

Champions 471

Chapter 471: Tang En's Mockery

As Tang En had asked the guards to chase off the reporters surrounding the outer grounds of the training area, the players only knew about what had occurred amid the apologies of their three teammates after training had ended. Seeing Tony's gloomy expression, they did not dare to whistle.

The team was to face their first opponents in the Amsterdam Tournament, FC Porto, the next day. So, with the remaining half of the day left after the end of training and the public apology of the three, Tang En announced the team list for the next day.

As it was a warm-up match, the restrictions on the substitution quota were more relaxed. In the course of a match, both parties could change out five players each. So, the significance of the team list was not big; practically the whole team would be able to go to the match scene.

But today, Tang En took the effort to announce the list to issue a public warning to the three guilty parties, and at the same time warn the others.

On the team list he announced, there was no Ashley Young, Aaron Lennon, or Gareth Bale. The three already knew beforehand, so they did not show much reaction. However, the reactions of the other players on the team satisfied Tang En.

"Even though you're unable to play in the match, you can still go watch the match live." Tang En said to the three standing apart from the team after reading out the list. "Sometimes, watching the match from the spectator's stands is a form of training."

Handing the notebook to Kerslake, Tang En departed the training grounds with Dunn for the halls where the urgent press conference was held.

Over there, the place was already filled to the brim with impatient reporters.

Tang En had yet to arrive, but the small news conference hall was already packed with enough people to cause a disaster. The media from England, the Netherlands, as well as those from other locations, flocked to the place because they had attained Tang En's promise that he would answer all their questions after training.

But what questions were there really? There was only one question everyone wanted answered: the news of the three players from Nottingham Forest getting involved with prostitutes.

Having such a scandal erupt as the new nobility in Europe's football scene, wasn't it something worth watching? Furthermore, the ages of the three players were all very young.

Pierce Brosnan was also among the crowd. He had come early and took up an advantageous position right in front, where he even had a seat.

The modestly spaced room was filled with the crowd and their buzz. Everyone was discussing last night's matter at Amsterdam's red-light district or guessing how Twain would face this awkward scandal at the press conference.

"I know what Tony Twain is like. He simply likes to oppose us." An obese middle-aged man was talking unceasingly in a far-fetched manner. "If we say one, he'll purposefully say two. If we say yes, he must answer no. It's as if he doesn't want our work to be easy... but this time, I want to hear what else he has to say. The photos are here, as real as it can get!" He patted a stack of newspapers in his hands. "If I want to, we can publish even more photos!"

Brosnan glanced at him. The typeface of The Sun printed in the newspapers was extremely eye-catching. So, he was a reporter from The Sun.

"Why don't you publish them?" Tang En's voice suddenly sounded from the back door. Everyone abruptly stopped their discussions and turned their gaze towards Tony Twain, who had appeared on the scene.

"Mister, your voice is really loud. This place is so raucous, yet I was still able to pinpoint your voice all the way from the outside, from amongst the swarm of voices." Tang En pointed to the obese man who was standing amid the crowd, sticking out like a sore thumb.

Brosnan stifled his laughter.

But someone failed to, and a burst of laughter erupted from the scene. Amid the laughter, the reporter from The Sun grew red in the face and prepared to sit down.

"Oh, don't sit down. The topic can start with you." Tang En pointed to the reporter who was about to sit. "Didn't you say you wanted to publish more photos? Very good. I'm looking forward to even more fresh and interesting photographs. I would advise The Sun to release a special issue and put out all the photographs you have on hand. Put them all out so you don't just leave people hanging. You know, if you consider this issue from a reader's perspective, reading an ongoing serial will not be as comfortable as reading the complete series."

Saying so, he looked at his opposition. "Do you have any questions?"

The fat man coughed and composed himself before deciding to retaliate. "Of course, sir. What are your thoughts about your three players appearing last night at that place? It's match day tomorrow, but your subordinates have run off to visit a brothel."

"I think it's very normal." Tang En answered expressionlessly. "Men naturally have such biological needs. It's just as normal as the brothel visits your reporters from The Sun indulged in last night. You reporters from The Sun, you're all married with families, aren't you?"

Laughter rang out.

This was the unique quality of Tang En's live press conference. Although there were many reporters in attendance, there were not that many people with questions. More of them came to watch how Tang En exchanged barbs with the media; his expressions, his words, his actions; all of that gave people the feeling that they were watching a marvelous show.

So, not all the media were standing in opposition to Tang En. In fact, some of them harbored an attitude of watching the show and were standing on Tang En's side.

The fat reporter from The Sun was stumped by Tang En's retort. He was right. This news was first published by their newspaper. There were even photos. It could be said to be irrefutable proof. Tang En would not be able to deny it even if he wanted to. Unexpectedly, Tang En never had the notion of denying it. After openly admitting to it, he even kicked the ball back to The Sun: my players did go visit a brothel last night, but what were the personnel from The Sun doing there?

"Fine. 'Three young players from Nottingham Forest engage with prostitutes' – those were your original words. Now it's my turn to ask..." Hearing Tang En say that, the reporters perked up. Recorders, microphones, quick notes, handphones; everyone got into work mode.

"You claim that my people engaged with prostitutes. Where's the proof of that?"

Tang En's question momentarily stumped the reporter from The Sun.

"Proof? The photos aren't?" The reporter indicated to the newspaper in his hands.

Tang En laughed with great delight. "To catch a thief, you must find the spoils; To catch an adulterer, you must find the offending couple. You claim that my people engaged with a prostitute, then please publish photos of them having sex with one."

"That's..." The Sun's reporters did not think Tang En would have a comeback like that, denying the allegations from that angle. Who in their right mind would follow them into the brothel and squat by the bedside to take pictures? That sort of place only allowed one person to enter at a time. The rest had to queue up behind him. Even if their reporters were good, they could not possibly barge in.

Seeing that the other party was at a loss for words, Tang En began utilizing his expertise in making a mockery of them.

"Oh, The Sun, with its infinite resources, didn't install secret cameras in each and every one of the brothels in Amsterdam's red-light district? How regretful!" He said this while shaking his head and sighing. It was as if he really felt sorry about it. "You've truly disappointed me!"

Off the stage, muffled laughter could be heard all around.

Brosnan was no longer worried about the impact of the matter. Now, he was sitting in the best spot with his legs crossed, watching the show with glee. It would be better if only he had cola and popcorn.

Of course, his opponents would not willingly allow Tang En to mock them that way. The reporter very quickly found an angle to retort from. "As a successful football team, Nottingham's players are all models for society's youth. Aren't you, Mr. Twain, worried that this matter would create a negative influence?"

His words sounded very reasonable. Football stars were the idols of many youths, and children loved to imitate their idols' speech, actions and way of dressing. No matter what their idols did, good or bad, it was all correct to them. Football stars bore the duty of having to watch over the many kinds of influences they had based on their words and actions; this was a societal responsibility.

Unexpectedly, Tang En seemed to care little for that. He waved his hands. "Stop kidding. Would briefly visiting the red-light district cause a negative influence? Then Mr. Reporter, wouldn't you be enraged by the fact that the country of the Netherlands still exists in this world?"

“That...” The opposing party was again stumped.

“I would like you to know something, sir. Other than training and competitions, the rest of the time belongs to the players themselves. Neither you nor I have the right to interfere with what they want to do. If you say that it’s no good influence for them to visit that sort of place, where is your social responsibility in secretly snapping shots of it and publicizing it so widely? Tang En had never seen eye-to-eye with The Sun. As long as he had the opportunity, he would not let go of the chance to verbally shame them. “No one hopes for such a thing to be made known to the world. This is a matter of personal privacy. The Sun seems to be quite proficient at such an invasion of privacy and is even being gleeful over it. Shouldn’t you seriously reconsider what kind of negative effects your methodology is causing the 10 million readers of The Sun? At the very least, I think the image of my players is healthier than The Sun’s Page 3 girls and brings about the less negative impact to society.”

Everyone could tell that Tang En had his heart hardened on protecting his players in the public eye; he even changed the topic to societal responsibility and moral reflections.

In truth, that was something everyone was already aware of. The three Nottingham Forest players surely weren’t visiting that sort of place simply for a tour, but Tang En would not allow anyone else to make indiscreet remarks about his players and speak nonsense of them.

He had already done the criticizing and scolding behind doors; outsiders had no right to interfere with it.

“You wish to set foot here and criticize my people? Go back and tell your boss, we’ll discuss it when Page 3 is gone.”

Of course, The Sun was not going to seriously take Tang En’s suggestion into consideration and take down their pillar of support, the fine tradition of Page 3 girls. Tang En saying so was only to let The Sun know that they had no right to make an issue out of the matter.

It started out as a rather severe crisis for the team, but it had been forcefully stirred by Tang En into becoming a farce that made people uncertain if they should laugh or cry.

Dunn appeared with Tang En at the scene of the press conference. However, no one noticed him. He had been sitting next to Tang En quietly without a word, or even a sound, like a statue.

What he had worried about turned out to end in this manner; he should be feeling elated. But, seeing Tang En’s method of dealing with it was not something he could easily agree with; the man had shifted the potential negative backlash to the team onto himself.

Now, the media had all their focus on Tony Twain’s verbal battle with The Sun’s reporter. Who was going to care about the scandal regarding the three Forest players engaging with prostitutes?

Berating reporters, going head-on against the media, provoking his match opponents, blaming the referee, and even falling out with the UEFA... Was it all because he wanted to become famous, to become a news personality, or to enjoy the “honor” of being on the newspapers’ headlines? No matter how others perceived it, Dunn did not think so. The man by his side was only shifting the pressure that was rightfully on the players to himself, allowing them to throw off all their burdens and focus only on training and playing matches.

But in doing so, the pressure he felt would only become heavier and heavier.

Which football manager would do something like that? This is only a job. Is this necessary, Tony?

“Alright. Mr. Reporter from The Sun, you can sit down now. There’s nothing else to do with you.” Tang En waved his hands at the man, whose forehead was lined with sweat, indicating for him to sit down. Then, he looked towards Brosnan sitting in the front row and asked, “Are there any other questions?”

The hint was obvious. Brosnan raised his hand and stood up. He began asking about the numerous preparations made by Forest Team for the next day’s match.

With the two working together seamlessly, the topic was successfully changed.

The media was already satisfied enough witnessing the spectacular battle between Tang En and The Sun. Truly, it was not in the least important if the three had engaged prostitutes. This was what they really wanted to see. Before Tang En, which main manager would go toe-to-toe with such a significantly influential media group? Making a mockery of them with his no-holds-barred ridiculing and a way of beratement that was clean of swear words and had daggers hidden in smiles; this was much more newsworthy than just engaging in prostitution.

After finishing his bottle of mineral water, the press conference came to an end. The reporters all dispersed with satisfied expressions on their faces. In the darkening dusk, Volendam’s training grounds gradually became desolate from their earlier lively bustle.

The club’s staff were moving the chairs away from the hall for the urgent press conference. Meanwhile, Tang En and Dunn sat on the stage, immobile. Even though everyone else around them was busy, neither had the intention to leave.

“You must be tired,” Dunn remarked.

Tang En shook his head. “No, how can that be possible? I’m the best and most energized when dealing with paparazzi.” But his posture of leaning back on the chair had already sold him out.

Dunn pursed his lips but did not expose him.

“You don’t believe me?” Tang En turned sideways to look at Dunn. “When I scolded that damn reporter, I felt so achieved. It felt great! Especially when I saw his face when he was lost for words.” He laughed hoarsely.

“Yes. Tomorrow, you’ll be in The Sun newspaper, and be severely criticized. The whole of England will know what you’ve done.” Dunn nodded in approval.

“Who cares? I don’t lose any hair or earn a cent less when they criticize me. I don’t have the obligation to be responsible for the perspectives of the people I don’t care about.” Tang En felt parched and wanted some water, only to reach his hand out to find an empty bottle.

He threw the bottle. It fell accurately into the rubbish bin dragged over by the cleaners.

“Come on. Let’s go eat. I’m starving!” Tang En stood up.

Dunn very much wanted to say to Tang En that although Tang En felt great achievement seeing the stumped faces of the others, that he felt a rush whenever he scolded the others, maybe this was exactly

what the others hoped to see. That maybe the other party felt achieved, having gotten him to scold them with such relish. Because in that way, they managed to get a hold of some sensational news.

Seeing Tang En's back, he kept his thoughts to himself and stood up with him, the two walking out of the place shoulder-to-shoulder.

"I thought you were going to sell Ashley Young off in your fit of rage."

"Dunn. We need to give our youth the space to make mistakes. We must allow them their mistakes. Who hasn't been rash before in their youth?"

Chapter 472: The Invitational Tournament

Things progressed smoothly and according to Twain's wishes.

The next day, the major media outlets hyped the war of words between Manager Tony Twain and the reporter from The Sun at the news conference. The incident involving the three players' visit to the prostitutes had been completely cast aside.

Even The Sun itself publicized the matter, and unquestionably, they wouldn't say anything nice about Twain, whom they described as an unreasonable, annoying troublemaker who used obscenities and was completely uncivilized.

This kind of description lacked creativity, as they had used it on Twain in the past. Therefore, with regards to this assessment, Twain didn't care at all. Even if the whole world thought that he was Satan incarnate with horns on his head, it didn't matter to him.

He was happy to see that no one cared about what the three players had done in the red-light district.

Now, the media hype was focused on him and gave the team the calm they needed most.

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The Amsterdam Tournament had a history of more than thirty-one years and had held twenty-six tournaments so far. Because of its long history and the high ranks of the teams invited, it had the honor of being named "Europe's top invitational tournament." Even so, the friendly matches were still friendly. Twain didn't care if the team could perform well in this invitational tournament. He placed more value on the state of the team. This was a great opportunity to test the results of the training they had done during this period of time.

The game between Nottingham Forest and Porto was second. The host, Ajax, tied 1:1 with Inter Milan in the first match. Adriano continued his terrible performance and streak of not being able to score since the World Cup.

This game, Twain didn't use the 4-4-2 flat four positioning that they had been best at for the last two seasons. Instead, they played the 4-5-1 formation, which was really 4-4-1-1.

As the striker, Van Nistelrooy was the sole player at the front, and behind him, taking the point role was Van der Vaart. He was positioned between the attacking midfield and shadow striker. Twain gave him special instruction to send more long shots.

The four behind him had also been changed from the Forest team's previous season lineup.

No matter how much Twain had diverted the media attention at the press conference yesterday to clear his men's name by making a scene, his arrangement today still exposed the scenes behind the matter. Ashley Young didn't appear in the right side position, and another right midfielder, Aaron Lennon wasn't there either. Chinese player Sun Jihai was in the starting lineup.

Sun Jihai was a very good utility player. He could play as right back, right midfielder, and defensive midfielder.

Ribéry did not start as the left midfielder. Instead, it was Petrov.

The two side midfielders were a combination from last season—George Wood and Mikel Arteta.

The rear defensive line was the same as the previous season: the center backs were Pepe and Piqué, the left back was Leighton Baines, the right back was Chimbonda, and the goalkeeper was Edwin van der Sar.

In addition to Ashley Young, Aaron Lennon, and Gareth Bale, all the other players sat on the substitutes' bench.

Twain drew the starting lineup on the tactical board. After he gave instructions on the specific tactics, he made a final exhortation. "Two things." He extended two fingers and said, "First, don't get hurt. Second, show what you're capable of without getting hurt."

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Sometimes when one thought hard, a lot of things in the world seemed very interesting.

Porto was the third strong Portuguese team that Nottingham Forest had played against in three years. Twain's team seemed to have a special bond with Portugal.

First it was Benfica, then Sporting Lisbon, and now, it was Porto.

Furthermore, the Forest team's center back, Pepe, had been bought from Porto, a famous team in Europe, and had also once been coached by Twain's old nemesis, Mourinho.

After Mourinho's departure, Porto might have still continued to dominate in Portugal, but it wouldn't be so easy to maintain its position in the European football.

The current match in the Amsterdam Tournament was a competition between the king of European football three years earlier and today's upstart.

The strength of both teams was no longer on the same level.

The Forest team scored two goals in the first half and basically locked in their victory.

After Van Nistelrooy received Petrov's pass, he thrust the ball fifteen feet in front of the goal and continued his good form from training in the friendly. He proved once again that his departure from Manchester United was definitely not due to nonsense like a decline in form or an increase in age.

"Nottingham Forest scores! Van Nistelrooy and Petrov, a terrific performance between the two new players!"

Twain got up from his seat and applauded at the side of the field. He was certainly happy with the goal, but he was even more pleased with the tight coordination that the team had shown before the goal.

Upon taking possession of the ball, Arteta had passed the ball to Van der Vaart, who had received the ball with his back towards the goal. When Van der Vaart hadn't had a chance to turn around to shoot, he had cleverly passed the ball in time to Petrov, who swiftly plugged in from the side. Then, after Petrov forced a breakthrough with his speed and made a pass, Van Nistelrooy had fully revealed his world-class striker's instinct at this moment. When he saw that the opposing defenders pressed in more tightly, he first charged forward, made to look like he was going to receive, and ran to the middle before he suddenly braked and retreated. The opposing defender didn't fall for it, as he also turned back to retreat. At this time, Van Nistelrooy and the other party brushed past each other—he suddenly started and sprinted ahead again! After this short battle of wits, he no longer had a Porto defensive player around him, and he easily breached the goal after he received the ball.

