

Champions 481

Chapter 481: A Rowdy Style of Play

Since the promotion of his team into the English Premier League, Mr. Steve Coppell had been looking forward to this day.

After two years, he could finally go up against Tang En again.

In the summer of 2004, Tang En's Nottingham Forest had slashed a bloody path out of the cruel First Division (now EFL Championship) and returned to the English Premier League they had been away from for the longest time. From that moment, they stepped onto a peaceful and smooth path forward; Tony Twain and Nottingham Forest became famous across the world.

What was Coppell doing then? He was enduring tough times as he reformed his football team with the goal of charging into the Premier League. Two seasons passed by. Coppell had reformed Reading F.C. into a tougher team with a rowdy and unyielding style of football. Such a team was more suitable to battle within the EFL Championship. The team united to strive towards their goal. Finally, their dreams came true in the summer of 2006. Reading F.C. successfully battled their way into the English Premier League!

The players of Reading F.C. were all big and tall, and Coppell exploited such an advantage of theirs to its greatest. His team's attitude in facing every match was to play as if they were fighting a war. Perhaps Coppell would not admit it, but his transformation was undeniably influenced by Tony Twain.

While Tang En feared the overly rowdy play of today's Reading FC, had he ever considered that this might have been his own creation? Based on his actions, the influence he brought to this world after his transfer was like the accumulation of fine strands of threads that eventually end up entangled with each other, becoming more and more firmly entrenched.

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Dunn noticed that Tang En had been frowning since he boarded the coach at the hotel.

"Is there something wrong?" he asked.

Tang En looked at his partner. He was indeed troubled over something, but it was something he could not tell anyone about. "I'm thinking about the match with Arsenal." Tang En gave a forced smile.

"Maybe you should think about your current opponents? Reading F.C. is not easy to deal with."

His words seemingly touched on the matter troubling Tang En, and he momentarily fell quiet.

"Aren't you taking your opponents a bit too lightly, Tony?"

The starting lineup for the team was not yet made public, but the managers themselves already knew. In this match, Tang En rotated the players in several positions. The main goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, played as a reserve, while Paul Gerrard was a starter. Ribéry was a reserve with Petrov taking his spot.

Bendtner took over for Ruud van Nistelrooy. Even Anelka who had few chances to be fielded was being put in as a starter player.

“Rotating players is something very normal to Forest Team now.” Tang En shrugged.

“Then why did you let Paul be a starter when you don’t ever rotate the goalie?”

He’s got sharp eyes. Tang En sighed as he thought this in his head. Outwardly, he said, “Don’t you all always complain about the lack of opportunities to field the reserve goalkeeper? That his conditions were hard to maintain, and that his standards could not be raised? The chance is here now.”

His reply was perfect. Dunn could not find any fault with it, but he still felt a little strange in his heart. He kept silent.

“Don’t worry, Dunn,” Tang En comforted. “I have gone up against Coppell many times in the First Division. I understand him and his football team. This match...”

The image of Čech and Cudicini in a coma abruptly flashed through Tang En’s mind. His words paused for a beat.

“...won’t be a problem.”

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“I am very delighted we are able to return to this stadium again to face with this opponent. During the EPL Championships, we have fought each other several times, but I have never once won. Today, the situation is different. This is our chance.”

Before his players, Coppell did not try to hide his special interest in their opponents, Nottingham Forest. As a result, everyone in his team knew how much their main manager anticipated the coming of the match.

“Nottingham is now a strong team. Before the season started, that guy Tang En even said that their aim this season was to become the champions of the Champions League. They have lofty ambitions and have become disdainful of mucking around in the mud with teams like us. So, in this match, we want them to relive old dreams! Fulham showed a very good example, but I don’t think they did it thoroughly enough. In this match, we’re sticking to our usual style!”

He did not elaborate any further, but everyone knew what he meant. In Reading FC’s playstyle, they did not care about technical statistics, such as fouling. So long as they could mess with their opponents, it was worth paying any price. Victory was the only law in this world.

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At the same time, Tang En was in the locker room. Again and again, he reminded his team to be wary of rough fouling by their opponents and told them to avoid taking risks if it was not absolutely necessary to fight for the ball.

His words prompted a round of laughter from the locker room.

“Head, did you hit your head?” Ribéry asked with a laugh.

“Ah?” Tang En did not understand.

“Usually you scold us, calling us ‘girls this, girls that.’ Why do I feel that you’re much more of a ‘girl’ today?”

Everyone laughed as Ribéry spoke.

If it had been a usual day, Tang En would have smiled at the joke and let it pass. Today, however, Tang En found it impossible to smile at it. He stared at Ribéry for a long time until everyone stopped laughing. But he did not say anything. He only dropped his head to continue analyzing Reading FC’s strategy for them.

The relaxed atmosphere in the changing room suddenly became awkward.

Dunn, sitting by the side, looked quietly at Tang En. By the end, Tang En stopped reminding everyone to be careful of the opponent’s rough fouling, sneaky actions, or anything of the sort. He seemed to have taken Ribéry’s opinion into consideration.

With the time of the match nearing, Tang En ended the pre-match preparations. Then, without making any speech to drum up their morale, he only waved his hand and let everyone out.

The substitute goalkeeper, Paul Gerrard, seemed extremely excited to be a starter for the match. He made sure to slap the top of the doorframe on his way out.

Tang En watched him from behind and did not know how to feel. He hoped that everything he was worried about was just a false alarm, that everything was only because of his own wild imagination.

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“Nottingham Forest and Reading FC, Tony Twain and Steve Coppell. They’re old acquaintances.” The commentator introduced the situation of both parties to the audience. “This match will have many highlights, surely!”

Tang En sat in the manager’s seat, waiting silently for the match to begin. It was very rare for him to be so quiet.

The match had only been going for five minutes when Tang En sprang up from his seat. He was finally revived. Nottingham Forest had scored.

Just like the media’s analysis before the match, Tang En’s decision of a major rotation in this match was not entirely because he was taking his opponents lightly. Rather, it was that Nottingham Forest and Reading FC’s abilities were that far apart. Before going up against their old opponents, Arsenal, arranging for a rotation was the best method to prevent players from being overly fatigued or getting injured.

