, knocking the football cleanly out of the sidelines.

With Bale sprinting at top speed, he was knocked off balance by Carvalho and thrown out head first, rolling on the ground several times before coming to a stop. City Ground rang with resounding jeers, but the main referee did not foul Carvalho, only awarding Forest a throw-in.

Bale climbed up from the ground as if he was still within a dream. The young champion, who had calmed down after getting slammed into, could not believe he had dribbled the ball from Forest's end line all the way forward in a craze, passing three players in a row and even managing to get so close to the opponent's end line. He even made Chelsea's defense general, Carvalho, resort to a "suspected foul" before he was stopped. His heart was still racing. Even he himself did not know if it was because he was tired, or for some other reason.

Despite their displeasure for the referee's performance, all of the fans in City Ground dedicated their most enthusiastic applause to the 16-year-old, Gareth Bale. From within Chelsea's encirclement, he led

the team to slash a bloody path out; his performance was, without doubt, worthy of exuberant applause.

Hearing the applause, Bale looked back towards the technical area. He wanted to see the managerial team's evaluation of his recent performance. What he saw was Tang En's thumbs raised high up.

Well done, lad. Well done!

Bale finally smiled, though it was one with a hint of bashfulness.

Motson also showered him with immense praise.

"Gareth Bale! Everyone, remember that name! In years to come, he will doubtless grow into one of Forest's core players. This long-range raid was simply exhilarating! That forward momentum and coolness he showed managing the ball makes it hard to believe he is only 16!"

Chapter 369: A Goal to Fame Part 2

Anelka came up to Bale and punched him in the chest. He did not blame him for not passing, instead saying, "Not bad." Then, he turned and ran back into the penalty area.

Ribéry also jogged over to pat Bale's head. "You're pretty great huh? You made me think the one dribbling earlier was me!"

"Don't listen to his nonsense." Arteta came up and pulled Ribéry away.

"Thanks for bringing the ball out and giving us an opportunity to attack."

Faced with their various praises, Bale could only smile. He truly did not know what to say.

He suddenly noticed George Wood looking in his direction.

On the Youth Team, Tang En had once asked Wood to take care of Bale. Bale regarded Wood as a big brother and idol, looking up to him. Other than Tang En, the praise he hoped to hear most now was from Wood.

But when Wood saw Bale looking back, he moved his gaze away.

Bale felt somewhat disappointed. He lowered his head and turned to walk to the sidelines, preparing to throw-in.

At that point, Wood suddenly ran over and picked up the ball before Bale could.

Bale was taken aback.

"You. Receive the ball." Wood said, pointing to the front. "Then bring it out for a pass."

Feeling exceptionally happy, a smile grew on Bale's face.

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On the spectators' stands, a short and chubby middle-aged man was pulling at the people around him, exclaiming excitedly, "Hey! Did you all see that? Did you all see that breakthrough? He passed three players in a row! That's my son! My son is a genius! I'll tell you, those idiots at Southampton didn't believe me. They must be dying of regret! My son is a genius! A real genius!"

Whether the people at his side were listening or not, he kept rambling. And when he finished, he ran towards the field shouting, "Beautifully done, son! Let them see what you're made of!"

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Though the beautiful dribble still ended up being destroyed, Gareth Bale's attack gave an enormous boost of confidence to Forest. The appearance of a mere 16-year-old child could disrupt and unsettle Chelsea. Why couldn't they?

To be suppressed by the away team to the point that they could not raise their heads or launch the ball forward... Not only did the score get evened out, but they also had an injured teammate. They'd had enough!

If we don't show you some claws, you'll still think we, Nottingham Forest, are this easily bullied!

The situation on the field gradually started turning around. From Chelsea having the absolute advantage, it became a more balanced situation. In fact, on occasion, Forest could even suppress Chelsea for a bit.

Even though it was a forced substitution, they had managed to reap unexpected results.

In the managers' seats, Kerslake said to Tang En, "Do you know what I remembered, watching Bale break through the wings earlier?"

"What?" Tang En asked without turning, his attention on the field.

"I remembered when you brought him to the Youth Team to sign his contract."

Tang En turned to look at Kerslake.