Van der Vaart showed praiseworthy skill in this attack too. That was, in the absence of a chance to shoot, he had passed the ball to a teammate in a better position, rather than forced himself to make a turn and try to shoot.

Twain looked at all this and burned it into his memory. He liked players like Van der Vaart, who was the kind of person who, at the expense of the team, for his own shot, would not hesitate to abandon him, even if he had just spent 4 million on him and promised him a good future.

The second goal came more easily. Without the complicated passing and coordination, Arteta's sudden dribble and plug-in caught the attention of the Porto players. Just when everyone focused their efforts on the Spanish player, he made a cross pass to Van der Vaart, then the former Ajax player fired a long shot at his ex-home team's net amidst the cheers of countless Ajax fans!

The ball whizzed past Porto's defensive line and slammed into the goal!

"Rafael van der Vaart—for him, this is a perfect farewell and rebirth! He used his best shot to bid farewell to Ajax and prove his ability as an all-rounder to his new owner! Ajax's Number 23 has become Nottingham Forest's Number 23. All the best, Rafael!" the Dutch commentator hollered at the commentator's box.

During halftime, Twain analyzed the two goals for the team. He praised the entire team for the first goal, and praised the scorers, Van der Vaart, and Arteta, who had assisted his rival teammate for the second goal.

"Guys, do you still remember what we were rated a month ago? 'A strong team.' Now, I'm very pleased that you've proven this. Keep up the good performance in the second half!"

Next, Twain changed five players in one go and used all five substitutions during the halftime interval. The team's formation reverted back to the 4-4-2 formation which they had been best at last season... with just a slight difference.

Van Nistelrooy, who had scored the goal, was replaced, and Twain brought on Bendtner to play as the center forward. Eastwood replaced Arteta, and the team's midfield changed into a diamond formation. Ribéry replaced Sun Jihai to play as the right midfielder, and Petrov's position remained unchanged.

For the center back position, Twain called off Piqué and brought on Kompany.

The five substitutions brought about a dramatic change in the team.

In the first half, Twain experimented with more tactical possibilities, while the tactic used in the second half was likely to be used often in the upcoming season. The lineup obviously wouldn't be the same as it currently was...

After the start of the second half, the Forest team changed their offensive momentum from the first half and switched to defensive mode instead.

Twain still constantly experimented with and adjusted the tactics. He wanted to see what tactics should be used in different situations and how the team performed.

There was one thing that everyone was well aware but didn't want to say. Who benefitted from Twain's snub of Anelka? It was Eastwood who had missed the vast majority of last season's games due to his injury.

His first comeback game had been stunning, but things had quieted down again for nine months. His injury, which had required two surgeries, still continued to affect his condition.

Now that Anelka was no longer in the main position, Twain was perfectly justified to give Eastwood more chances to get his game back.

Twain hadn't said this to him, but he knew Eastwood must know in his mind that this was his chance. He had to grab ahold of it or he would be eliminated—even if the boss kept him on the team, he wouldn't have agreed to that kind of life.

Eastwood had to prove that Manager Twain was right to ditch Anelka because he was a striker that was still useful.

And what was the best way to prove that he was still a powerful striker?

"It's a GOOOOOAL! Freddy Eastwood! A name that we still long for... and he scores! Nottingham Forest leads Porto with three goals!"

Twain jumped up from the substitutes' bench. Eastwood had lived up to his expectation.

After he scored the goal, Eastwood ran towards Twain and hugged him tightly.

Naturally, this goal was dedicated to Manager Tony Twain, who had always supported and trusted him while waiting for a chance to give him a new lease on life.

His teammates rushed up to celebrate Eastwood's goal. Only Anelka sat alone on the bench and didn't get up.

"For you, I f*cking let my favorite player sit on the bench!" During his outburst of rage at that time, Twain had yelled out this comment that Anelka still clearly remembered.

Now, you finally don't have to put your favorite player on the bench...

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Porto scored a face-saving goal with a long shot by young player Anderson at the last minute.

Everyone realized the strength of the current Forest team through this game. At the press conference after the game, the Portuguese media no longer grudgingly termed the result of the Forest team's victory over Porto as "an upset win." As rivals, they acknowledged the strength and status of the Forest team now—this was indeed a strong team.

Are you kidding? If a team with Van Nistelrooy, Van der Vaart, Edwin van der Sar, Ribéry, Wood, and other players is still called a dark horse, then what does a real strong team look like?

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A day later, the Forest team was at the stadium, challenging the final opponent of this invitational tournament—the official host, Ajax.

In this game, Twain unexpectedly started the game with his substitute players.

He was well aware that his substitutes were inadequate, so he seized every opportunity to give them the chance to develop in competitions. Even if there was hope of winning the title in the invitational tournament, he also considered how to give his entire team thorough training first, rather than a mere tournament trophy.

Therefore, the starting goalkeeper was Paul Gerrard, and the starting center defense was Kompany and Wes Morgan. The starting defensive midfielder was Sun Jihai. It looked like Twain was determined to fully utilize Sun Jihai. Albertini also appeared in the starting lineup. Kris Commons became the starting right midfielder, and Van der Vaart went to the left side and became the left midfielder. The strikers were Bendtner and Viduka.

Twain's requirements of Van der Vaart were not to let him be active on the left flank, but to lean towards the middle as much as possible, then to let Leighton Baines come up and actively assist.

He had studied Real Madrid's tactics during their most glorious moments at the turn of the century and intended to test the suitability of their tactics for the Forest team in this game.

However, because he had punished three players, and these three players had their own important roles in the team's tactical system, the results of the test had to be discounted.

With such a lineup, plus this tactic, the results of the Forest team were imaginable. They lost to the official host in this game with the score at 1:2.

At the last minute, Twain finally thought to bring in Anelka after he had used four of his allowed substitutions, but he only left him a mere ten minutes. Anelka could do nothing and didn't score. The Forest team's only goal was scored by Bendtner.

Nottingham Forest didn't win the title in the end because of their loss to Ajax.

Ajax's rules were very special. Other than complying with the general game regulations of three points for a win, one point for a draw, and zero points for a loss, there was a rule created by them that was increasingly being used by more and more invitational tournaments to "encourage offense". It was that each goal was counted as one point. The scores from each game's win, loss, or draw plus the number of goals scored would be converted into the team's total score.

Nottingham Forest had gotten a win and a loss, and their game score was three points. Then they had scored a total of four goals in two games, with one point per goal, counting as four points. The addition of the two sets was the Forest Team's final score in this invitational tournament, seven.

The tournament's champion was Mancini's Inter Milan. They had one win and one draw, which gave them four points, and they had relied on their goal score to overtake the host Ajax.

Nottingham Forest had seven points, the same as Ajax, but placed third due to the outcome of their games. Twain didn't care about the rankings. The day after the game, he ended the team's training in the Netherlands and brought the team back to Nottingham.

It was now August, and in ten days, the English Premier League would kick off a new season. That was the tournament that Twain would split hairs over

Chapter 473: What a Small World

The Forest Team, who returned to Nottingham, did not go back into preparatory mode again. Tang En kindly gave the team two days off. In the span of two days, they did not have to train and the players could do whatever they wanted. Even if someone among them wanted to engage with a prostitute, Tang En couldn't care less.

Originally, the two days of vacation were not part of their plan. But the matter with Ashley Young and the rest had reminded Tang En of something. 20 days of focused training could allow his players to put their minds completely to prepare for the new season. Other than training every day, it was even more training. While the benefit of doing this was greatly increasing the tacit levels of understanding within the team—something they had already tested in the Amsterdam Tournament—the side effect was that it made the players' moods terrible. Especially because Tang En enforced a rule of no-contact with their wives and girlfriends during the training period, a lack of a sex life was too difficult to bear for this group of men filled with youthful vigor.

That was why Ashley Young did not care about Tang En's repeated warnings and took the risk of running out to search for some excitement.

Everything had a cause and effect. From this matter, Tang En remembered that he should allow the players to relax at suitable times.

As such, on the day they returned to Nottingham, Tang En announced the decision to tremendous cheers from the whole team.

“Be careful,” Tang En reminded. “Two days from now, I hope to see a group of energetic players, not pitiful bugs that were wrung dry.”

Loud guffaws erupted inside the coach.

After they sent off all the players at the gates of the club’s training grounds, only Tang En and Dunn were left.

“Two days of vacation... what should we do?” Tang En raised his hand to look at his watch. It was 4:21 in the afternoon.

“Let’s head home,” was Dunn’s answer.

“Oh, god...” Tang En rolled his eyes. “Are we going to watch match and training recordings for two days? Haven’t you watched enough of them in the Netherlands?”

“What else can we do?”

Tang En rolled his eyes again but truly could not think up anything else to do. They were not like the players who had wives, girlfriends, or lovers. In the two days, their schedules would surely be arranged very substantially. What about themselves? Surely, they couldn’t partner up to find prostitutes together, right?

He himself had just criticized his players for visiting prostitutes. If he was caught by the media again, his words would mean nothing to his players.

So, that sort of thing must not be done.

After thinking about it, Tang En sighed in despair. “Let’s go home.”

At that point, his phone started ringing in his pocket.

Upon seeing the identity of the person calling, Tang En appeared extremely happy.

“Shania!”

Dunn glanced at him when he heard Tang En’s voice suddenly rising.

“Yes, I’m back. You... What, you’re in London?! Didn’t you go to Italy and France to develop your career on that side? Why did you return? Oh, a commercial... sure, sure. I’ll definitely go. When is it? Tomorrow? No problem. Funny, I was just fretting over what to do for my two days of leave.”

Although the call had ended, the smile on Tang En’s face was still hanging there.

Dunn took a glimpse at him and said, “Tomorrow, you’ll go to London. I’ll stay at home.”

“Let’s go together!” Tang En invited him enthusiastically.

Dunn knew in his heart that the trip would mean nothing if he went too.

“No. I’ll help you to prepare the information you’ll need in the new season. You have fun.” He turned and walked to the gates.

Behind, Tang En lowered his head to look at his cell phone before hurriedly chasing after him.

“You’re really not going? Shania hasn’t seen you in a long while...”

“It’s not me she wants to see. And, I’m really busy.”

“What a pity...”

The next day, Tang En took Landy’s cab to the hotel in London where Shania was residing.

Meeting up with a famous model in Europe, Tang En naturally took some precautions; he wore a pair of dark sunglasses and dressed casually to avoid attention.

Tang En had only knocked on Shania’s room door, and the girl came leaping out to hug him. “Uncle Tony!”

“Woah!” Tang En jumped. He was sorely afraid that there would be paparazzi outside snapping pictures of the scene. He hastily hugged Shania to him and rushed in before kicking the door shut.

“Alright, alright... You’re still like a kid.” Tang En patted Shania’s back, signaling for her to come down.

“In your eyes, aren’t I one?” Shania asked coyly, not wanting to come down.

“You’re now a famous model in Europe... no, a world-famous model...”

Realizing that Uncle Tony suddenly went quiet, Shania then noticed he had an awkward expression. She smiled secretly to herself and jumped off, finally letting off the tremendously awkward Tang En off the hook.

“Uh... you’re the only one staying in this room?” Tang En looked around the spacious guest room. Other than the bedroom, there was even a living room. It was a suite.

“Should I still be sharing a room with someone else?” Shania sat on the sofa cross-legged.

Tang En nodded his head in sudden realization. The current Shania had already ascended into the ranks of international models. Naturally, the treatment she received correspondingly rose with her status.

“Where’s your agent?”

The doorbell rang from the back.

“He’s here.” Shania pointed at the door.

Tang En went over to open it.

“Mr. Tony, hello!” Agent Fasal was not at all surprised at his appearance here.

“Ah, hello, Mr. Fascal.” His attitude made Tang En a little embarrassed. As the person who stayed most frequently by Shania’s side, Fascal had an in-depth understanding of their relationship. And his understanding may not be the same as their own.

“Shania has been insisting to call you since her return to London. She very much hoped for you to be here.”

“Uh. Coincidentally, my team has given me two days off.” Tang En scratched his head. It was truly a coincidence.

“Hey, you two, stop chatting at the door!” Shania’s voice sounded from inside the suite.

The two laughed and turned to walk in.

“Shania, are you ready?” Fascal asked.

“Yes.” Shania nodded. “There’s nothing much to prepare really, it’s just a print ad...” Then, she smiled at Tang En. “Uncle Tony, you have to come with us, then. I’ll introduce you to someone. I guarantee you’ll be very happy to know him.”

“Oh? Who is it?”

“It’s a secret!”

Shania acted mysteriously, refusing to reveal the answer. Fascal also only smiled at Tang En. It seemed like he had to go there himself to know the answer.

Following that, Fascal explained the write-up to Shania, about what she needed to pay attention to during the shoot, and what she had to do.

This had nothing to do with Tang En. He looked curiously at the stack of documents in Fascal’s hands. There was the same logo on all of them.

Gillette.

The studio they were shooting the advertisement at was very close to Shania’s hotel. Driving over took only 10 minutes.

As they sat in the moving silver car, Shania asked Tang En how he had arrived. He answered that he came by a cab and Shania rolled her eyes at him. “Your annual salary is three million pounds. Can’t you buy yourself a car?”

“It’s 2.75 million.” Tang En corrected the error in the figures.

“Even if it’s 2.75 million, you should still be able to afford a car, right?”

Tang En laughed with a shrug. “My workplace is a 20-minute walk from where I stay. I also hardly go out to other places. If I’m going out for a competition, there’s the team coach and airplane... I really can’t see the necessity of buying a car.”

Shania widened her big eyes and looked at Tang En. “Are you living in the middle ages, Uncle Tony?”

Her words stunned Tang En. When he had first arrived here, he had once grouched that the former owner of this body must be someone who lived completely in the middle ages; he knew nothing other than deeply researching football.

He had not thought that he would be regarded that way by someone else... could he really be living a boring life?

Shania continued rebuking him. "No matter what, you're already a successful manager now. Are you still living in the rental apartment?"

Tang En shrugged. "At least there's a benefit. It's harder for reporters to find my residence."

"If they really want to find it, what can't they dig up? Look at you, you only buy two sets of clothing through a year and the four seasons. One set is for wearing to matches, and the other for wearing at home."

"Uh..." Tang En scratched his head. He did not care about the need to dress up. To him, having two sets of clothing was enough for him to deal with numerous situations. One set of formal wear was to be worn when they were playing matches outside, while he dressed more casually at home. "Men are not like women, needing many sets of clothes..."

"That's for the average person. You're a public figure now, so you've got to be aware of your image." At this, Shania sighed. "You might as well let my friend design an image for you."

Tang En hastily shook his head. "Don't. I'm only a football manager, not some movie star."

Hearing him say that, Shania pursed her lips but did not continue nagging.

Although Tang En did not care about his clothes, buying a car and moving into a new place did move Tang En. He began seriously considering those two matters in his heart.

As they chatted, they arrived at their destination. Under the instructions of the staff, the car parked in a special carpark and avoided the massive congregation of reporters and fans at the gates.

"So many reporters and... football fans?" Tang En was taken aback. It was normal to have this many reporters around, but why was there a flood of football fans here as well?

Shania beamed. "Yes, yes. It's very lively."

Tang En cast a suspicious look at her and then opened the car door, slipping out. Agent Fascal was about to open the doors for Shania when he was stopped by Tang En. He routed over to personally open the doors for her.

"Please, little princess."

Shania laughed gaily as she stepped out from the car.

She had just gotten out when the staff on the other side came to fetch her. Without any greetings, with work being number one, Shania was directly ushered into the dressing room to get ready for the advertisement shooting.

"In a while, I'll introduce you..." Shania was dragged off even before she finished her words.

"How busy." Tang En whistled.

Fascal laughed beside him. "Shania is a very busy person now, Mr. Tony. Why don't I find you a place to rest?"

"Ah, thank you, but it's okay." Tang En waved his hands. "I'll just look around here. It's rather interesting watching you all shoot an advertisement."

He had also done a print ad before. But his was not followed with so much interest by the media as this one was. The shooting location was also not as lively. Tang En liked this sort of lively scenes; it was novel and interesting to him. After all, his own profession was a football manager. He did not usually get to interact with the many other fields. Taking the opportunity now, he wanted to widen his own perspectives. It was good to enrich himself.

As a result, he was led to the studio by Mr. Fascal. All the staff were busy, and no one took notice of an additional stranger popping in. After bringing Tang En into the studio, Fascal went off looking for the person-in-charge for the product and advertisement shooting.

There were no reporters within the studio. All of them had been locked outside. Naturally, there were also no fans around. Everyone was busy with their own matters, and Tang En continued his observations uninterrupted.

He saw the familiar logo again: Gillette.

"Excuse me..." A sharp voice sounded from behind. "Could I get past, please?"