“Nicolas Anelka!” The live broadcast loudly announced the scorer of the goal. To Forest’s fans on the home field, it had been quite a while since they heard his name. Since the new season began, Anelka was iced on the bench. He could not even get to play in a game, let alone score a goal. Unexpectedly, his first time as a starter, he had already gotten a goal for the team within the first five minutes.

Tang En jumped up and clapped before sitting down again. He was no longer as excited as before. At this point, however, it was not the rowdy Reading FC he was worried about. He did not want Anelka to get too smug.

“Anelka.” Assistant manager David Kerslake shook his head by the side, sighing. “What a pity.”

Tang En harrumphed, and Kerslake fell silent. He cast his gaze back onto the field. Anelka was still celebrating the goal to his heart’s content. He seemed a little over-excited. It looked like he had vented some of his frustrations by scoring a goal in front of Tang En.

The situation is no longer the same, Anelka. No matter how well you perform in front of me now, don’t dream of getting any more chances.

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Coppell’s face instantly changed when Forest Team scored a goal. He had been looking forward greatly to this match, but he had been given a smack to the head only five minutes into the match.

Before the match, he had told them to mark any of their opponents down. They could foul whenever they need to and did not have to be polite. But they had just lost that ball. After Anelka used his speed to forcibly break through, no one on their side fouled! They only watched with wide eyes as he barged into the penalty zone and scored a goal!

The bunch of b*stards!

He stood up from his seat.

“Sonko!” He yelled the name of the team’s center back. In truth, his words were shouted at every player in Reading FC. “What are you guys doing? Why did you let the opponent get a point so easily? Have you already forgotten what I’ve said before the match? Do you all still want to win?!”

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After Coppell’s yelling, it was as if Reading FC woke up from a dream. Nottingham Forest’s players quickly found it more difficult to gain possession of the ball. Whenever their feet was close to kicking the football, their opponents would rush up ferociously, making use of both their hands and feet to intercept the ball. What made Forest players even more unhappy was that the main referee on duty, Riley, seemed to turn a blind eye to the methods of Reading FC. Even those that involved pushing Forest’s players down from the back and then successfully stealing the ball were all quietly allowed by the main referee.

This especially angered Forest’s members. Jeers aimed at referee Riley also rang out from the spectators’ stand.

Tang En sat in the manager’s seat. The match could still be considered rather normal. After all, kicking at legs was completely different from kicking at heads.

However, his face clearly bore a cold smile specifically directed to the main referee on duty, Riley.

“The UEFA isn’t troubling us, but our own people are setting us up?” He mumbled to himself.

Following this, the match officially entered a “fighting stage.” With the loss of the ball, Reading FC’s temper spiked. Meanwhile, Nottingham Forest was also enraged by their rough fouls, and the actions of both parties became bigger and bigger.

They pushed back and forth at each other. In the current match, it all seemed to be considered normal bodily contact.

Riley’s dismissal of the fouls caused Reading FC’s actions to get worse. Suddenly, the Forest team remembered that their Head had warned them to be wary of the opponent’s rough fouling. Thinking a little further ahead, their next League match was the highlight match with Arsenal. No one was willing to lose an opportunity to appear in such an important match. They began to play with more restraint.

Taking advantage of the momentum, Reading FC attacked into the middle of Forest’s backfield, hoping to equalize the scores before the end of the first half.

In Reading FC’s midfield, member of England’s national Under-21 football team, Steve Sidwell decided to take the middle path after receiving a pass from his teammate. After all, this was the route that could threaten the opponent’s goal the most. It was also the most straightforward and effective one.

If Sidwell’s memory had been good, he would not have chosen a forceful breakthrough from the middle.

Sidwell intended to barge his way through the middle but had forgotten about one person. His forgetfulness annoyed that person quite a bit.

Steve Sidwell was certain that the route breaking through the middle had no Forest players on it. However, just as he was about to shoot the ball, a streak of red shadow suddenly flashed before him, swiftly turning and cutting in.

When the red shadow turned their back on him, he finally got a clear sight of it—13, WOOD.

Sidwell who had just accelerated could not pull on the brakes quickly enough, slamming straight into Wood. Wood did not even shake. In this manner, he was separated from the football.

In that instance, Sidwell abruptly recovered his memories. He remembered that there was a lad who had cost him dearly in the match against Forest Team two years ago. But at that time, the boy was still wearing number 33.

Wood. George Wood. Currently England’s hottest defensive midfielder. How could I have forgotten about him?

It was too late for Sidwell’s regret. The ball was already lost.

“George Wood! A beautiful box-out! Forcibly breaking through the middle when facing George Wood? Sidwell’s brain must be muddled...”

The spectators’ stands finally stopped ringing with jeers against the referee. The home team fans dedicated all their enthusiastic applause to their captain.

In a crucial moment, their captain was always the most trustworthy.

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Wood depended on his own performance to resolve a single moment of danger for Forest Team. But he was not the whole team. Forest Team had not gotten out of the difficult situation they had fallen into.

With Forest's members having greater considerations, Reading F.C. bullied Forest Team, their plays turning rowdier and rowdier even as they became more open with it.

Tang En was not wrong in his worries, and Coppell was also right in his assumptions.

The Nottingham Forest of today no longer dared to go all-out against the stylistically rowdy Reading FC. They needed to consider many more things: their next League round against Arsenal, the Champions League Group Stage matches, the long journey through the entire season, their aim of becoming champions, etc. All these were reasons that made them play in a restrained manner.

With the people in front playing so restrictedly, goalie Paul Gerrard became extraordinarily busy. He was receiving shots high and blocking low, all in the effort of preventing the opponents from breaking through his gates. Of course, he did not dream that he would be able to snatch the main goalkeeping position from Edwin van der Sar. He did not know why the Head suddenly decided to rotate the goalkeeping position for this match, but he was clear about one thing – since the Head had let him on the field, he had to do his best within the 90 minutes.

“Reading FC's direct pass has... gone wide! But Hunt is chasing it!”

Korean midfielder, Kim Do-heon, sent out a surprising pass down the middle, tearing apart Forest Team's defensive line. Originally, the fullbacks of Forest Team were not bothered with it. Just as the commentator had mentioned, the pass went much too wide.

But at the moment they relaxed, they noticed that Reading FC's forward, Hunt, had not given up and was chasing the ball!