"I thought it was brilliant. Not the breakthrough that just happened. I'm talking about when you told Bale in Wilford to have confidence and smile. That left me with a deep impression. When I saw him running with the ball earlier, I thought, this kid sure is confident! He was facing Chelsea, Paulo Ferreira, Damien Duff, Tiago, and Carvalho... But he didn't retreat. He just..." Kerslake motioned forward with his hands. "Just went straight ahead!"

"That's because you taught him well on the Youth Team, David. I didn't do anything. A few words of praise are a simple thing to me."

"But children always see that as the highest reward. It's their motivation to keep working hard."

Tang En chuckled.

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"For fairness' sake... A draw is reasonable for both sides. But..."

“But, neither of these managers would think a draw is reasonable or fair.” Lineker continued, following-up Motson’s words.

“You’re right, Gary. There’s still more to come for this match!” Motson said excitedly.

“I don’t want such an exhilarating match to end in a draw, that would be too bland!”

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The match progressed into its final 10 minutes. The score for both sides remained at 2:2. On the field, the situation continued to be a stalemate. Both sides had opportunities, but neither got a good grasp of them.

Mourinho and Tang En stood at the sidelines and observed the field with stern faces. Mourinho did not dare to underestimate the 16-year-old boy any longer. After entering the field, Bale was extremely active. Though he was somewhat strained dealing with the defense, he received support from the other Forest players. Wood also purposefully leaned towards the wings; while keeping a close eye on Lampard’s movements, he also dabbled in the wing’s defense.

In terms of their offense, Bale was a beneficial supplement to Ribéry; his forward cutting put tremendous defensive pressure on Chelsea on his side of the wings. In comparison to Chimbonda, Gareth Bale excelled even more in assisting. His pass to the center from the left was more accurate than Ribéry’s; whether it was the arc, speed, or height of it, all of it were fantastic.

Looking at the lively Bale, Mourinho suddenly found himself full of envy for Forest’s youth training level. After he had taken over as Chelsea’s manager, Abramovich had poured in large sums of money to establish the Youth Team. He built them the best training facilities, the most modern training grounds, and hired the top Youth Team managers with attractive salaries. He even put massive funds and effort into buying young footballers with potential from all over the world. But none of the players in Chelsea’s Youth Team could be like Forest’s Youth Team, shining with such resplendence during a match.

Dammit!

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Tang En looked down at his watch. There were still five minutes before the match’s injury stoppage time. He had just substituted Viduka with Bendtner to further enhance their offense. He still had a final substitution quota left. He was hesitating to continue his adjustments.

Arteta dribbled the ball, attempting to enter Chelsea’s penalty area, but was tripped by Makelele when he was seven to eight meters away. The main referee then awarded Forest a direct free kick.

As usual, Arteta put the ball he hugged onto the ground; he was intending to take the shot himself.

Off the field, Tang En’s eyes brightened.

As Forest’s core penalty kicker, Arteta would surely have been researched by Mourinho. It was impossible for Čech not to know how Arteta was going to kick. Why don’t I swap out the kicker at the last minute? We’ll catch him unawares!

He brought both hands to his mouth and formed a horn shape, shouting onto the field, "Mikel! Switch with someone!"

Arteta looked back strangely at Tang En. Switch? With who?

"Let Bale do it! Let him kick!"

Bale was surprised to hear Tang En's words. He had not expected the main manager to directly assign him to take the shot.

Arteta did not express any unhappiness. In training, Bale had trained for set-piece kicks like this with him. He knew of Bale's capabilities. So, he waved for him to come forward instead and passed the ball with a pat to his shoulder. "You can do it!"

Seeing Bale come forward, Wood ran back and took Bale's earlier position to substitute for him for the defense.

This was Forest's hard-earned set piece opportunity in the last stages of the match. Practically everyone moved up for it.

They were 26 meters from the goal, with a slight lean towards the right. Forest had gained an opportunity for a direct free kick.

Bale was the kicker.

The short, chubby man who kept on raving about his son's genius in the stands stopped. Instead, he anxiously watched his son as the boy bent down to position the ball.

On the sidelines, Mourinho had his head lowered, flipping through his notebook. There was a final line of "PS: Extremely good at free kicks" under Bale's capabilities.

His brow tightened.

Extremely good. To what extent was he extremely good?

Chelsea arranged for a frontal five-man wall. Forest's Arteta did not just stand in front of the ball for show; he squeezed into Chelsea's player wall as well.