Only then did Tang En notice that he was standing in the middle of the corridor. Everywhere else around was filled with shooting equipment and only where he stood had enough space for someone to pass by. He hurriedly turned sideways to give way as he apologized, "I'm sorry, I... eh?"

The lighting in the studio was dimmer, except for the main stage where all the light was focused. Tang En was stunned when he clearly saw who the man standing before him was.

What made him feel even stranger was a similar reaction from the other man when they saw him.

"David... Beckham?"

"Tony Twain?"

It was not unusual for either of them to know each other. At the end of last year, Tang En was invited to a prize ceremony where the English FA was giving out a variety of annual awards because he won the Domestic Manager of the Year Award. David Beckham was also present there. In fact, it was Beckham who gave the award to Tang En. Later, during the banquet, the two even greeted each other. In a way, they had the fate of meeting at least once.

Unexpectedly, they met each other again in a changed setting, at the scene of an advertisement shooting.

Tang En turned to look at the logo. He suddenly recalled that Beckham was Gillette's global spokesperson. He also knew who the person Shania so mysteriously wanted to introduce him to was.

"I understand..." Tang En scratched his head as he said to Beckham, "You're here to shoot an ad."

“I’m very curious as to why you would be here?” While Tang En already understood the situation, Beckham was still confused.

“Uh... A friend of mine is also here to shoot the ad.” Tang En pointed at the dressing room.

Right on cue, Shania walked out from the dressing room after she finished putting on her make-up. She immediately saw the two men standing together.

Beckham looked over to where Tang En was looking and saw Shania walking out. He laughed. “So, that’s your friend. She previously mentioned introducing a friend to me today.”

“What a coincidence. She said the same thing to me.”

The two exchanged a glance and smiled, understanding.

Shania ran over and pouted, a little disappointed. “You guys are already chatting? I was still thinking of introducing both of you.”

Beckham pointed to Tang En with a smile as he explained to Shania, “Actually, I know Mr. Tony from before.”

“It’s at some award ceremony at the end of last year.” Tang En nodded along.

Shania was even more disappointed now. She rolled her eyes and ran back into the dressing room. “I’m going to freshen my make-up!”

Looking at the girl’s back, Tang En shook his head helplessly.

“I didn’t expect you to be friends with Shania.”

Tang En laughed wryly. “It’s a long story... I’ll tell it to you when I get the chance. I’m just afraid you won’t believe it and think I’m spinning stories.”

Tang En was more than happy to take the opportunity to become friends with Beckham. The Chinese greatly valued networking; this was something Tang En understood. Not only in China; it was the same in any nation. In the football circle, having more friends was always a good thing.

“Why would I?” Beckham shrugged. “Mr. Twain, your success is already the greatest legend. What else won’t I dare to believe?”

This lad knew how to compliment people well. Tang En admitted that his words made him feel very comfortable.

“It’s nothing... call me Tony. Mister this and that, I get the uncomfortable hearing it. I’m only that formal when I’m quarreling with reporters.”

Upon hearing Tang En’s words, Beckham laughed. Everyone knew about the relationship between Tang En and reporters. “Then, feel free to call me David as well.”

Although he was delighted that he could get to know Beckham in this way, Tang En was still curious about Beckham and Shania’s relationship. Of course, Beckham could tell. He pointed to the dressing

room. "Shania and my wife are good friends. They got to know each other from a fashion show in Milan."

Tang En could only continually exclaim in his heart: What a small world. Truly small.

Chapter 474: A New Friend and An Old Acquaintance

Beckham didn't talk to Twain for long since he had to go shoot the commercial, but Twain also learned about the ins and outs of this matter from their brief conversation.

As everyone knew, Beckham's wife, Victoria Beckham, was a well-known fashionista who liked to be seen in fashionable places frequented by celebrities. It was also normal social activity for her to be invited to Milan to see a fashion show.

As the new international top model, Shania naturally became the target of the other party's intentions to make their acquaintance.

As a result, Shania and Victoria became acquainted with each other, and then through Victoria, Shania had met David Beckham...

Their relationship came full circle.

Twain stood in the corner and watched Beckham and Shania, who were filming under the spotlight.

He had never thought he would make Beckham's acquaintance like this. Although they had to have heard of each other's names, they hadn't had a deep connection before.

Had it not been for Shania, Twain and Beckham would have continued on their respective paths, and nothing would have changed.

Their respective paths...

Twain looked at Beckham, who was posing according to the photographer's request, and repeated this remark in his head.

What would their respective paths look like?

His future was unknown. He wouldn't even know what he was doing in a month, let alone further down his path.

As for David Beckham? Twain dared not say what he would do further in his future, but he could still guess for the near future.

The current year was 2006, and the new season, which was about to begin, was 2006-2007. During this season, Fabio Capello would take over the helm at stormy Real Madrid and bring the concept of Italian-style soccer, as well as an iron-fist style of coaching. Real Madrid would get rid of the star footballers of the "Galácticos" era with the unveiling of an official policy to clean up.

Ronaldo would become the first victim. He would be sold by Real Madrid during the winter transfer period to AC Milan. At the same time, Real Madrid would bring in a large number of young players and

begin to build their futures. Young Argentinian players like Fernando Gago and Gonzalo Higuaín, and the Brazilian young player, Marcelo would be signed.

Beckham, who was steadily becoming the main player in Real Madrid, would also be severely challenged.

Capello wouldn't like him and would want to clear him out.

As a result, the negotiations between the club and Beckham for a contract extension were slow-moving and even interrupted at one stage.

After Beckham was completely disappointed with Real Madrid, he finally announced his transfer during the winter transfer period to the LA Galaxy at the end of the season when his contract expired.

At the time, the news caused a sensation. Some people even thought it was an April Fool's Day joke. David Beckham, a world-class star player, was far from being old enough to consider retiring and had unlimited commercial value. How was it possible that he would transfer to play in what was considered a second or third tier league in the world?

Did he not care about his career? Was he not concerned about his competitive form? Was he not worried about his reputation? Did he not care about... soccer?

The media then received confirmation that Beckham was indeed leaving the European football center and the heart of the world's football to go to a "bush league" like Major League Soccer.

No one would think highly of him again... Everyone thought that this might be a sign that Beckham was going to switch his career to entertainment circles...

After this, Beckham suddenly broke out in the league. He returned to the team's main line-up by regaining the trust of Manager Fabio Capello with his professional attitude, then helped the team catch up to Barcelona step by step, starting a classic reversal in late March. His biggest regret in joining Real Madrid in the previous four years had been failure to win an important championship trophy for the team. This was the main reason why many people had criticized him. He hoped to be able to help the team defeat Barcelona and win back the long-overdue UEFA Champions League trophy before he went, his only wish.

Twain didn't know his story any further in the future. He had inexplicably transmigrated in the middle of April at that time, so he didn't know whether Beckham's wish had materialized, nor did he know what the fate of Real Madrid and Beckham would be after that.

Whether Beckham would really be engulfed in the barren land after he went to Los Angeles, and eventually be forgotten, or whether he would transform from a football star to a movie star... Twain knew none of these things.

However, he vividly recalled his feelings when he had learned of Beckham's decision—powerless and angry.

The powerless feeling had been about Beckham's decision, and the anger was directed at Real Madrid.

Letting Beckham go was bound to be the most significant and foolish blunder made during the career of Real Madrid's president, Calderón.

Yes, that was what Twain had thought before Beckham led the team to fight back.

He wasn't like most people. He had always thought that Beckham was an underrated player. The aura of a commercialized star was so dazzling that everyone forgot that he was also a brilliant player. When most people mentioned Beckham, they first thought of his image as a product spokesperson, not his hard-working figure on the field and during training. There were even some people who felt that Beckham's hard-working image was brand packaging in itself...

That was silly.

Twain liked hard-working players. It didn't matter whether the player was talented or not. If he wasn't diligent, he absolutely did not want him.

Their respective paths...

Twain had experienced many things since he had appeared in this world. Some things had happened exactly the same as he knew without any changes; some things were completely different from what he knew, and some of these completely different things were due to his direct interference, such as Van der Vaart's transfer from Ajax to Nottingham Forest instead of Hamburger SV, or Van Nistelrooy's transfer from Manchester United to Nottingham Forest. Other things were due to indirect changes, such as Capello bringing along one more player when he went to Real Madrid—David Trezeguet.

In that case, would his presence change Beckham's future trajectory?

In the new season, he had won Capello's trust and affection, and dedicated every assist and goal to the fans as part of the starting lineup throughout the season. With his good performance, he had won a new contract with the club and stayed at Real Madrid until his retirement.

Or it could be... that nothing had changed. Capello didn't like him, the club wanted to dump him, the media vilified him, and Hollywood beckoned to his wife and cast a spell on his choice for the future. And then everything would be irrevocable... as he went to America.

Apart from these two endings, would there be a third?

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Lost in his thoughts, Twain did not notice that the two people had finished their shoot and gathered around him to observe his expression curiously.

"Mr. Twain?" Perhaps since he felt it was a little rude to do so, Beckham finally piped up.

"Ah!" Twain was startled to see the two of them suddenly appear in front of him. "You guys... what are you doing here? Don't you have to continue..." He pointed to the center of the studio and discovered that at this time, the staff were busy dismantling the lights, removing the reflector boards, and getting ready to wrap up for the day.

"Finished your shoot?" He asked, puzzled.

"Oh, yes." Shania spread her hands and asked, "What were you thinking about, Uncle Tony?"

"The shoot with Shania went well." Beckham looked at Shania and smiled.

Shania stuck her tongue at him and put her arms around Twain, "Let's have lunch together. We've already made plans with David."

"Oh... Uh, where's your wife, David?"

"Victoria is in Spain, looking after the children. She's not comfortable leaving Cruz."

Cruz was Beckham and Victoria's third son, born on February 20th, 2005. He was the Beckhams' new favorite.

"My flight back to Madrid is in the afternoon. I think I'd like to ask my new friends to have lunch with me before I go." Beckham extended his hand to invite Twain.

How could there be any possibility of rejecting such a thing?

Twain also held out his hand, "But I think I should be the one treating."

Beckham laughed, "Don't forget that I'm British too, Tony."

Twain felt a little embarrassed by his laugh. He had really treated Beckham as a Spaniard...

"Uh, all right. If you have the opportunity to come to Nottingham in the future, it will be my treat. That's my home ground." He winked at Beckham.

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Lunch was at an upscale London restaurant, Beckham's favorite restaurant. They could tell from the private room that he had reserved for the long term.

Without the paparazzi's interruption, the three of them could chat about anything they wanted.

Together with Beckham, Shania gave Twain a lesson on fashion. As a fearless and individualistic manager, Twain behaved like a schoolboy in front of this serious young girl.

Beckham was fortunate enough to see the other side of Tony Twain that was unknown to others. He had a good time laughing.

"You mustn't say anything about this to the others," Twain specifically told Beckham when Shania went to the bathroom.

"Don't worry, Tony, but I don't think you have any need for concern. Even if the media really knew about this matter, they wouldn't believe it. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't believe it, either... Haha!"

Twain shrugged helplessly as Beckham guffawed.

"Would you mind telling me how you met Shania?" Beckham was curious. Beckham did have good reason to be curious about how a soccer manager had such a good relationship with a world-famous model and such a laissez-faire attitude towards her acting like a spoiled child.

"It sounds a lot like a movie script." Twain slightly recounted, "It's like this..."

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After listening to the story, Beckham chewed over it and said, “No wonder she keeps calling you ‘Uncle Tony.’”

“In my eyes, she’s not some world-famous model. She’s just a girl who will never grow up.” Twain sipped his red wine.

“I understand.” Beckham nodded.

“What are you guys talking about?” Shania asked curiously as she heard the last remark when she pushed open the door on her way back from the bathroom.

“Your Uncle Tony told me the story of how you met, which was very interesting.” Beckham said and smiled.

Shania cleared her throat and returned to her seat. She suddenly felt a little shy.

At this point, Twain wanted to talk to Beckham about his career.

He had considered that question for a long time, but he didn’t know where to start. Should he tell him directly that he would be dumped by the club in six months? That would be too shocking. David Beckham certainly wouldn’t believe it.

“Uh, David, you’ve worked with the new manager for some time now. What kind of person do you think he is?”

All in all, soccer was a common subject between the two men. When the conversation turned to this, the relaxed look on Beckham’s face disappeared. Twain made a keen mental note of this.

“Well... He is a very tough coach, different from the team’s previous managers. Everyone has to adapt once again...” Beckham shrugged and shook his head, “I may have to train harder than before to impress him.”

“Real Madrid is a powerful club and haven’t had a championship title for several years in a row. Everyone is under a lot of pressure. Maybe it’s better to be a little tougher...” Twain encouraged, “David, have you ever thought about coming back here to play soccer?” he asked, seemingly by chance, and pointed at his feet at the same time.

“Back to the English Premier League?” Beckham smiled and shook his head, “No.”

“Because of Manchester United?” Twain continued to ask tentatively.

“There’s a reason for that. You know I played for Manchester United for years, and I can’t imagine myself facing Manchester United wearing another team’s jersey...” Beckham shook his head. He really couldn’t imagine it.

He had said this once before in 2006 when he had returned to his country to promote his new autobiography. When asked if he was likely to return to the English Premier League, he had replied to the reporter the same way.

Now on a private occasion, he had stated it again.

When Twain heard this, he could only sigh on the inside.

If there was no change in the next six months, then Twain only hoped that by the time Beckham was at the end of the line, he would be able to give up this idea.

It was with some regret that lunch was over, and Twain and Shania said goodbye to Beckham. He had to rush back to join the team's training the next day, while Twain would go shopping with Shania in London.

"Good luck, David," said Twain as he held Beckham's hand when they said goodbye at the airport,. But he didn't say the next half of his sentence, "You will need some luck in the future..."

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After they had sent David Beckham off, Twain asked Shania in the car on the way back to London, "Where are we going?"

"To go shopping and buy stuff!" Shania declared excitedly.

"Ok... I got it." Twain thought that all women were like this.

"Don't think I'm shopping for myself." Shania, however, saw through his thoughts. "I'm shopping for you. You need to make some changes in your image, can't look like this all the time..."

Her agent, Fasal, who was driving in the front continued to say, "Shania is right, Mr. Twain. Even a man should have more than one set of clothes to wear on different occasions."

Twain somehow thought of George Wood's agent. The man hadn't come by to harass him for a while, yet he was very good at dressing him. He had a different look every time he appeared in front of him.

"I always felt that men who have makeovers were sissies..."

"Hey, Uncle Tony!" Shania was a little angry.

"All right, all right, I'll take your advice. Anyway, I don't need to worry with a fashion insider like you around." Twain raised his hands in surrender. It wasn't easy for them to meet up, so he didn't want to part on bad terms.

Therefore, guided by Shania, the three of them headed straight to London's most famous shopping street—Oxford Street. There, Twain was brought in and out of the upscale clothing stores, constantly entering and leaving fitting rooms, showing the new clothes he tried on to Shania and her agent. When the two people nodded, Fasal pulled out his credit card to pay the bill and picked up the shopping bag with the selected clothes packed in it. The three people would then go to the next store.

Twain hadn't experienced such crazy shopping in his life. Whether it was in China or here, he had never taken great pains to buy clothes.

He always felt that this scene should happen for a woman, and that he would be the one who used his credit card to pay the bill. He didn't expect a complete reversal of roles at this time.

But...

Twain struck what he thought was a dashing pose in front of the mirror in the fitting room. The man who appeared in the mirror was almost unrecognizable to him.

You don't say. After being made to suffer by Shania, I do look a bit like a star on a fashion magazine cover.

"Are you all set, Uncle Tony?" Shania cried outside.

"Oh... Ah, okay, okay, I'll be right out." Twain looked at himself in the mirror again, then turned to open the door.

Finally, back at the hotel room, Shania looked at her "work" with satisfaction—a brand new Tony Twain.

"What do you think, Mr. Twain?" Shania asked Twain as she took a fashion magazine from the bedside, rolled it up to serve as a microphone, and acted like a reporter.

Twain looked at himself in the mirror and turned around. "Think? Pretty good. Now when I'm out, I'm not afraid of being stalked by the paparazzi. They won't recognize me at all. It's very practical."

"Uncle Tony!" A profound sense of defeat surged from Shania's heart.

"Hahahaha!" Her agent, Fasal rocked back and forth in laughter.

Chapter 475: Declaration for the New Season

Despite being forced to dress up by Shania, Tang En greatly enjoyed his two days of vacation. While it was true that he hated being forced to do anything by other people, it depended on who those people were. He would not mind if it was Shania making him do it.

So long as it could make Shania happy, what was this little sacrifice?

At the young age of 17, Shania already had to bear the burden of working and doing something that she did not like very much. Perhaps, the only time she smiled as much was during the period of their interaction.

In front of the others, she needed to be seen as an international model and pay attention to her image. She had to be careful about every word and action. She even needed to maintain her expression at all times to preserve the perfect image in all lighting, from all angles. This was the perfect image they hoped for, but it was not the real Shania.