Upon looking back, Piqué got momentarily nervous when he saw Hunt's shadow hurtling forward at high speed. However, he noticed Paul Gerrard already running forward and getting ready to drop to the ground to receive the ball. His heart calmed again.

Although Hunt was still chasing after it, he would surely be unable to get it.

Paul Gerrard slid on the ground towards the ball, grasping both hands around it tightly. Reading's attack ended.

Hunt was still sprinting forward. At such moments, wouldn't forwards, in general, jump up to avoid the incoming goal-keeper? Stephen Hunt did not. He directly rushed up, his knee smashing right into Paul Gerrard's head...

Everyone – regardless of whether it was the audience before the television or the live audience – saw it very clearly. Hugging the ball, Paul Gerrard's head suddenly whipped back, his body flipping over. He went from crouching on the ground to being on his back, staring at the sky. He was still tightly hugging the football, but the situation seemed abnormal.

Hunt did not notice all this. After running past Paul Gerrard's head, he ran out of the end line to notice the ball still in the goalkeeper's hand. He stopped, opened his hands and smiled nonchalantly at the camera.

Just as he finished smiling and turned around, a gigantic fist suddenly appeared before his eyes. Following that, he had no time to react before feeling like he had been slammed into by a heavy-duty truck driven at high speed. He flew backwards and fell onto the advertisement board near the end line.

This time, the whistle of the main referee, Riley, finally sounded.

Chapter 482: Stadium Violence

“Paul Gerrard got the ball, but Hunt didn’t stop kicking....Oh my God!”

The substitute goalkeeper, Gerrard was supposed to hold the football in his arms and press it under his body, but he was suddenly knocked over by Hunt.

Hunt didn’t think anything of it; it was physical contact. He even smiled for the cameras. But just as he turned around, he saw a huge fist appeared in front of him, and then he was sent flying backwards.

After George Wood punched the man, he lay still, his right leg bent backwards due to the strength Wood had used in the single punch. It was as if this was the evidence, clearly demonstrating to the referee that he had beaten Stephen Hunt in that spark of an altercation.

Wood’s movements were just too fast. From the moment Kim Do-heon passed the football, he gave chase at a high speed, but he was still one step behind and did not manage to put a barrier between the goalkeeper, Gerrard and Hunt.

Because he was closest, he saw Hunt’s dirty trick clearly. He did not care if Hunt’s action was intentional or not, all he knew was that it was an injurious action, especially since it was directed at the head—the most important part of a human body. Even boxing required head protection. A moment of carelessness could be fatal.

There was no time to intercept Hunt, but there was still time to punch him. Therefore, Stephen Hunt, who plotted against Paul Gerrard, was knocked out of the field by George Wood’s single powerful punch.

Hunt’s dirty trick against Gerrard was covert, but George Wood’s punch was a public act of stadium violence.

The referee, Riley’s whistle finally rang. With Wood in the middle, the players from both sides suddenly swarmed around, looking like they were ready for a fight. As the players jostled and pushed each other on the field, Twain grabbed the collar of the fourth official at the sideline and yelled, “Stop the game and call for an ambulance! Did you not see someone is unconscious?”

There were also people shouting on the field, “Stop fighting. Help him!!”

“Didn’t you hear that? Save him!”

“Damn it, ref, blow the whistle and calm them all down!”

The players on both sides were forcibly separated. They all calmed down when they saw Gerrard unconscious on the ground. The football had rolled past the end line. Was it a corner kick or a goal ball? No one cared about that anymore.

The Nottingham Forest team doctors had rushed up to administer emergency rescue while the Riley was busy controlling the agitated players on both sides.

“His condition is very bad. He needs to be sent directly to the hospital.” Fleming shook his head, speaking to the referee who had approached.

The referee waved for the ambulance, which was parked at the exit, to drive over.

As the paramedics carried Gerrard into the ambulance, Riley whistled for Wood to follow him. Wood knew very well what was going to happen. He would not obediently follow him. He looked at Gerrard, who was strapped to a stretcher, took off the captain’s armband and threw it to Piqué, and turned to walk straight into the player’s tunnel by the sidelines.

Behind him, Riley had already raised his hand high with the red card in his hand. Riley did not punish the perpetrator, Stephen Hunt. He did not even give him a verbal warning.

Hunt had fallen on the ground and was also being treated by the team doctor. But he only had a swollen face at the most, which could not be compared to Gerrard’s injury. The Reading team’s medical unit dragged out treatment for five minutes, during which the booing did not stop.

Without Gerrard, Edwin van der Sar had to be put on the field, and since George Wood was sent off with a red card, Twain could only replace one other player. This time he chose to bring off the striker, Bendtner.

Bendtner gnashed his teeth as he walked off the field. He was not upset that he was being brought off. He was angry because his teammate was ambushed, and the perpetrator had gotten away with it.

“Be careful!” Twain warned him as van der Sar walked onto the field.

Edwin van der Sar nodded with a solemn expression.

This time, everyone was surprised by Twain’s deep anxiety. After Edwin van der Sar ran onto the field, the booing stopped and was replaced by the sounds of applause. It would indeed take some courage to play at this time after Gerrard had just been knocked unconscious and sent to the hospital.

As the Nottingham Forest goalkeeper had just come on the field, Hunt stood on the sidelines and raised his hand to request to come back on the field.

As if there was a conductor, the applause for Edwin van der Sar immediately turned into an earth-shattering boo, so loud that it took one’s breath away.

Twain stood in front of the technical area with his eyes fixed intently on Hunt, his chest heaving.

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“Riley approved Hunt’s request to play again, which is a little unbelievable. That petty maneuver was absolutely immoral. Kicking a limb and kicking the head are two completely different things. Seeing Hunt

play again, the Forest players' expressions changed. I think Riley's going to have his hands full for this game. Moreover, Paul Gerrard's injury is quite worrying. Hopefully he's going to be fine."

The commentator was right. Riley found it difficult to keep control of the game. Originally, the injury stoppage time in the first half was five minutes. But they could only play two minutes, and he hurriedly blew the whistle to end the first half.

The whistle sounded and the players on the field did not make any drastic moves. Instead, Tony Twain rushed to the visiting coach's technical area and tore into Steve Coppell as he roared, "This is how you f**king play football, Coppell!"