Once the ball was positioned, Bale took a step back and stood still. His run-up distance was much closer than Arteta's. Čech found the opponent before him extremely unfamiliar. He did not have any information on Gareth Bale's free kick; he did not know what kind of style Bale had gotten into, which corner he preferred, how fast he was, or how powerful his kick was...Čech could only lean on his experience to leap for the ball.

The referee found the retreated distance of Chelsea's player wall to be insufficient and went forward to request that they move further back. Chelsea's players all shuffled backward unwillingly.

All of that failed to disrupt Bale. After he had set down the ball, he only stared straight at the opponent's goal.

The referee jogged away in satisfaction once Chelsea's player wall moved to the designated distance. The whistle then sounded, indicating for Forest's player to take the penalty kick.

At the whistle, Bale tapped his left toe on the ground and launched into his run-up. One step, two steps, and shoot!

Just as he was in the Youth Team matches and in training facing a moving player wall, Bale felt he was in good condition the instant he took the shot.

Makelele leaped up, but the ball flew just a hair over his bald head! As it spun, the ball drew a wondrous arc, shooting through the Czech Footballer of the Year, Petr Čech, and his 10 fingers like an arrow!

“What a fantastic goal by Gareth Bale!”

Chapter 370: We’ve Won Part 1

“The game has progressed for eighty-six minutes and the home team, Nottingham Forest, has been awarded a direct free kick in the front field. This is a precious chance; almost all the Forest players have rushed up to watch.”

“Arteta gives the football to the young Gareth Bell. This is the first time he has stood in front of the football to prepare for a free kick since his debut. Gareth Bale, aged sixteen, is an outstanding player from the Forest Team Youth training camp. He can play the two positions of left back and left midfielder. He’s capable in assists and very good at free kicks.”

“Let’s see if young Bale can score the first goal of his career in the game against Chelsea! This is the crucial goal that decides the victory! The pressure must be high for him.”

“...But the kid’s performance has already surprised us repeatedly. If he can really withstand the pressure and score this goal, I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“At sixteen years old, the Welsh kid, Gareth Bale, stands before the ball. In front of him is the wall of five Chelsea players. This may be the free kick that will determine the final outcome of this game and a goal that will determine Bale’s future.”

The commentator stopped his commentary. The spectators in the stands and at home held their breath.

On the tiny television screen, Bale stepped back. As the referee’s whistle rang, he ran and swung his leg to take a shot.

The football drew an arc over Makelele’s bald head, skirted Čech’s outstretched fingers and brushed past the goalpost into the goal!

Countless arms stretched out, and no one could hear the sound of the commentary coming from the television. Even the image on the screen swayed violently. The entire City Ground stadium was in a frenzy.

“GOOOAL!” In the stands, Bale’s father turned to hug a man fatter than he was.

“GOOOAL!” Countless red-clad Forest fans jumped with their arms aloft in the stands.

“City Ground stadium is shaking. Gary, can you feel it?” Motson asked in the commentator’s box.

“Of course, John. Bale has ignited this red volcano, and it’s gorgeous! It’s perfect! At sixteen years old, Gareth Bale’s performance in this game is impeccable!”

“Wait, Gary, there’s something even more gorgeous.” Motson suddenly arose and looked down.

In the television footage, Twain, who had rushed out from the technical area, suddenly did a 360-degree side somersault and landed firmly. He vigorously waved his fists as if he was the one who had scored!

Lineker laughed.

Surrounded by his ecstatic teammates, Bale might or might not have seen the scene on the sidelines from the field.

“Tony Twain must have been in the circus. He did that with such ease!”

“The newspapers’ editors are gonna have a headache deciding who is going to make the headlines.”

“Tony? Tony?” David Kerslake called out to Twain who was still brandishing his fists.

“Yes?” Twain looked back at his partner.

“How did you think to do that?”

“I promised Bale that if he scored the goal, I’d give him a much cooler celebration. What do you think?”

“It was awesome!” Kerslake laughed, “We’ve won, right, Tony?”

Twain turned to look at the electronic scoreboard. The score displayed had changed from “2:2” to “3:2”. He looked down at his watch. There was not much time left until the end of the game.