Only in front of Tang En, in front of the man she called "Uncle Tony," was she able to put down those masks and live in a carefree and true manner.

While the topic might be a heavy one, it was the truth.

Tang En's two-day vacation passed in a blink of an eye and Shania also needed to return to Milan to continue her work. In London's Heathrow Airport, Mr. Fascal thanked Tang En solemnly. He was grateful that he had spent the two days accompanying Shania to play.

"You're too polite. I wanted to relax too." Tang En smiled and waved his hand. "I forget all my troubles when I'm with her. I hate agents, but you're different. You're a good agent. No matter how famous Shania gets, she's still a child. Please protect her."

Fascal nodded. "You can set your heart at ease, Mr. Tony. The new season is beginning. Good luck to you."

The two men shook hands.

After sending Shania and Fascal off, Tang En sat on the stairs outside the passenger terminal and called Landy, asking him to pick him up.

After putting down the phone, Tang En continued sitting on the steps, looking up at the sky disinterestedly.

Perhaps he should really buy himself a car.

An ear-splitting roar sounded. A silvery-white airplane flew across the stretch of sky above Tang En's head.

The thought of buying a car lasted only one afternoon in Tang En's mind. The next morning, he concluded that walking was still better during his walk to the training grounds with Dunn. On one hand, he could train his body, and on the other, he could contemplate his problems as he walked without having to worry about getting into a car accident.

The first matter to attend to after resuming training was dealing with the transfers. Anelka had yet to find a suitable club to be his new employer. Mark Viduka's agent, however, already informed the club that his client wished to be transferred. The reason was simple, and it was one that Tang En understood. There was already no place for Viduka in the current Forest Team. Viduka himself was also unwilling to play as a substitute, so leaving the team was the best option.

Viduka knew it in his heart. When the club bought in Ruud van Nistelrooy, he knew that there would no longer be a core position for him on the team. He could not accept playing as a substitute. After all, he was still in his prime.

Tang En also knew that Viduka's space for survival was shrinking with the addition of Nistelrooy and Bendtner. By letting him go, they could still earn a sum of a transfer fee. It was not a bad idea. Middlesbrough hoped to purchase Viduka with an offered price of five million pounds. Tang En turned them down immediately.

No matter what, Viduka was a core forward on the Forest Team for the past two seasons. Forest's current results were inseparable from Viduka's hard work. The number-two forward in the English Premier league was only worth five million pounds? Tang En could not accept it.

However, he did not completely shut down the potential transfer. Instead, he gave Middlesbrough a chance to continue bargaining. He hoped that they would continue upping their offer. If they were truly sincere about Viduka, they had to show a sincere offer!

Back then, Nottingham Forest spent six million pounds to buy Viduka. Selling him off, how should it be put, should not be at a price lower than that.

Tang En's benchmark was to disregard all offers lower than six million pounds.

After a round of bargaining, both parties finally reached an agreement. Middlesbrough would pay four million pounds first. Then, within 12 months, they were to pay another 2.5 million pounds in

installments, totaling 6.5 million pounds for the purchase of Mark Viduka, whom they had been very keen on.

Following that, Tang En loaned out Kris Commons to Watford, who had just been promoted into the English Premier League, hoping that Commons would be able to gain sufficient appearances in the field with them. To appease Commons, Tang En even especially gave him a new four-year contract before deciding to loan him out. While his terms were not considered high on the team, it was mainly to express the team's trust and promise to him – that in the future four years, he was still a member of Nottingham Forest.

It was not only Matthew Upson and Mark Viduka who were sold off. Forest Team's second reserve goalkeeper, Barry Roche, was also sold for 2.7 million pounds to an EFL Championship team, Leicester. Under the situation where Akinfeev would be returning in a year's time, Nottingham Forest no longer had a position for Barry Roche.

After clearing the surplus of players, Tang En successfully reached his aim of streamlining the players on the team and at the same time increasing their battle capabilities. The players who remained were all extremely capable. In comparison to the common syndrome of EPL clubs registering more than 30 players, Nottingham Forest's team list of 23 First Team players could be considered a small team. But Tang En deeply believed that all 23 of them were excellent players. Here, there was no player just scraping the barrel for a meal; everyone who stayed was surely of some use to the team.

After completion of his work on streamlining the team, George Wood's agent came knocking again.

"I'm not here to inform the club that George is transferring, but I know that the team has sold a few players recently." Sitting on the sofa in Tang En's office, Woox crossed his legs as he casually said, "Now that Forest's momentum is so good, only a fool would consider a transfer."

That was the truth.

"But, as everyone knows, there are not just a few powerhouses in the European football scene that are keen on Wood. Yet Wood has turned down all of them. So..." Woox put down his legs and straightened his back, somberly saying, "shouldn't the club show their appreciation for Wood's act of loyalty?"

Hearing his words, Tang En said impassively, "Sure. Tomorrow I will give him a carton of milk as welfare. How about that?"

"Mr. Twain!" Woox raised his voice.

"Just get to the point if you want to raise his salary. There's no need to beat around the bush like that." Tang En snorted in contempt at Woox's attitude.

Woox went back to crossing his legs. "It's good that you're aware of it. If you wish to retain an important member of your team, you need to better your treatment of him and make him feel that his efforts and reciprocation are positively correlated."

"I think that George is very satisfied with his current income."

"That's what you think." Woox did not back down. "I still think his current conditions are too low. Tony, you wouldn't be unaware of the salary standards of a national player, would you?"

Generally, once a player was successfully selected for the national team, his value would shoot up under the agent's management even without playing a single match. The commensuration for taking on advertisements or becoming a spokesperson outside the field, as well as the salary and prize money given by the team internally all had to be raised. Currently, that was exactly what Woox was doing.

"He is the captain of a team that was runner-up in last season's EPL and UEFA Champions League, a selected member of England's National Team who participated in the German World Cup, a player who is most indispensable to the team, and the only core who cannot be rotated. Is such a player worth only 15 thousand pounds per week? If that number was made known, people would be laughing until their teeth fell out, Tony." Woox's words were razor-sharp. His verbal abilities did not seem to pale in comparison to Tang En's. "When you were spending truckloads of money in the transfer market buying one football star after another, did you not think about making a new promise to the most hard-working and most important person on the team?"

Tang En stared at Woox and did not immediately respond.

He had to admit it in his heart; Woox's words were impeccably reasoned. Tang En could barely find any reason to refute them.

"But we've just renewed our contract..."

"That's not important. The value of a player is constantly shifting. A year ago, who among us expected George to have the achievements he's got today? Clearly, we have underestimated his abilities, and in turn, underestimated his value. Now is the time to correct that mistake."

Tang En sighed. Although this agent was hateful, he was at least not egging Wood on to consider transferring. No matter what, Wood was the most important person on Forest right now. He was both the future for Tang En and his team. Evan had also mentioned before that if Wood was to become tempted by the outside world, they had to retain him at all costs.

A weekly salary of 15 thousand pounds for Wood was indeed a little too low.

"Alright. State your demand, Professor Woox."

Hearing such mockery, Billy Woox was not perturbed. Instead, he smiled as he stated, "A weekly salary of 75 thousand pounds."

Even though he was already prepared in his heart, Tang En still sighed upon hearing the numbers.

"Are you surprised, Tony?" Woox cocked his head and looked at Tang En. "I think that number is very reasonable. Ruud van Nistelrooy currently draws the highest salary in the team, 85 thousand pounds. Shouldn't the team captain enjoy the same level of treatment?"

"So, I should be grateful that you didn't ask for a weekly salary of 140 thousand pounds at one go?" Tang En said, laughing coldly.

"I wouldn't want to destroy the salary balance in the club," Woox replied with a smile.

"Thanks for your concern for the club's financial status," Tang En said with an unhappy face. "But now, negotiations of players' contracts are no longer under my purview." He lied. He suddenly thought of

someone who was more suitable to deal with this insatiably greedy fellow before him. "Especially contracts for important players."

"Hm?"

"You can look for Mr. Allan Adams to discuss raising George Wood's salary. He's currently in his office. I'm sure he'll be happy to have you."

Looking at Tang En's smothered smile, Woox knew that this must be a strategy of his. However, he could not do anything even if he knew it. Tang En evidently did not wish to discuss this issue with him, but he did not turn him down, only changing someone else for the discussion.

As a football agent and as a successful individual with some achievements in the market, Woox had long heard of Nottingham Forest Club's current marketing manager and knew he was not a character easily dealt with. It seemed like Forest was unwilling to fork out that sum of money so readily.

While Woox was in a stupor, Tang En picked up his phone and called Allan Adams to inform him about this. Allan agreed to take the matter off his hands.

"Mr. Woox." Tang En hung up the call, "I've already informed Mr. Adams. He hopes for you to go over to his office to discuss the matter now."

At that point, what else was there to do? Was he going to just turn and leave, refusing to further discuss the salary raise? That would not do. Woox decided he would have to meet this Allan person.

Of course, he did not forget to give Tang En a thumbs up before leaving. "A beautiful pass, Tony."

Tang En smiled as he waved his hand. "Thanks for the praise. Goodbye, Mr. Woox."

After passing the ball of raising Wood's salary over to Allan Adams, Tang En was going to wash his hands of it. All his focus was on leading the team's training and the final two warm-up matches.

The new season was coming.

Initially, Billy Woox and Allan Adams' negotiations were progressing slowly. Allan did not seem in a hurry to reach an agreement with Woox. After all, there was still a few years on Wood's contract. The club's attitude was, "of course his salary has to be raised, but not that high." To be honest, Forest was still not some rich and powerful team who could spend money like water. They needed to have strict control over the salary structure of the players.

But Woox felt that the team was not showing their sincerity. If they were already so stingy with their future captain, could they be expected to be generous with the other players?

Both parties were at an impasse until the media suddenly revealed that George Wood was in current negotiations about his contract renewal.

Tang En originally had no interest in such topics; it was like watching dogs fighting each other. He only cared if George Wood's condition in training was affected. But he soon found himself to be wrong.

Getting media exposure was a move by Woon. He wanted to blow the matter up so that it was not only an issue involving Wood alone but something that the whole team was concerned about; how did Nottingham Forest Club treat the players serving her?

If Woon got his way, there would be an unstable situation at a crucial point when the new season was about to begin. The morale of the team would be negatively influenced. This was not something Tang En wanted to see.

This move was out of Tang En and Allan's expectations. It was rather beautiful as well.

The media was an expert at stirring things up. With their addition, any issue would become complex. In this way, the club would have no choice but agree to Woon's demands.

Tang En also hoped to settle discussions of the matter before the season began and not let such messy matters impact the team's preparations for battle.

Finally, both parties managed to reach an agreement. George Wood and his team would sign a new contract with an increase in his weekly salary from 15 thousand to 70 thousand pounds. This was five thousand pounds lower than his initial demand, but Woon did not care. He was very satisfied with the result. Allan, on the other hand, made a point to remember the guy.

What comforted Tang En greatly, other than reaching a consensus about the new agreement, was that the matter seemed almost unrelated to Wood. The boy was not in the least affected. If some ignorant reporter asked Wood for his thoughts about the salary raise, he would deftly throw all the questions to his own agent; "Please approach my agent for this." If asked about his feelings regarding training, he would respond, "Feels great. Everything is as usual." Such answers were clearly unable to satisfy the media but were immensely satisfying for Tang En.

After following Woon for a year, he had indeed learned something. He now knew how to deal with the reporters. Faced with reporters, he was no longer as uneasy as before.

August 13, Cardiff Millennium Stadium.

The English Premier League champions, Chelsea, lost 1:2 to FA Cup winner Liverpool in the Charity Shield. The final warm-up match before the new season of the EPL ended.

In the interview after the match, Mourinho proudly talked about the defeat of this match. "I think this is a good sign. The League championship of the new season still belongs to Chelsea. A third in our streak of the Premier League championship. Furthermore, we also want to attain a breakthrough in the Champions League."

This was the reigning champion's declaration for the new season. Thanks to the advancement of live broadcasts, the other 19 managers of the rest of the EPL teams all heard his brave words.

No one would show approval of his words. Mourinho pushed his own team into the teeth of the storm. He wanted to make some waves, but this depended on if his opponents would give him that opportunity.

The next day, in Tang En's column, he announced his aims for the team in the new season:

“Mourinho said that his team wanted to attain a breakthrough in the new season of the Champions League. I regret to see what a gutless person he is. In the new season, our aim is to become the champions of the UEFA Champions League. I know what you want to say, but you are not reading it wrong. In the new season, our aim is indeed to become the champions of the Champions League. What’s mine is mine. If you’ve taken what’s mine in the last season, it’s time to cough it up.”

Chapter 476: Absolute Strength

Appendix: Nottingham Forest’s final list in the 2006-07 season (jersey number in brackets).

Goalkeepers: Edwin van der Sar (1), Paul Gerrard (25), Igor Akinfeev (12, on loan to CSKA Moscow)

Defenders: Leighton Baines (22), Gareth Bale (2), Pascal Chimbonda (3), Sun Jihai (21), Gerard Piqué (24), Vincent Kompany (33), Pepe (6), Wes Morgan (5)

Midfielders: George Wood (13), Demetrio Albertini (4), Martin Petrov (8), Rafael van der Vaart (23), Kris Commons (20, on loan to Watford), Ashley Young (18), Aaron Lennon (17), Franck Ribéry (7), Mikel Arteta (14)

Strikers: Freddy Eastwood (11), Nicklas Bendtner (9), Ruud van Nistelrooy (10), Nicolas Anelka (39)

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“Guys, don’t you think it’s amazing?” Twain asked his team in the locker room before the first game of the season. “Our first game last season was here too, against the same opponent.”

When he said that, everyone thought about it. He was right, it was exactly the same.

Nottingham Forest had hosted Wigan Athletic in last season’s first game. Everyone still had an impression of this team, because they had been called “the second Nottingham Forest” by the media, both before and after the game. The opposing manager had also named Twain as his idol during the interview and said that Nottingham Forest was a role model for his team to learn from top to bottom.

“It looks like you all remember. So, does anyone remember the course of that game?” Twain continued to ask.

Accordingly, everyone thought again. Other than the newly joined Van Nistelrooy, Van der Vaart, and Petrov, everyone else remembered what that game was like.

“Chief, we played badly in the first half,” Albertini stood up and answered. Although George Wood spent more time on the field wearing the captain’s armband, the Italian was still the team’s first captain.

“Not bad.” Twain motioned for Albertini to sit down. “I was furious with you all during the halftime interval and then we won in the second half, but I don’t want to a repeat performance. I’m sure you don’t want to see me like that again, do you? I’m actually very good-natured.”

The players laughed.

“At that time, we were still young and naive enough to feel complacent just because our opponent gave us a few words of praise. Now, it’s different. We’ve all been through a lot of important games and have

more experience!” Twain and his players met gazes and in the exchange, the players understood what Twain was referring to when he said experience—the UEFA Champions League final. “We’re no longer the same as we were a season ago. We’ve weathered a lot and will not trip over such a small game. Bring your best form! We have a magnificent goal for the new season. Do you all know that?”

“Yes, Chief!”

“The Champions League title! WOOOW!”

The players shouted in unison, impassioned by this goal.

“Very good. Now, this is our first official game for the new season. So... give me a good start!”

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“This coincidence was wonderful for Nottingham Forest, whose opponents in last season’s first round appeared in the first round of this season. The weaker Wigan Athletic cannot threaten the Forest team’s defense. The Forest team’s big-name stars will show their offensive strength as much as they like in the front field, and poor Wigan Athletic can only choose to defend their goal to the death.”

“Twain shows no mercy to their little brother... Haha!”

It was almost a replica of everything that had happened last season. Even the two commentators for the game were Twain’s old acquaintances—John Motson and Alan Hansen.

The only difference was that the two commentators joked about the two teams in the game in an easy manner and didn’t mock or ridicule Nottingham Forest’s poor performance as they had last year, because Nottingham Forest was gaining the upper hand, both in terms of the game situation and the score.

The game’s latest score was displayed on the electronic scoreboard: Nottingham Forest 1:0 Wigan Athletic.

“This is a more mature team.” Motson critiqued the Forest team as such.

He was right to say that. After that important defeat, the Forest team had matured a lot. It was obvious, judging by how they dealt with Wigan Athletic.

They didn’t give their opponents any chance and took advantage of their overwhelming advantage of their home ground and strength. They controlled the pace of the game firmly. The team’s overall tactics were no different from last season. At the beginning of the new season, Twain placed importance on stability. They had to first strengthen their performance before they considered a change of tactics. During this game, the Forest team’s two flanks repeatedly shuttled up and down. On the left side, Ribéry agitated Wigan Athletic’s defense on the right until they were confused and jittery. Ashley Young, who was back in action after his internal ban had ended, repeatedly used his passes to salvage his image in the manager’s mind.

Other than the major changes on the forward line where Van Nistelrooy replaced Viduka and Eastwood replaced Anelka, the rest of the team was no different from last season.