Coppell ignored Twain and walked briskly toward the tunnel. His assistant manager, Dillon, came up to confront Twain. "Please mind your language, Mr. Twain!"

Twain pushed him away. "Get lost, you're not qualified to talk to me!"

Twain bellowed at Coppell's back, which the television journalists at the scene could hear, "Why are you keeping quiet, Coppell! Don't think that silence can clear you of this. Show the guts that you let your players use on us! Where are the d*ck and balls between your legs?!" Coppell still did not answer as he increased his pace. "If anything happens to my player! Stephen Hunt—that bastard will be a murderer, and you son of a bitch will be the mastermind! We'll see you in court!"

"Mr. Tony Twain, watch your words..." The fourth official warned Twain at the back.

Twain jerked his head around and stared at him. He was so terrified that he swallowed back the words and did not finish his sentence.

"We'll settle our score separately, Mr. Referee." Twain threw out this remark before he marched into the tunnel.

The Reading assistant manager, Dillon, who was just pushed aside by, also wanted to come up and demand an answer from Twain, but he was turned back by the stadium security guard.

"I—I can treat this as a threat to the referee!" The fourth official announced loudly.

"Do whatever you want, Mr. Referee." replied the assistant manager, Kerslake as he walked past him. He was followed by the Nottingham Forest coaches who all looked serious as they walked back.

Only Dunn stayed on to explain to the angry fourth official, "Please forgive them for their reactions, Mr. Referee. Our player was taken to the hospital, and we do not know how serious his injury is..."

The fourth official looked at those people who were rude to him, and then glanced at this Chinese man in front of him. He turned and walked away with a grim expression.

Dunn scratched his head somewhat helplessly and turned to run back into the tunnel to catch up with the rest of the team.

The media were excited. The scene that happened during the halftime interval was so thrilling that tomorrow's news would be exciting! The fierce conflict during the game and the halftime interval was a three-way melee!

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Back in the locker room, Twain received a call from Fleming, the team doctor who went with Gerrard to the hospital.

“Good news, Tony. The initial examination shows that Paul’s life is not in danger.”

Twain breathed a sigh of relief. “Did he fracture his skull?”

“So far, they haven’t found anything. The bad news is that it’s likely he has to rest for more than six months. They have to consider the after-effects of a concussion. We do not know if he will be able to return to the field to continue as a goalkeeper.”

Twain fell into silence again.

The entire locker room was quiet. Everyone was listening to Twain’s phone conversation. Although they could not hear Fleming on the other end of the line, they could guess some things from Twain’s expression.

After he was quiet for a moment, Twain gave a grunt and hung up the phone. He then looked at a room full of expectant looks.

“Paul’s life is not in danger,” he began to say.

The players gave an audible sigh of relief. The dreary and suffocating atmosphere just now had just been eased.

Twain did not say the bad news because he was afraid to affect the mood of the players.

“George.” He looked towards the captain’s seat and said, “You come with me.” With that, he patted the assistant manager, Kerslake on the shoulder and indicated to him to take charge of going over the tactics.

Wood stood up and followed Twain out of the door.

“All right, guys, calm yourselves. Let’s go over the second half again.”

Kerslake’s voice faded as the door was closed.

There was no one left in the passageway. There was no one to disturb Twain and Wood, except for a few stadium staff hurriedly walked by.

“George, how many times have you been sent off because you acted impulsively?” Twain stared at Wood and asked.

Wood bowed his head and kept quiet.

This was his typical impassive attitude. Twain frowned and slightly raised his volume, “You’re the captain. Can you cool down a little bit? After you’re sent off, our playing becomes passive! There are forty-five minutes left in the game. Who knows what else will happen? What more, do you know the cost of your one punch?!”

An important measure by the English Football Association for the Premier League this season was “severe punishment for any stadium violence.” Just before this game, the Manchester City fullback, Ben Thatcher, bashed the Portsmouth midfielder, Pedro Mendes with his elbow in the game, causing Mendes to faint and was suspended by the English Football Association for an additional eight games.

The Football Association would severely punish this type of stadium violence and foul this season. Manchester United’s Paul Scholes and Wayne Rooney were suspended for three rounds in the league tournament because they each received a red card in the pre-season friendlies.

The former incidents were just fouls, but George Wood’s deliberate punch was bound to be viewed by the Football Association as a brazen provocation of their authority. There was almost no need to guess what kind of punishment would await Wood. No wonder Twain was furious.

Wood was silent for a moment and could hear the sound of Twain’s heavy breathing across from him getting louder, and he knew that his boss was really angry. Then he opened his mouth and said, “When I met Roy Keane, he told me that he used to beat people up and then think about whether or not he should have taken the shot. Later, he learned to think about whether or not he should hit someone before he punched them.”

Twain listened in bafflement, “what does this have anything to do with what we’re talking about?”

“This time, I thought about it before I hit him,” Wood said as he raised his head.

Twain grabbed his head with both hands. He was stumped.

Roy, you b*stard, of all the things to teach George, you taught him this!

“You stupid b*stard, if the referee was going to punish the foul player, your punch just landed you in it!”

“Was that number 10 punished?” Wood asked in return.

Twain froze for a moment, and then answered indignantly, “No!” He certainly knew what Wood meant. “You are not a vigilante, George. You’re the captain of the team. You have to prioritize the entire team’s interests at all times.”

“I know,” George replied.

“You know, and yet you still...” It was really infuriating for Twain to try to have a conversation with him.

“If I didn’t fight, they’d have done the same.” Wood pointed to the door of the locker room.

Twain could not refute this. He knew his team the best. Wood said one thing right. A lot of players in this Forest team had been playing together for several years and developed a deep emotional bond. They had long regarded each other as their own people. When one of their own people was being bullied, who could stand by and do nothing?

This fight could not have been avoided by any means.

There was a brief silence between the two men.

“All right, George. If you seriously thought about it before you hit that bastard hard, I’m sure you know exactly what the consequences of this punch are.”

Wood nodded.

“So, the next time a similar situation occurs, just hit harder!”

Wood looked up at Twain with somewhat a strange look.

“Since you are going to be sent off with a red card and an additional suspension and if the other side does not follow suit and go to the hospital, it just makes your exit a little meaningless. To put it bluntly, that was you venting your personal spite.” Twain shrugged his shoulders and said, “Your punch has to have a bigger effect. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

Wood contemplated, and then nodded.