“I don’t want to give a verdict when the game isn’t over yet, but...” He nodded at Kerslake and said, “You’re right, David. We’re all set for victory!”

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Bale’s goal was a huge blow to Chelsea’s morale. They were overtaken by the other side when there were four minutes left in the game. Even Mourinho did not have a better idea at that point.

Instead, the Forest team was braver as they fought on. They still had the opportunity to break through Chelsea’s goal in the final stage of the game. If it were not for Čech’s heroic performance, the game would have made Mourinho lose face.

When the referee blew the final whistle at the end of the game, the City Ground stadium became a sea of joy. The Forest team’s supporters sang their team songs at the top of their lungs to celebrate their team’s victory over Chelsea again.

“The game is over! After a fierce fight, Nottingham Forest defeated Chelsea by 3:2 on their home ground! Since their return to the Premier League, the Forest team has maintained their unbeaten record against Chelsea. Mourinho still has not beaten them.”

“With this game’s victory, the Forest team’s points rise from twenty-two to twenty-five points. After the start of the season, Chelsea, who has been unbeaten for ten rounds, suffered their first defeat. Their

points remained the same and the second-placed Forest team narrowed the gap to only three points. The league is starting to look good!"

This time, Mourinho, who had been defeated, did not turn around and leave. Instead, he took the initiative to shake hands with Twain according to the usual custom.

"Till Stamford Bridge," Mourinho said this when they shook hands. Twain knew he was already planning his revenge for the home game.

"Looking forward to it," he replied.

Mourinho paid no heed. He let go of his hand and walked away.

Twain did not mind. Now he had no time to pay attention to the loser's feelings. He turned and walked toward the field. At that moment, he wanted to celebrate victory with his players.

Bale became the focus of the crowd. Everyone gathered to congratulate him on his first league goal. He saw that Twain had also come up.

"Congratulations, Gareth." Twain winked at him. "Did you see my celebration?"

Bale nodded heartily and laughed continuously. "It's definitely awesome, chief."

"Your performance was much better." Twain smiled and touched Bale's head. The seedling that he had personally brought from Southampton to grow in Wilford had finally blossomed. "Have you practiced your autograph?"

All the surrounding teammates laughed.

Every Forest player was in a good mood.

"All right, boys!" Twain stood in the crowd and said loudly, "Go and thank the fans! Gareth, don't forget to thank your father!"

The players lined up as a team and waved to give thanks to the red formation in the stands.

Twain turned and walked away.

He walked very slowly and even seemed to be strolling aimlessly. He just paced on the field.

He wanted to enjoy the atmosphere here, the atmosphere after winning the game...

The reporters had already gone to the mixed zone to interview the players who had left the field. Twain was not worried about being disturbed. The stadium staff was cleaning up the debris in the field and stands. After an exciting victory, there was always a lot of litter.

Twain was fond of the calm after the din had passed. He walked back and forth with his hands in his pockets. He was in no rush to get to the press conference.

Suddenly a man approached him.

"If you want an interview, you have to go to the mixed zone," Twain said. He pointed to Pierce Brosnan, who had walked over from the player's corridor.

"I'm not here for an interview." Brosnan smiled. "Look."

Twain looked at his chest, and sure enough, his press card was kept away.

"What do you want then?"

Brosnan looked at the gradually emptying out stands and took a deep breath. "I like the calm after the excitement, so I came down for a walk. What are you doing here, Mr. Twain? The press conference isn't here either."

"I'm the same as you." Twain looked around the stands.

"It was a terrific game. Everyone and every segment was wonderful, including that side somersault celebration of yours."

"Thanks for your compliment, Mr. Reporter. Are you going to say that in the papers, too?"

"Why not?"

Twain did not elaborate. He just looked at the busy stadium staff.

"Mr. Twain, you know, occasionally I think of the press conference you gave at the hospital gate." Brosnan laughed.

"Well, we were still newbies at that point."

"I really didn't think that there would come a day when we would stand here together to chat after you defeating Chelsea."

"Maybe someday, after we beat Real Madrid, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Barcelona, Bayern Munich... We'll chat like this again."

"I believe you."

"Well, I have to go now." Twain waved and walked toward the player's corridor.

Pierce Brosnan gazed at the man's figure, lost in thought. Ah, it really isn't right to connect the man who embarrassed me at the press conference and put me on the spot, with this man.