Van der Vaart, who had been bought for 5.7 million dollars, entered the team's main list, but didn't make his debut. The Forest team's midfield combination in the middle was still the unstoppable George Wood and Arteta. Therefore, the team formation was still the flat four positioning, 4-4-2.

Although they had repeatedly practiced new tactics during the summer training session, Twain was still not reassured. The new tactics were still hasty and not as dependable as the old tactics that the team had practiced for two years. At the start of the new season, he chose to be steady, and at the end of the day, the utilitarian in him was at work.

The team performed well year after year: They ranked fourth in the English Premier League in their first season and were in the top eight in the UEFA Europa League. In the second season, they were the runner-up in the Premier League and the Champions League... What extent would be satisfying for them this season? The Forest team would have to bear more expectations in the future seasons. The Forest team's rocket-like ascent made everyone feel that this miraculous team's outstanding performance was to be expected as a matter of fact. Otherwise, the World Soccer magazine wouldn't have rated Nottingham Forest "a strong team" instead of "a dark horse."

Just as Twain was flushed with success, the pressure on his shoulders grew heavier... Certainly, this was part of the price he had to pay for success. As the hottest manager of the moment, he had to be aware of this.

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The player who scored a goal for the Forest team was Franck Ribéry. With his excellent performances in the World Cup and the UEFA Champions League, he had become a world-renowned player. Wigan Athletic specially arranged to closely mark him but still failed to block him. With a corner kick, Ribéry shot Nottingham Forest's first goal of the new season.

The City Ground stadium fell into a frenzy. Even though everyone had become familiar with Tony Twain's team bringing victory after victory, every goal could still ignite the passion.

After the goal, Ribéry ran to the corner flag, followed closely behind by Van Nistelrooy, the player nearest to him. This newly joined player waved his arms to signal to his teammates to come up and celebrate.

Twain had once told Dunn and Kerslake that he wasn't worried at all about the question of Van Nistelrooy's integration with the team. It had now been proven.

Twain knew this. Van Nistelrooy was a very professional player. A new environment for him meant that he had to start over. He needed to adapt to everything in the new team. He knew how to integrate faster and better with this team. It was normally a good idea to take the initiative to be friendly.

He wasn't peculiar like Anelka, who wasn't likeable.

Van Nistelrooy's assimilation into the team was smooth, so it wouldn't be difficult for Van der Vaart, either. The team had three Dutch players, and the first to join was Edwin van der Sar. Twain didn't mind the men from same country sticking together. The old players could help the new players become familiar with the team. It was a virtuous cycle when done properly.

As for the wrangling between the factions from various countries, Twain wasn't worried. The days were long, and there was time for them to recognize who the people were that the team couldn't do without.

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At the end of the first half of the game, the score was still at 1:0, with Nottingham Forest dominating. The home fans weren't worried about the outcome of this game. Tony Twain's team was reassuring. The quality of the team's determination would not easily lead to failures like a "dark three minutes," where a foregone conclusion at the last moment could be completely reversed.

During the fifteen minutes interval at halftime, Twain lauded the team's performance with reservations and specially praised each player after roll call. He didn't gloss over his words, but truly praised everyone from the bottom of his heart.

No one disliked praise. Twain was also not stingy with his praise, which was a means of management. He was reminded only after Kerslake mentioned Bale at that time that it was easy for a person to pay a compliment, but it might be an important incentive for those who received it.

Of course, he also wasn't stingy with telling them off.

With regards to this point, Twain was rather inventive with rewards and punishment...

During halftime, Twain didn't say much tactical stuff other than praising everyone on the team. All the coaches knew that when their team did well and occupied the dominant position in the first half, there was often no need for anything else to be said at halftime. It was the best option for the team to continue playing the way they had in the first half. This was the same principle for the reason not to hastily change tactics and deployment of players when the lineup continued to win games.

Therefore, towards the end of halftime, Twain just clapped and said to the players, who were ready, "Play like you did before!"

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The Forest team carried out this remark in the second half and continued playing in the second half as they had in the first half.

Wigan Athletic was definitely not willing to lose this game. After all, they were no longer newly promoted from a season ago with a dream to successfully stay in the English Premier League. Last season's excellent results had made them more ambitious this season—to qualify for the next season's UEFA Europa League.

Since they were called "the second Nottingham Forest," how could the Wigan Athletic manager, Paul Jewell not study the team in front of his eyes?

He admitted that he understood Twain's team and Twain as a person and was fully confident that he could make a comeback in the second half—conceding one goal in the first half was well within Jewell's plan.

Much accomplished at a young age, Twain was currently flushed with success. He had chosen to take it lying down in the first half so as to make Twain underestimate his opponent. The second half was a good

time for Wigan Athletic to launch a massive counterattack. He still remembered the Forest team's performance in the first game last season.

It would have been possible for Wigan Athletic to go home with three points had it not been for Twain's admonishment of his players at halftime.

But right now, Manager Twain, you won't be scolding them during halftime... Jewell thought, feeling a little smug.

Ten minutes after the start of the second half, Wigan Athletic suddenly powered up and threatened the Forest team's grounds with three consecutive attacks.

Dunn looked at Jewell, who walked to the sidelines from the technical area and reminded him, "Tony..."

Twain smiled and waved, "I know. It's not nice to be number two. Take a look, guys. No one is willing to be someone else's replacement. Jewell thought that he had studied me and the Forest team, so let him continue to think so."

"Do you want to make any changes?" Kerslake asked.

Twain stared at the field for a moment before answering, "No."

Kerslake was surprised by his reply. He had thought that Twain was going to adjust his tactics. "But the opponents have seen through our tactics, and they've stepped up their defense on the sides..." he said and pointed to the field.

Twain smiled, "You're right. They've seen through our tactics. But... what about it?"

Kerslake was rendered speechless by his rhetorical question.

"Does he know how to deal with it when he sees through our tactics? If he knows how to deal with it, does that mean he'll be able to do it?" Twain laughed more and more happily. In Dunn's eyes, he was giving off a feeling that his prank had succeeded.

"David." Twain decided to give his assistants a good lesson. "In this world, these petty maneuvers do not mean that everything will go smoothly and unhindered. You know that they are still some distance away from us in terms of ability. But do you know how big a gap there is between them and us? Sometimes, an absolute advantage in strength can make all schemes and ploys ineffective. The gap between them and us..." He pointed confidently to the darkened sky and said, "Is like the distance from Earth to Mars."

Kerslake's mouth was agape. He had trouble accepting this reference.

"Nothing has to change. This lineup and this set of tactics will remain the same. We'll let Wigan Athletic understand why they can only be 'the second Nottingham Forest,' and not the real one. As you know, it's dangerous to believe oneself infallible in a fantasy."

With that, Twain got up, walked from the technical area to the sidelines, then whistled. When his players set their sights on him, he gestured for them to push forward. He was telling the team to continue to press forward, keep attacking, and score more goals.

Wigan Athletic's three consecutive attacks on the Forest team's hinterland just then had already provoked his squad of proud and arrogant Forest players. Even without the manager's reminder, they would also press up to absolutely crush the opponent.

For the rest of the game, Jewell could only look on in astonishment as he watched his team be trampled by the other team.

Twain was right. Jewell had seen through the Forest team's tactics and studied them thoroughly. He had also come up with a lot of ways to curb the Forest team's most impressive side attacks, but he hadn't considered that his team, whether in overall or individual competitive ability, were far from the Forest team. Even if his strategies were on the right track, what was the use if the players who implemented them were not strong enough?

"Arteta... What a beautiful pass! Eastwood isn't greedy, and he passes the ball to... Van Nistelrooy!! He scored his first league goal for Nottingham Forest!

"This was Van der Vaart's first contact with the ball in the game. He tries a long shot—and it hits the Wigan Athletic defender on the leg and bounces out... and Ashley Young makes a pass! Antonio Valencia... goal! Poor Valencia, this is his first league game for Wigan Athletic...

"The frontline combination of Heskey and Camara simply doesn't pose any threat to George Wood's leading defensive line. Wood actually rushed up to participate in the offense... He makes a long shot! Oh, what a pity, he shot too high!"

After the team was leading the opponent by 3:0, Twain, who was standing on the sidelines, turned to the two assistant managers and shrugged, then walked back.

"The game is over," he said to his two helpers at the 76th minute.

On the other side, Jewell's face looked ugly. But what could he do about it? His strategy was completely ineffective against the Forest team. The gap between the strength of the two teams was too wide... even wider than it had been a year before. It wasn't that Wigan Athletic had weakened. His team had added some players this summer. The only reasonable explanation was that Nottingham Forest had become stronger, and the speed of their strengthening was far greater than he had anticipated.

"Nottingham Forest has fully demonstrated the strength of a great team. Poor Wigan Athletic, it looks like they can only continue to be 'the second.' There's no suspense in this game. Nottingham Forest takes control of every corner of the field and can score as many goals as they want! Tony Twain is having a really good laugh. This is the perfect beginning of a new season!"

Amid Motson's praise, the referee blew the whistle to signal the end of the game.

Tony Twain took the initiative to go shake the hand of the loser, Jewell, and said, "Welcome back to Earth, Mr. Jewell. There are still thirty-seven games in the league. Please continue to fight on!"

Jewell smiled a little helplessly. "Please continue to do well, Mr. Twain."

They were right. There were still thirty-seven matches in the league, and the new season was just starting. They all needed to keep fighting.

But in any case, Jewell's team had been defeated, while Twain had received a boost, signifying a good beginning.

Chapter 477: The Chinese Man Who Conquered Forest

When Tang En declared Nottingham Forest's aim for the season as being the UEFA Champions League champions in his own column, no one felt any surprise. But no one expressed their approval of it either. Most people thought it was the arrogant Tang En once again hyping matters up; a poor performance, that was all.

Even Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea, and Liverpool did not dare to publicly announce their season's aim to be the champions of the Champions League, much less speak of the trophy representing the highest level of European Club tournaments like it was their own.

So, even though there was little surprise, there were several people who believed that such an arrogant declaration was not at all trustworthy.

"Tony Twain loves being the focus of attention. Every now and then, if he doesn't incite a wave, he would get uncomfortable. I completely understand that. However, if you always treat the waves he creates as real, you'll go crazy; you don't know what he actually wants." The Daily Telegraph was firmly "Anti-Tony". The words in his column were representative of how some people saw Tang En.

However, when the first round of the League match ended, everyone who still saw him that way fell silent. In the face of Nottingham Forest's overwhelming victory, they did not know what else they could say to make themselves seem less awkward.

Even though those people were unwilling to see the gleeful smiles of Tang En on the television screen, their words paled in comparison to the truth.

China's media did not care much about Tang En's relations with the English media. What made them exuberant with joy was the discovery of an Asian face sitting in Nottingham Forest's technical area in the match.

As numerous Chinese citizens were guessing if the Asian man was Chinese, Korean, or Japanese, Titan Sports, where Tang Jing worked, took the lead in revealing the person's detailed information as well as the reason behind his appearance in Nottingham Forest's technical area: they were online friends. Although it sounded like a fantasy, the fact was that it had happened. It was not up to them to disbelieve it.

Wasn't Nottingham Forest's victory over Wigan Athletic F.C. to be expected? As a result, everyone became even more attentive to the Chinese man who appeared on the managers' seats of a strong Premier League team.

Nowadays, the appearance of a Chinese player in a European team was not uncommon. There was not much hype value to the news. However, it was incredible to the Chinese to have a Chinese manager appearing in a foreign football team.

In the hearts of many Chinese football fans, perhaps there were still one or two geniuses among Chinese players who could be nurtured into outstanding players. Chinese managers, on the other hand, were certain to be devoid of any high-quality talents. Becoming a manager in a foreign club? It would be good enough if they did not lead their young ones astray!

Precisely because of such opinions, Dunn's appearance triggered a sensational reaction in China.

It was like he had suddenly dropped out of the sky, making his mark. No matter how deep their research or understanding of Chinese football was, no one had heard of such a top dog among Chinese managers, not to mention understanding Dunn's past, coaching experience, or other details.

For a period, Titan Sport's article written by Tang Jing with information on Dunn became everyone's only way of understanding this mysterious manager.

Many people were shocked by the information disclosed in the article – the person who had managed to become an assistant manager on Nottingham Forest, a team ranked second in the EPL, was someone who did not have any coaching experience! And he had only gotten to know Nottingham Forest's main manager, Tony Twain, through chatting online! No matter how it was viewed, it seemed like a scene that only appeared in YA novels.

As a result, many guesses regarding Dunn's appearance in Nottingham Forest began to surface.

Some people thought Dunn must be the brother-in-law to some big corporate boss in the country whose company forked out money sponsoring Dunn to go over and have some fun. In truth, however, he was without any real ability.

That was the supposition with the greatest support behind it.

Then, there were those who believed that Dunn was a learned man hidden amongst the commoners.

Didn't the report say that Tony had toured China twice? Getting to know Dunn was normal.

Furthermore, the Chinese football scene was rubbish. Was having any coaching experience in the field something worthy of being bragged about? Maybe Tony would not have even wanted Dunn if he had done any coaching in China.

Some felt that Tang En, as England's characteristic manager, was always doing things that puzzled everyone else. So, even if Dunn turned out to be lacking, it was just the norm for Tang En to have chosen him to be an assistant manager; Tang En simply did not do anything normal.

The final viewpoint was angled from a business perspective. The idea was that Nottingham Forest had the intention of breaking into the Chinese market after purchasing Sun Jihai. As such, they found a Chinese manager... This was sheer nonsense. Who would buy Nottingham Forest's merchandise because of a Chinese manager? What were they going to sell? A customized manager's suit?

Regardless, no matter how these people were making guesses, Dunn was, as a matter of fact, a member of Nottingham Forest's managerial team.

To clarify the story behind all of this—the other media groups did not want to always be picking up crumbs dropped by Titan Sports—countless Chinese media flocked towards where Nottingham Forest Club was.

“Tsk, tsk.” Tang En shook his head and clucked his tongue on the training grounds. “Even when Sun came, I didn’t see this many dark-haired, yellow-skinned reporters. Dunn, your charm is quite compelling! I’m a little jealous.”

The other members of the managerial team laughed.

Dunn knew that Tang En was joking, so he only smiled at him and said nothing.

“Letting them wander around outside our training grounds all day won’t do. It affects our training too much. Let’s make time to call for a press conference. Dunn, I’ll go with you to deal with them.”

Dunn nodded this time. He also disliked being treated like a monkey. It was a very visual metaphor; surrounded by barbed wire walls within the training grounds, it was as if they were monkeys in a metal cage while tourists outside scrutinized them with curious gazes. It was an unpleasant feeling.

Tang En could understand the enthusiasm that the Chinese media had for Dunn. After all, he was once a Chinese man too. With the fatigue and weakness of Chinese football today, they needed a hero to boost their morale. Although it was still not known if Dunn was a hero, that could not, in the eyes of the Chinese media, prevent them from declaring him to be one. As a lone ranger who found his way into England, he had managed to move the famed general, proud and aloof Tony Twain, with his true abilities. Dunn was then called on upon to serve under him. International superstars were amazing, but so what? They had Dunn, who specialized in managing these incredible superstars!

Tang En wiped his eyes. What a touching story...

As a result, each of the Chinese reporters who hoped to interview Dunn had received the following invitation:

Nottingham Forest Club sincerely invites our reporter friends who have come from afar to participate in a press conference held in City Ground at three-thirty in the afternoon tomorrow.

Naturally, Tang Jing was one of the invited parties. She held the invitation in her hand and looked inside the venue. Her gaze was not on Dunn, whom everyone was paying attention to. Rather, it was on Tony Twain.

In comparison to Dunn’s mystical appearance in Nottingham Forest, she felt that manager Tony Twain was likely worthier of further research. He was the one who had decided to recruit Dunn into the team to be a manager after mere conversations over the net and the two discussions they had had when he flew to China. What on earth did the man think about his whole day? Was he thinking of all the ways and means of astounding the world with his decisions? If it were really the case, he had succeeded, going by the current reactions from the outside.

It was not just the Chinese media. Even UK’s media had begun taking notice.

Right now, there were numerous foreigners around her. But Tang Jing firmly believed that those people had not come for Dunn. Instead, they had their sights on Tony Twain, the man who had brought Dunn into the English Premier League. Otherwise, Dunn had already been working as Forest’s Youth Team manager for the past two years. Why wasn’t there any attention from UK’s media then?

No matter how China's media was in an uproar over this news, the English were not at all interested in a Chinese manager. They were only concerned about their own people and their football. The UK media did not care even for the other strong football nations from Continental Europe. In a corner of Europe, England's football imagined they were the world's best in their own illusory world.

Having stayed in England for so many years, Tang Jing had long ago come to understand how the UK's football was. Her attitude towards it had also gone from being deeply admiring to coldly looking at it from afar.

Their losses in the World Cup and UEFA European Championship were certainly not only due to less-than-optimal conditions of the players or a lack of standards in the management of the team. Many times, they showed similarities with China's football.

"I say, Dunn. When the time comes, you must dress a bit more formally. Don't you go there wearing a bloated sports outfit... this one isn't going to work." In preparation for the press conference on the next day, Tang En was forcing Dunn to try out clothes at home. The tactics Shania had used to "torment" him back then were now all inflicted on Dunn.