“Go on and head back.” Twain patted him on the shoulder and opened the locker room door for him.

When Twain and Wood returned to the locker room, Kerlake had already finished all his instructions and waited for Twain to sum up his remarks.

“All of you know our current situation, I’m not going to talk nonsense. We must win this game! We don’t care what means and methods you use. In short, we must stop that bunch of bastards! I don’t care about fouls! Red card, yellow card? Let that d*ck-less referee pull one out of his pants and try it! He’s got no d*ck, where will he f**king get those cards?”

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The outcome of the game was Nottingham Forest thrashed Reading by 1:0.

Despite the win, it was a tragic victory for Twain.

Both teams played with resentment in the second half. Pepe suffered a knee injury in a fierce scramble with the opposing defender and had to be carried off. The team doctor’s initial diagnosis about his condition was not encouraging. Pepe was replaced by Kompany as a result. Sonko was kicked out of the field by Riley, the referee on duty with a red card for that foul—even though it was just an ordinary fierce scramble, and it could not be compared to Hunt’s malicious attack in the first half.

As a result, the commentator ridiculed Riley for trying to seek a balance in the game commentary, and unfortunately that his act of trying to curry favor with the home team attracted even more boos.

Hunt, who got rid of Paul Gerrard, was replaced by Coppell with the South Korean striker, Seol Ki-hyeon, not long after the start of the second half. Hunt had become the “hunting target” of the Forest team on the field. As long as he had the ball, there would be Forest players going up there to “violently collide.” Most of the time, Riley went along with the Forest team’s behavior. Even so, the Forest team still received three yellow cards just on Hunt.

This provoked the anger of the Reading team. The more the two teams played, the more physical they got. Riley completely lost control of the situation. Towards the end of the game, he started issuing cards frequently.

Because he had already accumulated two yellow cards, Ashley Young was sent off with a red card. Seol Ki-hyeon, who only came on in the second half, was also sent off with a red card because he struck Kompany with his elbow during a scramble for a header.

When the game entered the injury stoppage time, the agitated coaching staff from both teams also clashed on the sidelines. Kerslake angrily went up and questioned the Reading team's rough style as not playing football at all but waging a war. The Reading assistant manager, Dillon, who was already disgruntled with the Forest team, naturally stepped out to fight. Had it not been for both sides' colleagues desperately holding them back, the two men might have fought directly under the nose of the fourth official.

Twain did not step in to stop his own assistant. He coolly observed this scene on the sidelines with some vengeance. He did not think about how he was going to play against Arsenal in the next round. He just wanted to even the score in this game right in front of him.

The referee will not punish, will he? Then my men will do it!

In the double chaos on the sidelines and on the field, the referee, Riley, who had already lost all control of the situation and the players' reactions on both sides, hurriedly blew the whistle to end the game. He completely ignored the seven minutes of make-up time on the signboard that the fourth official had just raised up...

His whistle sounded, drowned out by the deafening boos over the City Ground stadium.

What a farce!

Chapter 483: Good News, Bad News

Was the farce considered over when Riley blew the ending whistle of the match?

No, far from it.

The match had ended, but Riley still ran to the sidelines and gave the two assistant managers who clashed—Kerslake and Dillon—a red card each. Although fouling people after the match was no longer something new, it was uncommon.

Upon seeing such a scene, even the match commentator was at a loss for words. "Riley must be mad."

"Six red cards! 20 yellow cards! A crazy, card-giving machine!"

After that, the four referees on duty had to leave the field under tight protection of security. Otherwise, it was hard to say if they would be ripped to shreds by the enraged Forest fans.

The reporters waited at the mixed zone for the interviews but quickly discovered that no one would stop to say a few words about the match. Helpless, they could only move to the press conference instead.

Unexpectedly, Tang En and Coppell still appeared. Both were present despite having experienced such a terrible situation. However, the expressions of the two were filled with hostility. Neither of them made a move to shake their hands in a show of friendliness.

Without waiting for the press officer to announce the commencement of the press conference, Tang En snatched the microphone and said, "I feel extremely regretful about this match despite having won the game. I don't wish to say whose fault this is, because everyone has already seen it. Despite the match

devolving into this, I believe there is not a single thing my players can be faulted for. They have already done enough. I am proud of their performance.”

Hearing this, Coppell could not help but interrupt, “Proud of that punch from George Wood?”

Tang En continued looking at the reporters without turning to the side. He lashed out, “Obviously, it isn’t pride for Hunt’s knees! I regret that George Wood didn’t pummel that b*stard into a concussion! Why, Mr. Coppell, do you feel proud of Hunt?”

“Watch your words, Tony Twain!” Coppell and Tang En could never see eye-to-eye to begin with. It was like watching two dogs fight each other whenever they met. “It was only an accident! It’s very normal to have accidents like that on the field!”

“Accident, my f*cking *ss! Tang En abruptly stood and burst out, “That’s malicious harm! It’s on purpose! Otherwise, why didn’t that b*stard jump? Instead, he lowered his own gravity and placed his knees right at the height of Paul Gerrard’s head? Have you ever f*cking seen people use their knees to snatch balls?”

This was turning out like some kind of verbal battle on the streets. The group of reporters did not bother asking questions. They watched the fight quietly and joyfully.

“Save your lambasting at Wood. I’d tell you, Steve Coppell. If it wasn’t for Hunt’s malicious collision, George would have never punched that b*stard. It’s that simple. Since the main referee, Mr. Riley, was blind, my players are only representing him in carrying out the punishments. That fool of a referee didn’t even give any verbal warning for this sort of malicious and absolutely inhumane foul? Were his referee qualifications bought?!” Tang En’s mouth was like a Gatling gun. He questioned, reproached, and blasted them with swear words, not giving Coppell any opportunity to retaliate. “The match becoming like this—20 yellow cards and six red cards! This is the player’s fault? It’s that f*cking useless referee’s fault! FA ought to terminate that r*tard for life! Not daring to give out cards when faced with the opponent’s rowdy fouling, being overly cautious like a sissy without b*lls. And then, waiting until discovering that the situation wasn’t right before madly giving out cards to destabilize the situation even more—is that what a main referee is supposed to do? Even a secondary school sports teacher would do better than him! I finally know why English referees in the German World Cup make so many low-level mistakes!”

After scolding his opponents, Tang En aimed his nozzle at the English FA as well as the main referee. This time, he was going to become a public enemy.

It was not hard to tell how enraged Tang En was in that moment.

“My player is now lying in the hospital, hanging between life and death!” Tang En pointed to the sky. “But the culprit remains free, at large! The one who put the guilty party up to it is still at my side, being unreasonable and refusing to take responsibility for it. The referee on duty is useless and afraid, knowing nothing other than pulling out cards from his *ss without any pause. How about you give me a reason why I shouldn’t be angry!?” he said to the reporters.

Pierce Brosnan originally wanted to wake Tang En up from his violent state of anger, intending to ask questions that could change the topic, such as about next round’s League match. But, realizing that the question might only be adding fuel to the fire, the hand he raised midway was withdrawn again.

After finishing his venting, Tang En no longer wanted to be in the same place as Coppell. Without saying a goodbye, he turned and left.

Seeing Tang En turn to leave the stage, Coppell also left from the other direction with an unhappy face. No matter how the reporters called after him, he paid them no heed.

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After departing from the stadium, Tang En did not follow the team back to the hotel they were staying at. Instead, he directly headed to the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University.

He met Professor Constantine at the doors of the building. The professor was exiting the building in a hurry and did not see Tang En.

“Professor!” Tang En shouted.

“Tony?” Constantine was unsurprised to see Tang En here. “You’re here.”

“Yes. How’s the situation?”

“In a coma.”

“Does he need surgery?” Tang En asked.

“No.” Constantine shook his head. “This is good news.”

Tang En sighed in relief, and then thought about the bad news. “Would there be any adverse effects from this?”

“It’s hard to tell now.” Constantine took off his glasses. “We will only know after he wakes up. I can’t give you a guarantee about if he can return to the field. Even normal day-to-day living may need some time for further testing.”

Tang En thought about Čech. His head sustained a depressed fracture from the hit, but he still made through it in the end. Not only did he survive, he even went back to being Chelsea’s main goalkeeper.

“He’ll be alright,” Tang En said, nodding.

Constantine felt odd about how Tang En was suddenly so confident again.

“It’s my instincts.” Tang En smiled as he pointed to his head. “I believe he’ll be alright.”

Constantine interpreted it as being a way for Tang En to comfort himself, so he just smiled along.

“You’ve won the match, right?” To prevent the atmosphere from being awkward, Constantine tried changing topics. He did not expect the topic to make it worse.

“We won.” Tang En’s face darkened.

“Uh. I didn’t watch the match. I was directly called in to handle this. What happened?”

“Watch the news later, Prof. There’s a good show to watch.” He patted Constantine’s shoulder. “I’m heading off. See you. Oh, that’s right. If Paul awakens, call and let me know.”

Constantine nodded doubtfully. He was wondering about the other things that could have occurred during the match.

The answer was swiftly revealed. England's news media was very advanced. Stories were available for purchase a mere half hour after the end of a match, usually brief introductions to the results and situation of the match. By night time, a variety of detailed articles would be available.

Constantine saw the news from the LCD television in front of the elevators in the hospital's hall. Tony Twain's verbal lashing during the news conference, filled with much swearing, appeared before him, taking him aback. He very rarely saw such an enraged Tang En.

After that, the news cut to a scene from the match, as well as the clash between both parties after it ended. Constantine watched with wide eyes, his mouth agape. Was BBC certain that this was the English Premier League and not the Middle-East war?

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Two hours later, the scene of Tang En's verbal lashing was transmitted to the millions of families in England. Everyone knew what had happened during and after the match.

By the next day, the news had already traveled across the world. The international football scene was shocked by such a rare occurrence of violence on the field.

Nottingham Forest Club took speedy action this time around. On the night of the match, they submitted a report against Reading FC's lack of sportsmanship as well as the atrocious enforcement carried out by main referee on duty, Riley, to the English Football Association. This was the club's response made under Tang En's request. They wanted to take preemptive measures.

The next afternoon, the FA received another complaint that came from Reading FC. In the afternoon, FA's personnel made an appointment to meet with main referee, Riley, hoping for him to give an explanation regarding his choice of enforcement during the match.

The sights of the media were entirely aimed towards London's SOHO Square, where the English FA was located.

Hunt's hurtful act was too vile. Even though George Wood purposely punched someone, sympathy points would be cast towards Nottingham Forest if the cause and reaction of it were taken into consideration. Especially after the publication of the follow-up report, wherein Paul Gerrard was revealed to still be in a coma, the people were moved. The public opinion began tilting against Reading FC.

Everyone in the English football scene knew that Reading FC's football style in the current season was rowdy. So, when Tang En said that the responsibility fell on Reading FC, no one else showed any objection to it.

Before the FA finalized any result of the discussion of the matter, they first announced a small-scale warning in an attempt to stabilize the sentiments on both sides:

"We have already warned the players, Sonko, Ashley Young, and Seol Ki-hyeon, who were penalized during the match. In addition, we will be closely watching their performance in future matches."

No one really cared about the fates of the small fish. They cared about the penalizations of Hunt, George Wood, as well as the two assistant managers who clashed verbally and physically after the match.

While the Football Association progressed with their analysis, the main managers of both parties did not idle. They continued the verbal battle over the media. By doing this, Tang En hoped to take the opportunity to pressure the FA. He wanted to see if the FA would still take Riley's side. On the other hand, Coppell simply could not swallow the resentment of his personal grudge against Tang En, his team having lost the match, and three of his players getting penalized.

During this period, it was practically a festive season for the English media. Every day, they had some news to stir up. In fact, there were even English publishers that were planning to organize the content of what was said, by both parties throughout the issue, into a book.