He had to admit. Tormenting a living, grown-up person like that, commanding him to do this and that as he desired, was very satisfying.

"Do I have to put on a tie?" Dunn was holding a dark red tie in his hands.

"I hope you will."

"It's not like we're going to meet the Queen..."

"It almost is!" Tang En said sternly. "Tomorrow, you're not going to be facing reporters from all over the world only as Forest's assistant manager. You're also facing them as a Chinese man. Every word and action of yours and the way you dress will represent China. If you dress badly, you would be mocked! They'll look down on China and think 'do all Chinese people dress that way?' You must know that many people in the western nations still know nothing about China. They believe the Chinese to be living in the '50s or '60s, or even further back in the Qing Dynasty. You have the duty to let everyone see how the Chinese are now!" He adapted and edited the lessons he had received from Shania, feeding them to Dunn.

Shania had said it this way to Tang En: "...You're Nottingham Forest's main manager. Wherever you go, everyone will look and think of you in that way. Your dress, words, and actions all represent Nottingham Forest. If you dress badly, people will ridicule the club that stands behind you. They'll say, 'Look, Nottingham Forest's main manager looks like some country bumpkin'. They won't say, 'Tony Twain is a country bumpkin.'"

Dunn had the same expression as Tang En had had when he heard this: wide eyes and agape jaws. In the past, they had had never thought about such complicated matters. Now that they were pinched awake by someone, it really seemed to be the case when they thought carefully about it.

Although everyone liked to say, "I am me, I don't have to live for anyone else", and sound very independent and strong, people were, in truth, social organisms; they needed to live in various groups. Everyone inevitably represented something.

“You get very serious when it comes to China’s image, huh?” Dunn said after a long stupor.

“No matter what, I’m Chinese.” Tang En crowed. “Protecting the image of one’s own motherland is everyone’s responsibility!”

Dunn snorted as he put on his tie. “I thought of a problem. Now that you’re getting closer and closer to China, would you go if the Chinese Football Association invited you to manage the Chinese National Team?”

“Of course not!”

“You turned that down rather flatly. Weren’t you saying something about protecting your motherland’s image?”

“China’s football is apart from China’s image. If you’re talking about the sports image, ping-pong, badminton, and gymnastics are enough. China’s football is already much too complex. It should be simpler. Plus, I don’t need to sacrifice my career and money to do that sort of thing.” Tang En sat on the sofa and swung his crossed legs leisurely. He was a completely different person from the man who had spoken sternly with a sense of justice.

Tang En’s words rendered Dunn speechless. He had to admit, the man before him with an Englishman’s appearance had a much more in-depth understanding of China’s football and deep opinions of the issues within it.

“How does this look?” Dunn asked after putting on the suit.

Tang En scrutinized him for a moment. In truth, he did not know. He was just putting on a pretense. Experts acted the same way when they showed an unclear attitude. To outsiders, it would be regarded as a show of depth by the experts. They must also speak slowly, which would be interpreted as a careful weighing of their every word. If they spoke quickly or made a clear stand on their opinions, it appeared frivolous and without standards. After all, empty barrels make the most noise.

After a show of intense scrutiny for a long time, Tang En finally nodded. “Okay!”

In fact, in comparison with before, he had only changed into a suit from a sports jacket, a round-neck tee into a white shirt, and added a tie.

“Perform better tomorrow. Don’t be so quiet.” Tang En gave his roommate a thumbs-up.

On this day, everyone’s focus was not on Forest’s preparation for the next League match, but on the press conference to be held after three-thirty in the afternoon.

Everyone wanted to know the story behind the first Chinese assistant manager to set foot in the English Premier League.

When the designated time came, Tang En brought Dunn, dressed in formal wear, before the many reporters.

“You are free to ask any questions, but we’re taking them one at a time. We have limited time, so I’m sure nobody wants to waste precious time on maintaining order. Let’s begin.” After a brief bout of instructions, Tang En announced the commencement of the press conference.

Then, the reporters launched their questions with raised hands before receiving an answer from either Tang En or Dunn. Questions that were aimed at Dunn were sometimes interrupted by Tang En as well.

The main interests of the reporters lay in the following:

First, Tang En and Dunn; one was an Englishman, the other was Chinese. How did the two meet and become familiar with each other?

Of course, Tang En and Dunn could not say that they had swapped bodies, thereby understanding each other so well. So, Tang En brought up how they had become friends via online chatting. Regardless of whether the reporters believed them or not, that was their answer. Even if it seemed unbelievable or like a fantasy, it was the truth of the matter.

Second. Was Dunn truly equipped with the ability and qualifications to be an assistant manager in an English Premier League team?

Naturally, Tang En would not say that Dunn was unqualified. He was also unbothered with whether the media would take his words on Dunn's abilities at face value. Either way, time would prove everything. In the future, the media themselves would know how to determine Dunn's abilities.

Third. The world had numerous capable managers and assistant managers. Those from England, Scotland, France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Argentina, and Brazil... why did Tang En specifically choose one from China?

To this, Tang En's stance was unyielding. Since those from the other nations could become assistant managers, why not one from China? So long as they had the ability, he did not care about whether his assistant was an Earthling or a Martian. In fact, he said something else that stunned everyone: "If there was a woman with enough capability, I wouldn't mind her as my assistant manager!"

Originally, the target of this press conference was Dunn, but Tang En managed to become the main character again. He was truly proficient in snatching the limelight.

Dunn also answered questions, but he answered very few. Only when the reporters specified for him to answer would he stand up to say a few words. Tang Jing was someone who witnessed his manner of speech. It was precise and to the point. After finishing whatever he wanted to say, he would not further elaborate. Interviewing him? That was practically a form of torture because one had to rack their brains over how to keep the conversation going.

When Dunn's answer failed to satisfy the reporters, Tang En would jump out to make additional remarks. It was only then that the media discovered that Tony Twain, who liked going against the media, was rather adorable in comparison to the Chinese man, Dunn, who spoke minimally.

The press conference this time answered many questions for everyone but also created more. These could only be answered later.

The next day, The Times especially published a commentary article on the matter. They used a thought-provoking title, 'The Chinese Man Who Conquered Nottingham Forest', for the article on the Chinese manager becoming an assistant manager with a renowned English Premier Club.

“He won the trust of his colleagues and convinced the arrogant Tony Twain. Dunn and Tony’s story of how they met sounds like a modern fairy tale. The internet has made everything impossible into a reality. To us, this Chinese man is still full of mystery, like the faraway nation behind him that we do not, in truth, know much about.”

Tang En passed the newspapers to Dunn and said, “From now on, please allow me to call you Man of Mystery, Dunn!”

Dunn took the newspaper and casually put it to the side. “I think they’re exactly right. A real Chinese man has conquered this ancient Forest.” He pointed to the laughing Tang En and said, “The Conqueror, King Tang En.”

Tang En’s laughter intensified. He liked that nickname.

Chapter 478: A Taste of Celebrity

The layers of dense fog that loomed over Dunn were parted, at least on the face of things. After answering a number of the reporters’ questions at the press conference, everyone learned what Dunn was like, the story behind his arrival at Nottingham Forest, and so on. This material was enough for the Chinese media to report continuously for one week without repeating the same details.

However, there were fewer reporters outside the Wilford training base than before. The British media and other foreign media were gone, leaving only the Chinese media to hold down the fort.

Sun Jihai did not have a main position at Nottingham Forest, so there was no story to write about him. It was the assistant manager, Dunn, who had become the favorite in the eyes of the Chinese media.

The publicity of Chinese players who went abroad was dull. The current popularity of the Chinese players abroad on major websites was also very low, because most of the players didn’t do well overseas. Sun Jihai was probably the most well-off player now, simply because he was in Nottingham Forest, the most impressive team at the moment. But he was not an indispensable force. If they published every little thing about Sun Jihai, they would be suspected of deception.

A Chinese coach abroad was a new point of publicity. No one had ever done this before. A sense of novelty filled the hearts of the Chinese readers and they followed this coach’s words and actions with interest.

Dunn didn’t want to be exposed to the media, in the spotlight. He just wanted to be a coach and study soccer. He didn’t care about anything else, but it was no longer up to him.

For example, three days after the press conference, the Nottingham Forest Football Club received a fax from Beijing, China.

“CCTV5 would like to come to the United Kingdom to shoot a feature on Dunn.”

Looking at Dunn’s miserable face, Twain gleefully agreed to the other party’s request.

He certainly wasn’t trying to embarrass Dunn on purpose. Twain just thought that this was a good opportunity to make Dunn open up more.

Dunn's character was a little like a tube of toothpaste. He required squeezing to open up. Without pressure from the outside world, he might just go on living the way he did and never change. Just like if they hadn't transmigrated, Dunn would probably continue living in a hard shell and become a loser at Nottingham Forest. He would be sacked as acting manager and returned to the youth team... and then be one for the rest of his life, until he retired.

If he hadn't met Twain and hadn't had the man nag at him and think of ways to make him talk all the time, he would not have become what he was now.

Twain was an external force that changed Dunn. Dunn still required more external forces. This time, the media exposure for Dunn might be a good thing, even if it made him uncomfortable.

Unwilling to? Don't like it? This is no excuse, you have to face these problems and try to solve them with a mindset you'd never think of. This is not the time to negatively withdraw into your shell and think that the rest of the world doesn't exist.

Therefore, Twain pushed Dunn to this point, and he accepted CCTV5's request for an interview.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Dunn. They're just reporters; they're not going to swallow you up," Twain sniggered and comforted Dunn as he looked at him. Dunn had been frowning all day long since he heard this news.

"I know that... I just don't know what to do..."

"What to do? What do you need to do? It's written clearly right here, isn't it?" Twain pointed to a stack of documents in his hand. It was the same as the shoot with Gloria. Tony Twain required CCTV5 to also provide a more detailed and specific shooting plan. He had to agree to this matter before it was considered done. "They're just going to follow you in your daily life and training work. If it's possible, they will also film a game."

With creased brows, Dunn said, "I'm not used to putting my life on display publicly..."

Twain patted him on the shoulder. "Sooner or later, you have to get used to it. Just follow me and you'll get used to it."

Dunn looked up at him. "You're a famous figure..."

"Ah, haha!" Twain finally stopped his sniggering. This time he had a good laugh.

"I'm not used to exposing my life to other people and then letting others judge. I'm not used to it..."

"Dunn. You have to get to the level where you forge your own path and don't let someone else dictate it. No matter what others say about you, their assessment will not influence your life, nor will it affect you one bit. You're still you, and you're not going to change based on what other people think of you. If you're someone who cares so much about other people's opinions, would you have lived such an isolated life for more than thirty years?" Twain was referring to the Dunn before his move.

After listening to Twain's words, Dunn was silent for a moment before he added, "But their intention in coming here is to report on a real Chinese coach. Am I one?"

Twain was also quiet for a moment. Sometimes, they would feel uncomfortable talking about both of their messy identities.

“Uh, this... In fact, this problem is very simple. You’re Chinese through and through. An authentic Chinese man.”

Dunn looked up and asked Twain, “What about you?”

Inside the dim room, Twain’s eyes twinkled, “Me?” He pointed to the sky where the sun was setting outside the window. “Have you ever noticed the clouds that drift in the sky? I’m those.”

Dunn’s gaze followed to where Twain pointed and looked out of the window at the red clouds in the sky.

He understood the idea in Twain’s heart.

He clearly had a home which he could not return to, and his biological parents were still alive, but he could only pretend to be Dunn’s friend and acknowledge them as godparents so he couldn’t openly address them as “Dad” and “Mom.”

A cloud was rootless...

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After Twain agreed to CCTV5’s shooting plan, the other party moved quickly. The crew arrived in Nottingham three days later.

For this kind of topic that society was currently concerned with, they were not willing to let it out so that other media outlets would get all the glory. They had an advantage over those print media in that the other people’s articles were in words or images, but they could produce video coverage. Motion coverage was obviously more appealing to the audience than static images.

After the production crew came, Twain went over to say hello as the team’s manager and give the appearance of being a leader, then he left them alone after. He handed the task of receiving the visitors over to Dunn.

Dunn would introduce the situation to the team and tell them what to watch out for during filming, and so on. On top of that, Dunn’s work remained the same, and he was still in charge of the team’s training.

As for the shoot during his daily life, due to the fact that Twain and Dunn lived together, the two of them felt that it wouldn’t be good for them to be filmed together. They didn’t want to be on the covers of gay magazines in the United Kingdom.

Therefore, taking advantage of this opportunity, Dunn took the initiative to move out, but he did not move too far away. He moved right next door. It would not prevent the two of them from coming together often to study the game videos and tactics. It was only to let the media see that there was no inexplicable relationship between the two of them.

The CCTV5 production crew would certainly follow Dunn to Twain’s house in the evening to film. They would film the two men watching a game video together to discuss the tactical scenes. This was no problem. If Dunn hadn’t moved out, they might have been filmed going upstairs together.

The production crew was excited when they found out that they could go to Tony Twain's house to shoot, because when they had conducted an investigation, they had discovered that no media outlets had ever been allowed to enter this individualistic manager's house so far. CCTV5 in China would be the first media outlet to enter Twain's home.

Twain didn't mind a Chinese media outlet filming in his own home. Anyway, there was nothing much to shoot. With Dunn moved out, his private life was so impeccable that it was unassailable. Apart from his heavy drinking, he had nothing else that the press could criticize. And heavy drinking was a social phenomenon in Britain, since it was normal for an Englishman to drink heavily, so the media would not make a fuss about it.

Seeing the Chinese journalists' excited expressions, he felt that the CCTV5 crew would soon be tired of filming Dunn's life, because this person's life was so hopelessly simple and dry. Even when he had lived with him, he would study the videotapes on the television screen all day long. The Chinese viewers wouldn't want to see their hero, who could save Chinese soccer in their minds, with his back to the camera and motionlessly facing the television screen for two hours, would they?

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After settling all these issues, Twain single-mindedly led the team in training to prepare for the next round of the league tournament. While Dunn was having a hard time with his shoot, the second round of the league tournament was completed. Nottingham Forest, named "powerful" by the media, defeated Tottenham Hotspur with a score of 2:0 in the away game.

Nottingham Forest had scored victories in both rounds of the league tournament.

Along with Ferguson's Manchester United, they were currently the two teams that won all their games, and the Forest team were in second place with fewer goals.

Chelsea, led by Mourinho, another madman manager who claimed that he wanted to defend his league title before the season, had encountered some trouble—the league had already had two rounds, and Chelsea's results were just one win and one loss. They had won against Manchester City in the first round of the league and unexpectedly lost to Middlesbrough in the away match in the second round.

It was worth mentioning that the player who had reversed the score for Middlesbrough and scored the final deciding goal, was Mark Viduka, who had transferred from Nottingham Forest.

BBC's comment on this was that "Tony Twain continued his record of victory over José Mourinho on another battleground with a former Forest player."

This comment certainly displeased Chelsea supporters, and Mourinho also thought that this was nonsense, so he said, "This world will be stupid if the performance of a player playing for a new team can still be counted as the former team's record."

Tony Twain also gave his opinion on these comments. He was on Mourinho's side this time.

"Viduka is a fantastic player, and I was well aware of that when he played at Nottingham Forest. I'm glad to see the success he has accomplished in Middlesbrough. Still, the feud between Manager Mourinho and I needs to be addressed by us in person... What? Did I say the word 'feud'? Haha, how can it be! You must have misheard me! What I mean is that Manager Mourinho and I are respectively the managers of

Chelsea and Nottingham Forest, so the competition between us must be between Nottingham Forest and Chelsea. Is this clearer for you to understand?"

Twain said this at a regular press conference after being asked about it.

The media certainly understood. Did it not mean that the matters between him and Mourinho were just between the two of them? Others weren't allowed to meddle. It was just more tactful to say so.

The CCTV5 reporters were also at the scene and had a close look at the special character of Tony Twain, the individualistic manager. Those people, who had previously commented on the actions and words of this man, had said the truth—it was hard to form a simple conclusion about him.

Everyone had heard him say "feud" just now, but he had denied it in less than ten seconds, and he did it with a calm expression and even breath, as if he had spoken casually.

To put it bluntly, how could a person's skin be so thick?

To say it nicely, uh, was there a nicer way to put it?

This group of confused Chinese journalists decided to ask Dunn this. Who was Tony Twain, the manager with two extreme sides? After all, Dunn was the one who interacted with him the most.

As a result, Dunn's answer was a great disappointment to them.

"I don't know exactly what kind of person he is."

Under the reporter's patient and systematic guidance for a long time, he blurted out, "You can't simply use 'good' or 'bad' to describe him. Or more precisely, you can't use a simple 'good' or 'bad' to judge him."

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Nottingham Forest wasn't surprised that the media was shadowing and filming them. When Gloria had first come, everyone had shown some interest because it was a beautiful woman. Now that this production crew consisted mainly of men in suits, who would still care?