Three days later, the English FA finally announced the finalized decision in dealing with the matter:

1. Main referee on duty, Riley, was to be banned from 10 matches due to a loss of control and misguidance of the match.
2. Reading FC's player, Stephen Hunt, was barred from 10 matches and fined 35,000 pounds due to malicious fouling and causing loss of consciousness in the other party. In addition, within two years after the end of his suspension, the player would be under close supervision of the Football Association. Should there be any act of violent fouls in the field, the player would be further banned for 15 matches.
3. Nottingham Forest player, George Wood, was to be barred for eight matches and fined 25,000 pounds due to malicious fouling. Should there be similar acts of violence within a year, the player would be further barred for another 12 matches.
4. Nottingham Forest and Reading FC's assistant managers, Kerslake and Dillon respectively, were to be each barred from four matches and fined 15,000 pounds due to acts stemming from lack of composure after the match.
5. Nottingham Forest's main manager, Tony Twain, would be barred from three matches and fined 25,000 pounds due to his unjust accusations of the FA, intentions of interrupting the referee's duty, as well as personal attacks on the opponents and lack of sportsmanship shown after the match.
6. Reading FC and Nottingham Forest were to be named and criticized for their lack of supervision over their players and fined 50,000 pounds.
7. Reading FC player, Seol Ki-hyeon was to be additionally barred for three matches and fined 15,000 pounds due to malicious fouling in an act of elbowing his opponents.
8. Penalty for players penalized during the match: Reading FC player Sonko and Nottingham Forest player Ashley Young, remain unchanged. Both players were to be barred for one match.

After the announcement of the results, it was declared by the media to be one of English FA's most severe penalty ruling. Although there had long been the precedent of Eric Cantona's eight-month match suspension for assaulting a fan with a kung-fu kick, this was a large-scale penalty imposed on several people at one time. It was truly one of the most severe instances.

It seemed like the FA's intention to clamp down on acts of violence on the field was not just empty talk.

The media was filled with anticipation at the thought of Tang En again expressing his dissatisfaction after the announcement of the results, and then continuing to make a fuss for a period. That way, they would have even more news they could stir up. Unexpectedly, Tang En did not make any comment regarding the matter this time. He neither appealed against the results nor criticized the FA. He kept completely quiet on the issue.

No one knew what he was thinking, other than himself. In his opinion, the two that he hoped to be penalized the most were already punished. His aims were fulfilled, so there was no need to continue entangling in this problem. Both Riley and Hunt were barred for 10 matches. He finally managed to vent his resentment.

Even in the interviews with Forest's players, everyone felt that Riley was the primary culprit of the whole matter. While Hunt's foul was something unavoidable, Riley could have stopped the series of matters occurring after it if he had been smart enough. However, his poor performance had just made the situation worse. Forest's players were all too happy to applaud seeing Riley being severely penalized.

Now, if Tang En was smart, he would avoid continuing the entanglement with the FA and Reading FC. Rather, he needed to pick up the pieces after the disaster. They were going to battle Arsenal in an away field very soon. Based on his currently crippled formation, what was the result going to be?

He did not even dare think about it.

Wenger, the old fox, would not let go of such a fabulous chance. Nottingham Forest's trip to London boded ill. The only good news was that Tang En received Constantine's call after the FA announced the final list of penalizations. Paul Gerrard had woken.

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By the time the three—Tang En and the assistant managers Dunn and Kerslake—arrived at the hospital, the entrance to the ward was surrounded by several media groups. They had also rushed over when they received news of Gerrard regaining consciousness.

Tang En was filled with impatience when he got held back for interviews at the door. He only threw out a quick, "Now, Hunt can finally sleep well," before quickly slipping in.

After the three entered the ward, the hospital staff shut the doors. The media groups who were hoping to continue snooping were chased out by the hospital's security. The reporters clamored about how the hospital had no right to intervene with press freedom, and that they had the right to know about the truth, and so on. Professor Constantine looked down his nose as he scolded, "I don't give a rat's arse about your freedom. This is a hospital! I'm a doctor, so I have the right to ask everyone to get out! If you disrupt the recovery of my patient, I'm going to hold you all responsible!"

"Prof... Professor. You swore." A young and beautiful nurse said this, covering her mouth in surprise. In her head, Professor Constantine, wearing his golden-framed glasses, was a polite and a well-mannered gentleman. He was the epitome of a good man. Although he was no longer young, he was still rather popular.

Constantine felt a little awkward. Having followed Tang En for so long, he unknowingly was affected by the problematic habit.

“But you are also charming when you act this way.” The nurse’s eyes practically had hearts leaping out of them.

It suddenly dawned on Constantine. Despite Tony Twain being perceived by the media as a demon with a tail and wings, horns on his head, a mouth of fire, and sharp teeth, it was little wonder why he was still considered the most coveted partner for a one-night-stand by female magazines.

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“Head, Manager Kerslake, and Manager Dunn. Why are you here?” Paul Gerrard, in the midst of waiting for his wife to cut an apple for him, was surprised to see the three of them walking in.

“I heard you were awake, so I came to see you. Should we go?” Tang En pulled a chair over to sit by Gerard’s bedside.

“No, I’m just shocked. I didn’t expect...” Paul laughed, shaking his head lightly.

Seeing that Paul was shaking his head very slowly, Tang En pointed to his own head and asked. “How does it feel?”

“It still hurts from time to time,” Gerrard said, frowning but not shaking his head. It seemed like even shaking his head was a burden to him now.

Tang En kept a smile on his face, though his heart was finding it difficult. The situation did not seem as positive as he had imagined.

“How was the match, Head?” Gerrard asked.

“We won.” Tang En beamed. “1:0. We didn’t allow Coppell, the b*stard, to leave our home field with a smile.”

“That’s good. I thought I was going to die,” Gerrard muttered.

“How is that possible? Medicine is so advanced now; there won’t be problems. It’s only one collision. Look, aren’t you lying in bed chatting with us now?”

He fell silent for a while. Paul turned to ask the two assistant managers, “Can I still continue to play?”

Dunn said nothing while Kerslake’s smile looked reluctant. Tang En rescued them. “Of course! You only need to rest well, and you’ll come back! Think about the Romani boy. He was laying here for nine months. Didn’t he still return in the end?”

Eastwood’s experience was certainly a good inspirational story. A true-life example was in the same team as he was. Paul Gerrard had no reason to disbelieve it.

“Rest well and don’t think about anything else. I said to Eastwood before that the whole team was waiting for his return. Today, I’ll say the same thing to you. Paul, we’re waiting for you to come back.”

Seeing Gerrard’s teary eyes, Tang En stood and bowed slightly to Paul’s wife. “Please take good care of him, ma’am. Your husband is a great man.”

“We have to head to London tomorrow, so we’ll head out now.”