Furthermore, the Forest players were no longer ordinary players these days. They could be called star players. They had long been used to training under the spotlight and surrounded by the media—after the start of the new season, more and more reporters came there every day in hopes of an interview. It all boiled down to their last season's success.

A lot of media would follow, even if they went to an away game. They were like sharks following behind a whaling ship. Some people would enjoy the fame, and some people wouldn't, like Dunn. Now, wherever he went, a four-person crew would follow behind him. When other people paid attention to the reporters with East Asian faces, they would also check him out. This was not the life he wanted.

However, he was also not someone who complained about things when he encountered difficulties. Therefore, no matter how much he didn't like it, he still worked very hard to cooperate with the other party's work. It was part of his job, too. His attitude towards work was based on his personal emotions, and work was work. This was the difference between him and Twain. Twain often put his personal emotions into his work, and it had become his unique style...

Fortunately for Dunn, “The Truman Show” kind of life was coming to an end. Two days before the start of the third match of the league tournament, the CCTV5 crew told Dunn that they were going to leave Nottingham and return home after filming this game. The third round of Nottingham Forest’s game against Fulham would be the last shot.

Dunn heaved a sigh of relief. There was an inexplicable pressure of being stared at, leaving him a little breathless. Although Twain had said to him “It’s nothing much. Just work and live as you usually do,” how could he actually treat these people like the air around him? Of course it was going to affect his work...

Subsequently, the third match of the league tournament was getting closer under such circumstances.

The third round of the league tournament was an away game for Nottingham Forest. This time, the opponent was not strong—Fulham, the eighteenth placed team who had one defeat and one draw. The CCTV5 crew had chosen this game for their filming. This was a carefully selected result. Although it was a bit of a shame not to be able to capture the atmosphere at their home ground, the opponent for this match was not strong, and Twain’s team would easily secure a win. For this shot, it would also be counted as a happy ending.

Chapter 479: Watch Your Foot

“How often do we visit London in a year?” Tang En asked casually as he sat in the coach heading to Fulham FC’s home grounds, Craven Cottage. He looked out at the street scenery of London.

“Who knows?” Kerslake said, following up leisurely.

“At least six times,” Dunn said.

“There are six English Premier League teams, huh? London may be the city with the greatest number of teams from the top-level league.” Tang En’s gaze drifted afar. They were getting closer to Fulham FC’s home stadium, but the place that caught his attention was not Craven Cottage, but rather the northeast.

Looking over there now, he could not see any sign of the large blue figure under the horizon, only rows upon rows of houses. Tang En could not see it, but his heart was clear. That was the direction of Chelsea’s home grounds, Stamford Bridge.

In the large city of London, there were six EPL clubs of various sizes. However, to Tang En, there were only two clubs which he would consider as his opponents in his heart. One was Arsenal, in North London, and the other was Chelsea, situated in the middle.

Overall, England’s football had always shown signs of strength in the North and weakness in the South. Manchester United, Liverpool, Everton, and Newcastle from the North were all old, famous powerhouses. Those who participated in the top leagues in England also often came from the Northern teams. This could be traced back to the earliest period of prosperity and the development of modern football – to the lead up to the Industrial Revolution.

Numerous heavy industries were concentrated in North England, and modern football developed rapidly from within the new working class, leading to an area rich with football culture. It was no surprise for

Liverpool or Manchester to have strong, internationally renowned teams emerge from that area. In South England, London had a high concentration of football teams, since, as the capital, many people converged there.

Fulham FC was established earlier than Chelsea. In fact, Stamford Bridge was originally built for Fulham FC's use (because it was within the Fulham region). However, the suggestion was turned down by Fulham FC. As a result, Chelsea Club was born.

Before Bates took over Chelsea, the two clubs were both unknown. Bates' arrival brought Chelsea Club their first glory, and thereafter, mogul Abramovich ushered in the second period of glory for the team. Since then, although Fulham also had Mohamed Al-Fayed, another mogul, backing them, the difference between them and Chelsea gradually became bigger. Chelsea was a standard powerhouse, a force to be reckoned with in the European football scenes. And Fulham was merely a normal English Premier League team.

The direction Tang En looked in said a lot about the positions the two teams held in his heart. Even if their opponent for this match was Fulham, Tang En's heart was still thinking about Chelsea. Who asked for the two clubs to be this close to each other?

When the team arrived at Craven Cottage, CCTV5's designated team was already ready for them. They had gotten permission to film for five minutes in the locker room. However, they could only film the footballers changing and leaving for their warm-up in that time.

Dunn was caught by them and gave a short interview. Most things could only be left to Kerslake to manage. In the locker room, Kerslake loudly reminded the players to make good use of the time to warm up outside. Tang En had yet to arrive. He was stuck outside the stadium entrance, caught by even more reporters.

"A two victory streak. If they take down Fulham in this match, they will get their third win in a row. Manchester United's match will take place tomorrow. If they are victorious in this match, Nottingham Forest will temporarily be first in the point accumulation table for the Premier League. To Tony Twain's team, this is a fabulous temptation. Ever since leading the team back into the English Premier, Tony's team has yet to taste how it feels like to be the leader of the EPL. Even if it's only temporary, it is still worth their effort in attaining it."

On television, an expert was analyzing the match for the audience. If not for his input, no one would have realized that Nottingham Forest had not managed to rank first even once in the League.

When Tang En finally got away from the pestering reporters and returned to the locker room, the team's warm-up was almost done. Neither Dunn nor the CCTV reporters were around. They had gone to the field to capture the scene of the team warming up as well as Dunn working.

The locker room, which had music playing earlier, was quiet. Tang En alone walked in circles around the room. His mind was not thinking about what might happen in this match, but the future of the team.

A sudden burst of noise from the direction of the field broke his train of thoughts. He looked back to find the locker room door being pushed open. The players and coaches walked in.

Dunn's interview was still ongoing at the door. The Chinese reporters were making good use of the chance, trying to capture the internal situation in the locker room. Tang En walked over to shut the door.

"Everyone. If we win this match, we can be the boss," he said, turning to face the players who had just gotten seated.

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"This is our home ground. Don't give those people outside a chance to make a scene here!" Like Tang En, Fulham's main manager was a young man—36-year-old Chris Coleman. He was not, however, as famous as Tang En.

Since they were both young, they were naturally unwilling to suffer a defeat. Prior to the match, regardless of whether it was the lottery company or the general media, the favored outcome was for Nottingham Forest to gain the full three points in their away match. They completely disregarded the feelings of the home team, Fulham FC. Coleman did not wish to prove them right. In this match, he did not hold onto the idea of having to win. Rather, he held onto the belief of "absolutely not letting Nottingham Forest win." He instilled this belief into his players; Fulham FC, in its entirety, was hoping to create trouble for Tang En during this match.

Players from both teams entered the field. The managerial teams also arrived at their respective positions and took their places.

"Tony, I'm a bit worried." Dunn turned to Tang En immediately after sitting down. He had a thought lingering in his mind. He wanted to speak up earlier but had not had the chance.

"Hmm?"

"Before the match, Fulham's main manager said that he would be making trouble for us."

Tang En waved his hands, unbothered. "Any manager that comes up against us will say the same. Even I would say the same to our opponents. It's no big deal, just pretty words to boost morale."

"But Fulham has sent out five rear defenders."

"Let them defend."

Seeing that Tang En wasn't worried, Dunn said nothing else. He hoped his feelings were misplaced.

When the match began, Fulham indeed set out a stance of locking down on their defense in their home field. In this match, Coleman arranged a formation of 451. From the first minute of the match, they retreated onto their half of the field to defend.

No matter how Nottingham Forest controlled the ball outside, they refused to come out. They would rather only get one point in their home grounds than take the risk of attacking and allowing their opponents to counterattack. All of England knew how quick Nottingham Forest's counterattacks were. Any mistake could bring an irreversible consequence.

Coleman told his players to never rush forward and lose their defense, even if they had to watch a scoring opportunity be wasted. Under such a strategic direction, the first half of the match was

extremely boring. Faced with a wall in the form of Fulham FC, Nottingham Forest did not have any good solutions. Other than a few long shots from Rafael van der Vaart, Forest could not find a better method of breaking through their opponents. Ruud van Nistelrooy and Eastwood were both tightly marked by their opponents, and the penalty zone was crammed with people. Even van Nistelrooy, playing as a center-forward, was forced to pull to the wings to receive balls.

They were already struggling, especially Eastwood, since after his injury, he was no longer a forward who could depend on playing rough with his opponents. Eventually, he also gradually pulled out of the penalty zone to attempt at long shots.

In the entire first half, Nottingham Forest attained 11 shots at the goal, of which eight were long shots. Rafael van der Vaart had three shots, Eastwood had four, and George Wood took one. Of the 11 shots, seven of them landed within the goal area, but none of them scored. Fulham's united defense truly gave Forest Team some trouble.

On Fulham's side, having no goal loss was no small feat. They paid the price of getting four yellow cards. However, the fouls committed by the players were scattered and not entirely shouldered only by the rear defenders; from their forwards to their fullbacks, players from a variety of positions received the cards. Evidently, this was specifically instructed by Fulham's main manager. For the results of the match, he could be said to have put forth immense effort.

"The first half has ended! Under Fulham's crazed pressing and lock-down on defense, Nottingham Forest did not manage to get any good opportunities. Their speedy counterattacks had no space to be utilized in the face of Fulham's defense. Coleman's strategy is extremely successful. He has managed to curb Forest Team's offense!"

"I believe Tony Twain's purchase of Ruud van Nistelrooy was certainly not for the sale of jerseys, but to make up for Forest Team's weakness in positional play in the last season. However, van Nistelrooy's condition in this match is not fantastic. Up until now, he did not even get a shot at the goal."

The commentator was right. Ruud van Nistelrooy's condition in the current match was bad. Tang En could tell, too. However, he still intended to give van Nistelrooy an opportunity in the second half.

During the halftime break, Tang En adjusted the formation of the team. Ribéry, who had been entirely suppressed in the left wings was swapped out with Petrov, while Eastwood completely retreated from the penalty zone.

In the previous two years of the English Premier, Ribéry had become famous. As a result, everyone had researched him thoroughly. This match rang Tang En's alarms. Ribéry's effects in the flanks were becoming more and more limited. He needed to consider other paths.

While Petrov was similarly a wing player and his unique point was even simpler than Ribéry, he had the advantage of being an "unfamiliar face." The numerous EPL teams did not yet understand him and lacked research. Substituting him in might bring out an effect of a miracle player.

Pulling Eastwood out of the penalty zone was to use his abilities in long shots and assists from the back. His long shots from the penalty arc area were rather threatening. Faced with heavy deployment in the penalty zone from their opponents, set plays and long shots were the best solutions.

Speaking of set plays... During the halftime break, Bale did not follow them in. Dunn made all the reserve players warm-up on the field. Hopefully, it would be helpful for the second half of the match.

In the locker room, Tang En was anxiously arranging the team's strategy for the second half. The calmness in the beginning of the first half completely gone.

CCTV5's filming team did not get permission to film in the locker room during halftime. They could only wait on the sidelines, chatting about their thoughts on the first half. They felt rather awkward about the current situation. No one had thought that this match would turn out to be such a tough fight. Nottingham Forest had not been able to make a breakthrough even after such a long time, and the moment of high they were waiting for refused to make an appearance.

"Hey, the happy ending won't become a bad ending, right?" someone asked.

"Who knows?" The team's leader, the producer of the program this time, shrugged. "That's not something we can control. You see the use of having you guys prepare two proposals for this? No matter how they play, our program can still be produced successfully."

"That's true, Mr. Zhang. But who wouldn't wish for their own team to win? Speaking of this, I didn't expect Nottingham Forest's relations with China to be this good. They have a Chinese player, a Chinese assistant manager, and a China expert who has a fervent enthusiasm for Chinese culture as their main manager."

"Yeah. It's probably something normal even if they suddenly visit China in a few years."

"If that really happens, we'll have to invite them to the studio to record a special episode!"

"Stop daydreaming up such beautiful stories. Have you already forgotten about the annoying matter with Real Madrid? Nottingham Forest's main manager is not someone that can be easily gotten along with. He's an eccentric character. When the time comes, who knows what kind of things he will do?"

Hearing their head say that, no one else spoke further about the matter. Real Madrid blowing them off had only just happened a year ago, and it still had a deep impression on them. It truly wasn't a good memory.

As the group of them discussed this, players from both teams entered the field again. The second half of the match was about to begin.

The two teams switched sides before resuming the match. On the field, it was no different to the first half. Fulham FC continued their lock-down on the penalty zone, firmly refusing to leave the area. No matter how Nottingham Forest's fans jeered or threw insults at them, they continued like cowardly turtles in their shells.

Tony Twain was not sitting calmly in his manager's seat like the first half. He had already taken his place at the sidelines, closely observing the changes on the field.

Looking at Tony's mildly anxious face, the television commentator suddenly laughed. "Fulham FC's performance reminded me of Nottingham Forest from a season ago. Tony's team also forced their opponents into a dead end like this that time. I didn't think that Nottingham Forest would also deal with by an opponent in the same manner. Manager Tony Twain, so you'd have such a day too, huh?"

Petrov's appearance on the field did shine for a few moments. Unfortunately, Ruud van Nistelrooy's condition in the match was truly terrible, failing to grasp opportunities well. At the 70th minute of the match, Tang En finally decided not to continue waiting for van Nistelrooy's condition to improve. He substituted Nicklas Bendtner in for the Dutch shooter. Bendtner's heading ability was better than van Nistelrooy, and his body was stronger. Tang En hoped that he would be able to break through the goal gates and score a goal from the front.

After Bendtner was fielded, Fulham's retreated even more tightly. Both Petrov and Ashley Young had no opportunities. The penalty area was choked full of Fulham's players. Any long shot would be easily blocked out. The Fulham players did not look like they were playing a match at all, but rather, they were using their bodies to close any holes.

In the 80th minute, the score was still 0:0. Tang En's stubbornness surfaced. He knew that Fulham wanted to get a point in their home field. The more his opponent wanted that, the more Tang En refused to let them have their way. You want a draw? You're taking a draw as a victory? I insist on winning! I'll make your one point into zero!

In the final moments, he used Gareth Bale, who excelled at set pieces, and changed out Leighton Baines. With Fulham's crazed fouling, Forest Team had no lack of set pieces in the front field. It was only that Rafael van der Vaart had not kicked well in the previous few times he took the penalty. He either kicked too high or got directly blocked by the player wall.

After Bale entered the field, the right to be the main penalty kicker for the team was automatically transferred to him. Young Bale was not afraid. By now, he held the record of saving the team with his free kicks at numerous critical moments. Tang En hoped that this time would be no exception.

Nottingham Forest very swiftly attained a front field set piece 25 meters away from the opponent's goal.

"Gareth Bale stands in the front of the ball. There are only eight minutes left from the end of the match. He takes a run, lifts his foot—ah!"

Amid the ear-splitting jeers within Craven Cottage, Bale's beautiful left-footed curve ball landed on the outside of the intersection between the crossbar and the goalpost. And in the duration of the ball flying towards the goal, Fulham's goalkeeper was completely immobile—he had already surrendered.

"He's trying too hard for the angle!"

Tang En's heart almost stopped because of the excitement. If the ball had gone in, Fulham, who had been on a tight defense for the last 80+, would be finished. The scene he would be all too happy to see would have appeared, with the despicable Coleman looking like a deflated ball. After the end of the match, Tang En would have been able to walk over with a victorious stance and purposefully pretend to be a gentleman, shaking the opponent's hand. Shedding crocodile tears, he would comfort him. "The Premier League still has 35 more rounds. Please continue to work hard, Mr. Coleman!"

However, the future he looked forward to did not appear.

"Damn it!" he cursed lowly. He was not swearing at Bale. The little monkey had already done well enough. He was cursing their terrible luck.

It was such a precise free kick, but it did not even manage to get in. After the football left Bale's feet, Fulham's fans could only use their despairing jeers in an attempt to stop the ball.

"Tony. Getting a point in the away match is not too bad." Dunn reminded him again.

Tang En, who had been vexed to the point of tearing his hair out, looked up at Coleman who sat next to them. Then he shook his head at Dunn, saying, "No. We can still win. We must win. Fulham is reaching the extent of their strength. Don't you see that their stamina is already at their limit? If we put on a bit more pressure, and add another piece of straw, just another piece, they are f*cking finished!" Saying so, he did not care to let Dunn continue explaining. He rose from his seat and walked to the sidelines, indicating for the entire team to press forward, fighting to break through and gain a point in the final moments.

Even Pepe had rushed forward to participate in the attacks. The backfield of Nottingham Forest had large, humongous swathes of empty space. They themselves had not noticed it. All of Forest's players thought that Fulham had to be grateful to God for being even able to hold onto their one point in the end. How could they possibly have any additional strength to retaliate?

But the impossible still happened. At the moment the Fourth Official raised his signage indicating three minutes of injury stoppage time, Fulham intercepted the ball in the backfield and suddenly launched a powerful kick to the front. Their right midfielder Wayne Routledge, who had been loaned from Tottenham Hotspur, sprinted madly once he received the ball. He, being a player depending on his expertise of speed, left behind Forest players trying to return to defend. And then, he came face-to-face with Edwin van der Sar who went on the attack, and intelligently chose to lob the ball!

"Wayne Routledge—GOOOOOOOAL! Something unbelievable has happened! Fulham, who had been dead set on defending for 90 minutes, have taken the lead! This goal is very likely to be the determining goal for the match! Listen to the cheers in Craven Cottage, it's deafening!"

Amid the commentator's excited shouts and the frenzied cheers of the home team fans, Tang En unexpectedly turned and walked slowly back to his seat, sitting down without flying into a rage. He exhaled heavily.

"We've been tricked, Dunn. Coleman, that b*st*rd, wanted three points from the beginning, not just one! D*mn it."

Dunn knew what Tang En meant. That Routledge guy was substituted in by Coleman during the final minutes of the second half. He was used as a forward despite not being one. What they were waiting for was for the opportunity to counterattack when Forest Team became anxious, causing the team to press forward. This had originally been Tony Twain's most frequently used trick. He did not expect himself to be defeated by the same ploy.

As Nottingham Forest became viewed as a strong team by more and more people, their main manager, Tony Twain, also adopted the style of a "manager of an elite team." His sights were set far and high, but he was no longer able to see the path immediately ahead of him.

What was truly a strong team? What did it mean to have the attitude of the strong? For young Tony Twain, he still had a very long way to go.

“Bad end.” The man standing beside the camera labeled with the “CCTV” logo watched Tang En as he sat on the manager’s seat conversing lowly with Dunn. “What an unexpected result. That’s one thing England’s media said correctly. This is a manager who defies expectations.”

“Hey, Head Zhang...”

“Yeah?”

“Are we here to film Dunn or Tony Twain?”

Chapter 480: What’s Going On?

The away loss to Fulham was seen by Nottingham’s media as an upset. The media elsewhere, especially the media in London, didn’t see it that way. They argued that the gap in strength between Fulham and Nottingham Forest wasn’t big enough to be termed an upset. However, they also admitted that Fulham’s victory over Nottingham Forest had not been expected before the game.

A day after Twain’s team lost the game, Manchester United also beat Watford in the away game 2:1. So far, they were the only team to win all three games of the league tournament. Therefore, they naturally continued to sit firmly in the league’s top spot.

Tony Twain still hadn’t gotten a taste of being the first in the league after all...

After losing this game, the Forest team’s ranking also fell from second to fifth. Even teams like Portsmouth and Aston Villa ranked above them. The only thing Twain felt grateful for was that they were still ahead of Chelsea.

As for Dunn, the only good thing that had happened this week was that the Chinese television station’s production crew was finally gone, and his private life could return to normal. But now that he had already moved out of Twain’s place, there was no reason for him to move back.

In fact, this was also rather nice. Everyone had their own private space. Even when they had lived under the same roof, there was no exception. If Shania were to visit Twain, even if the two of them didn’t think anything was wrong, Dunn wouldn’t be uncomfortable anymore as the third wheel.

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As September came around, Nottingham Forest beat the Blackburn Rovers at home 2:1 in the fourth game of the league. With their three wins and one loss, they ranked fourth with nine points and continued to press Chelsea down.

It looked like everything was normal except for one small setback.

The results of the Champions League group stage draw had been released, and it was time to focus on the Champions League.

Twain also had to go to this draw ceremony. The situation was not the same as a year before.

A year before, Twain had been a nobody on the UEFA Champions League tournament and sat alone in the corner, with only a few English managers coming over to say hello. Neither the press nor the managers of other countries paid attention to this somewhat gloomy young man.

And this time? As soon as he got out of the car, he was caught in a frenzy with the media who had waited a long time. There was a burst of flashes, almost turning the area in front of the hotel entrance from nighttime to daytime.

The AC Milan manager, Carlo Ancelotti, closely followed behind Twain and was also startled by this scene, even though he was used to all sorts of big events. The chubby manager thought something big had happened. When it was clear that it was just a disturbance caused by Twain in front of him, he pursed his lips and went around him.

Twain looked sideways at Ancelotti, then waved to the media as he walked in.

After entering the conference room, his hope for a quiet rest was in vain. There was a constant stream of managers coming over to talk to him. Whether he knew them or not, they would come up for a chat. Twain also enjoyed the feeling of being a central figure among managers.

Evidently, most of the people who came over were the managers of non-powerhouse teams. The powerhouse teams also had manners befitting their status. For example, the managers of the two Milanese teams did not intend to maintain friendly ties with Twain, especially the Inter Milan manager, Mancini. As the person who had been eliminated by the Forest team last season, he didn't have any good thoughts when he saw Twain looking pleased as punch.

Another man who did not find Twain objectionable was the Barcelona manager, Rijkaard. Everyone still recalled the scene after last season's Champions League final. Although on the face of it, when Twain gave his silver medal to the ball boy it was seen as disrespect to the UEFA, in fact, Barcelona had been implicated as the champion of the victory over the Forest team. Twain had shown attitude to the UEFA and Barcelona at the same time.

During an interview, Rijkaard was unrestrained in his criticism of Twain. He said that he "had never seen such an ungracious manager," "Britain always claims to produce gentlemen. Don't tell me this is a gentleman's behavior," and "if my opponent had won instead, all I would do is say congratulations. I would never have done such a disgraceful thing." One could see that he was furious.

Rijkaard certainly had reason to be angry. Twain's behavior had made it seem like Barcelona was unfit to be the champion. It was an insult to Barcelona. Not only Rijkaard was upset, but the top echelon of the Barcelona football club and the ordinary fans, too—who do you think you are? How dare you make us look bad? If you lose, you lose. If you're going to be a sore loser, then don't play!

Therefore, at this draw ceremony, Barcelona manager Rijkaard and Nottingham Forest manager Tony Twain did not greet each other.

Initially, these were the highlights of this draw ceremony. Unfortunately, the two men didn't have an incident at the venue, so the media were somewhat disappointed.

Before the draw, there was another thing to watch. Due to the fact that Tony Twain had given attitude to the UEFA after the Champions League final, would the UEFA secretly retaliate against his team in the

new season? Needless to say, the UEFA would never admit that there would be retaliation, but would anyone believe what they said? They had stated that the draw was fair, impartial, and open. In that case, why would Chelsea, led by Mourinho, whom the UEFA saw as dangerous, run into Barcelona repeatedly?

And currently there was another figure seen as dangerous and unruly by the UEFA—Tony Twain and his Nottingham Forest team.

Johansson would certainly complain. Why had such a troublemaker come from England?

But other than England's soccer environment, which gave its managers a lot of power, it was really unlikely that this kind of self-centered manager would come from elsewhere.

The media speculated that the UEFA secretly had means to put Nottingham Forest in the "group of death" so that they couldn't advance past the group stage. After all, even though the Forest team had been the runner-up the season before, they were not a seeded team. They were placed among the third-tier teams so that there was a high probability of being in the "group of death."

Even the club chairman, Evan Doughty, reminded Twain to be prepared for the worst.

"Didn't Allan already smooth things over?" Twain was baffled.

"Public relations isn't that simple. You have to know it's not easy to deal with those people. It's quite difficult," snapped Evan as he looked at the UEFA officials sitting on the table. "So, no matter how well Allan did over there, you still have to prepare for the worst."

Twain stared at the group of officials who had already been dubbed "politicians" and nodded his head. "I understand."

The two men didn't speak again, both with a load on their minds as they quietly looked at those fateful hands fiddling with the small balls in the box.

When the results of the draw were announced, everyone was taken aback, including Twain and Evan.

If Mourinho's Chelsea and its nemesis, Barcelona being openly grouped together by the UEFA this time, in Group A, and causing a hubbub in the venue was the first good show today, then what happened next was even more astonishing to everyone.

Nottingham Forest had actually been sent to an incredibly weak group!

"Group C: PSV Eindhoven, Girondins de Bordeaux, Nottingham Forest, Galatasaray S.K."

Not just the media that followed the draw, but even the various team managers there hadn't expected this result.

Before every draw, each team's manager was bound to selfishly hope to avoid strong opponents and battle with the weak teams so that they could smoothly advance. There were a number of people who wanted the troublesome Nottingham Forest to be put into the group of death and then clash with a strong team. No matter which one of the last two teams would advance, both sides would suffer.

Unexpectedly... Instead of secretly punishing Nottingham Forest, the UEFA had done Tony Twain a huge favor!

The strength of this group could almost be counted as the weakest out of the eight groups. If there were no other mishaps, Nottingham Forest would not have a problem advancing.

How could this happen? The same man who gave the UEFA a headache and secretly crushed Mourinho had received an advantage instead.

Everyone turned their doubtful gazes towards the UEFA president, Johansson, at the table, but no one could get the answer they wanted from that plump, smiling face.

"Looks like Allan succeeded," Twain said to Evan next to him with a smile.

Although he felt like something was fishy, Evan responded with a smile, "That's good. We don't have to spend too much energy in the group stage."

"I have to thank him well when we get back."

"Don't cause him any more trouble, and he will thank the heavens." Evan smiled helplessly.

Twain chortled, his laughter was very loud. He didn't hide his smugness and excitement at all, regardless of how the people around him viewed him.

"The draw ceremony for the Champions League group stage is now over. I don't think anyone's going to disagree when I say that the biggest winner in this draw is, without a doubt, the Nottingham Forest manager, Tony Twain. His team drew a spot that was too good to be true, in the weak Group C. The prospect of Nottingham Forest advancing from the group stage looks bright." Most of the sports news reported this news this way, with the image of Twain laughing brilliantly at the venue.

Now that you're riding high, Mr. Twain, please be sure to grab hold of the reins...

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With an overwhelming victory at the Champions League draw, Nottingham Forest seemed to try to prove to the world that they had the ability to compete for the Champions League title this season. In the first game of the Champions League group stage, Nottingham Forest defeated the strongest team in the group, Eindhoven, by 1:0 in the away game.

They didn't play beautifully in the game, but it fit with Twain's consistent principle of "only pursue goals, do not seek a good spectacle."

Eindhoven was depressed after they lost. Looking at the game, they'd had the same number of opportunities as the Forest team, but had just failed to grasp them. And Van Nistelrooy had a total of three shots in the entire game and scored a goal.

Perhaps in connection with Twain's declaration before the season, the Nottingham Forest players didn't require Twain to motivate them in the Champions League game. They were particularly driven.

There were no problems with the players' conditions, the team's stamina, or coaching tactics. Twain was full of confidence for their prospects in the Champions League.

Having done well in the Champions League and now back at the league tournament, the esteemed Nottingham Forest would host this season's newly promoted team, Reading.

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Before his reincarnation, Twain had known little about Reading until after a famous game, when Reading's name had been engraved in his mind and impossible to forget.

Because he had been a Chelsea fan for a time, Twain still had a favorable impression of Chelsea—of course, now that he was a manager, he had already tossed his fan mentality to Timbuktu. Chelsea was now his opponent.

In that famous game, Reading had ousted two Chelsea goalkeepers, one after another. Five minutes after the game started, the main goalkeeper, Čech, suffered a fractured skull when Reading player Stephen Hunt's knee collided with him and he was struck unconscious. Even Mourinho worried about whether he would survive. Later, a minute before the end of the game, the substitute goalkeeper, Carlo Cudicini, was also knocked unconscious by the Reading full-back, Ibrahima Sonko. Having no other choice, Mourinho could only use the team captain, John Terry, who put on a goalkeeper jersey, as the stand-in goalkeeper.

This game caused a stir in the international football circles. The violence in England's soccer stadium was once again known in the world.

Twain, who was still an ordinary Chinese fan at that time, firmly remembered Reading, and their blue-striped jersey that looked similar to a prisoner's garb.

Twain didn't know the impact his reincarnation would bring to the game. In any case, after it, his team had played against Reading many times. He had even had a personal feud with the manager. It was almost impossible for tomorrow's game to be played amiably. He understood Steve Coppell. This man wouldn't let go of any chance to take revenge against him. It would be perfect for Coppell if he could beat the Forest team at their home ground.

Twain had this worry when he considered this. According to his memory, that game between Reading and Chelsea would happen this season. In that case, would the current risk be passed on to the Forest team now? After all, Reading and Chelsea didn't have a grudge. Would Čech and Cudicini escape their fate because of this?

Twain was currently unclear on these matters. There was only one thing he knew: Reading's rough playing style had not changed as a result of his reincarnation. When they played against each other in the Football League First Division, Twain had already fully understood Reading's style. Now, after they had been promoted to the Premier League, their style had intensified in order to survive in this brutal league.

Now that the league tournament had already had four games, the newly promoted Reading had given a full picture to everyone of what kind of soccer they played—they had already had a player sent off with a red card in the league's first four matches.

Twain was very concerned about this. Now that his team was no longer in the Football League First Division, they were no longer that small team who wasn't afraid of taking their gloves off, rolling up

their sleeves, and fighting to the death with any opponent without any regard for the consequences. The rash Reading team could risk it all. They were not afraid of anything, and there was nothing to lose. Nottingham Forest, which needed to compete in a number of tournaments, only had twenty-three players in the First Team. They couldn't risk it all.

With one player hurt, it would mean less fighting power.

During training a day before the game, Twain kept frowning, which made everyone think he was unhappy with the training situation.

He was actually worried about what Reading would do in this game. Had he not known about Reading's game against Chelsea ahead of time, he might not have thought about things that had not happened. Now that he knew, it wasn't the same. There was always a hint of worry in his heart.

However, he couldn't tell anyone else, even Dunn, who was closest to him. He couldn't mention that he knew about those things in advance, even in the hopes that everyone would pay attention to their own safety.

Would he make everyone give up their positive attitude for the game due to safety? Twain couldn't say that, either, because it would make the players and the coaches feel weird—why would Twain, who never gave up, suddenly be afraid of a newly promoted team?

After thinking about it for nearly a day, Twain figured it out. It was not a good habit to worry about that hadn't happened yet, but it wasn't right to not do anything and wait for something bad to happen.

Consequently, when he announced the next day's lineup, Eastwood, who was in good shape, failed to be chosen.

Eastwood had three surgeries on his leg and Twain was reluctant to let him get an operation for the fourth time. It was a form of protection for Eastwood, but would the players appreciate it?

After Eastwood learned that he wouldn't need to play the next day, he just shrugged his shoulders and looked like everything was fine.

Twain felt relieved in his heart. However, he still had to have a talk with Eastwood, so as to avoid repeating the same mistake as Anelka.

"Freddy, after training is over, you stay back for a bit. As for the others, you're dismissed!"

The teammates looked at Twain and Eastwood in puzzlement as they left the training ground. When the coaching staff were gone too, there was only Twain and Eastwood left on the field.

"Do you think it was strange that I didn't put you on the list?" Twain asked with a smile, trying to soften the mood.

"It is strange. But I think, Chief, you must have considered this arrangement." Twain was moved by Eastwood's thoughtful answer.

"Well, I did think about it... You know Reading is a team that plays rough and I don't want you to take that risk."

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

Eastwood looked at Twain and was quiet for a moment before he said, “If other people knew about this, they would think I’ve run away, wouldn’t they?”

Twain swore in his heart. He forgot that Eastwood was a man with a strong self-esteem.

“It’s not that simple, Freddy.” Twain hurriedly explained, “No one will think you’re a deserter. It’s also a normal tactic to protect important players before an important game.”

“An important game?”

“The sixth round of the league tournament. We’ll be challenging Arsenal in the away game,” said Twain.

This was indeed a compelling reason, and Eastwood was silent for a moment before he nodded. “I understand, Chief.”

Twain’s nervous expression finally relaxed. He laughed and patted Eastwood on the shoulder. “Do you still remember what I said to you? I’m going to be a legendary manager, and you’re going to be a legendary striker. Our legend has just begun. I don’t want you to take any risks in a game like this. An opponent like Reading isn’t worthy for our strongest squad to deal with. Haha!”

Eastwood laughed too, for he was certainly aware of an opponent like Reading, who he had played against in the Football League First Division many times. They hadn’t won against Nottingham Forest once. No matter how arrogantly Mr. Coppell acted, Reading would eventually be the loser.

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Appendix:

The groups for the 2006-07 Champions League season:

Group A: Barcelona, Chelsea, Werder Bremen, PFC Levski Sofia

Group B: Bayern Munich, Inter Milan, Sporting Lisbon, FC Spartak Moscow

Group C: PSV Eindhoven, Girondins de Bordeaux, Nottingham Forest, Galatasaray S.K.

Group D: A.S. Roma, Valencia CF, FC Shakhtar Donetsk, Olympiacos F.C.

Group E: Real Madrid, Olympique Lyonnais, Fotbal Club Steaua București, FC Dynamo Kyiv

Group F: Manchester United, Celtic F.C., Sport Lisboa e Benfica, F.C. Copenhagen

Group G: Arsenal, FC Porto, CSKA Moscow, Hamburger SV

Group H: AC Milan, Lille Olympique Sporting Club, AEK Athens F.C., R.S.C. Anderlecht