The three of them rose and said their goodbyes before pushing the door open to leave. Tang En saw Professor Constantine still standing by the doors and was surprised.

“Are you here as a door guard, Prof?”

The old man did not react to Tang En’s joke. As if he did not hear him speak, he said to Tang En, “I have something to discuss with you.”

Dunn, who was the furthest back, pulled the doors shut. Tang En took a few steps forward before turning to face Constantine.

“Is this good news or bad news? I’ve been asking this a lot recently.”

Constantine did not immediately answer, looking like he was in a bind.

“Alright. There’s no need to tell me anything, Prof.” Tang En waved his hand. “If it’s good news, leave it as a surprise for me. If it’s bad news, I don’t want to hear it.”

His words made Constantine smile again. “Alright, Tony. As you wish.”

“Let’s go. I’ll come by again after my return from London.” Tang En waved goodbye to Constantine.

“Please take good care of him.”

“You can rest assured, Tony. And I wish you all good luck.”

Everyone needed some good luck.

Chapter 484: Suspension

There wasn’t much to say about Nottingham Forest’s away game. Short on players, Nottingham Forest predictably lost to Arsenal by 3:1, which could be counted as a complete failure.

Twain followed the team to London, but he could not direct the game in the technical area due to his ban. He and Assistant Manager Kerslake, who was also sent off with a red card, sat in the stands as they helplessly watched their team besieged by Arsenal. The Forest team did not show its usual drive at all.

Dunn carried out the acting manager’s authority in the game. But just as Twain once thought, Dunn was a brilliant assistant manager, but not a qualified manager. He was able to do the supporting work perfectly, but could not make decisions on his own.

Without a definite view, he would not know what to do. If the manager was that way, the players would be even more so.

Without George Wood, Sun Jihai was placed in the defensive midfielder position. Despite the Chinese player’s best efforts, he was still overwhelmed in the face of Arsenal’s group attack. The position of the defensive midfielder was too important. If the field was compared to a battlefield, the midfield was the ground the soldiers must fight for. A defensive midfielder was equivalent to a stronghold. A good defensive midfielder could defend this area and make it invincible to attack, whereas a terrible one...

Not that Sun Jihai was terrible, but he was still some distance away from his opponent’s level.

If the midfield were to fall, the Forest team's penalty area would not fare any better.

They easily conceded three goals.

The only thing worth mentioning was that Nottingham Forest had managed to score a goal even under such unfavorable circumstances. Eastwood scored a face-saving goal for the team at the last minute, so they did not suffer a crushing defeat in the hands of Arsenal.

After the end of the game, Wenger glanced at the stands, intentionally or unintentionally, as he shook hands with Dunn. He was unquestionably trying to find Twain in the crowd, but by then Twain had already left with Kerslake.

None of the post-match commentators felt anything was odd about the outcome of the match. Arsenal was a strong team. Furthermore, the Forest team was currently short of players and even missing its key figure, Tony Twain. Even if they had been well-organized, they still might not have stood a chance against Arsenal in the Emirates Stadium.

For their part, the Nottingham media lamented their bad luck for playing against such a strong opponent after a widespread ban. If they had encountered a weak team, they might have still been able to win.

Twain did not see it that way. He was glad to meet Arsenal at this time. There was already a leak in the house, what was a downpour instead? It was best to put all the bad things together and once the bad luck had run out; good luck would naturally take center stage again.

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After his return from London with a loss, Twain did not waste time feeling dejected by the defeat. He was going to lead the team right into the preparations for the Champions League group stage competition.

There was little time. On September 27th, Nottingham Forest would host one of their other rivals, the Turkish Süper Lig team, Galatasaray S.K., in this group stage at home.

Since that earth-shattering war, everyone had been waiting to see it. They wanted to see which direction Tony Twain's team would go.

Twain knew what the media thought. He was enemies with a lot of English media. They wanted to Tony Twain fall on his face and the Forest team to lose twice in a row. Having just lost to Arsenal in the league tournament, it would have been even nicer if they could continue to lose to Galatasaray.

However, Twain was an antagonistic person and liked to be at odds with everyone.

Therefore, Twain won this group stage game.

The punishment by suspension only took effect for the league tournament. The Forest team could still send its strongest lineup for the Champions League game. And the team did not appear to have been hit by the widespread ban, but rather were spurred by the ban and could vent their frustration with the league tournament on the Champions League group stage competition.

During the game, Twain did not use the Forest team's defensive tactics that they relied on for their ascent last season. Instead, they audaciously and also unexpectedly employed strong offensive in their home ground. They made light of Galatasaray's offense.

As a result, the game ended in 3:2, with a total of five goals scored by both teams. Nottingham Forest won by scoring one more goal than their opponent.

The commentator thought for this game, the Forest team, everyone from the coaches to the players, must have needed to vent their frustration. Obviously it would not help them if they were to continue to implement the defensive tactics and play under pressure from the opponent in their own home ground. So, it was reasonable that they would attack aggressively regardless of everything. Tony Twain was unpredictable, so his team would naturally be unpredictable. It was normal for them to suddenly change their tactics.

Twain did not care about the noise from these comments. He had a plan in mind.

After they defeated Galatasaray at home, Nottingham Forest was temporarily ranked first in the group with their two wins.

The scene that those onlookers wanted to see most did not happen. Tony Twain's team was still alive and well.

"We were so pathetic in the league tournament that I didn't expect us to do so well in the Champions League," Dunn said to Twain after the coaching staff on both sides shook hands affably.

"This is quite nice." Twain nodded, "Our goal this season has always been about the Champions League. It's fine if we are in the top four for the Premier League."

Twain did not lie, and he definitely was not being modest. He was not considering the issue of the league title at all this season. Putting aside the fact that they were surrounded by Chelsea, Manchester United, Arsenal and other powerhouse clubs, he based the decision on the Forest team itself.

Since he decided he would reclaim what he had lost in the Champions League, it was natural to put more energy into the Champions League. The league tournament was a competition with a long system, unlike the Champions League with its knockout system. One of the Champions League's big features was how much one put in would reflect how much one reaped in the end. That was to say as long as one put in the effort, there would be returns with fewer uncertainties.

Whereas, due to the long schedule, the league tournament had more uncertainties, just like the saying "long delays cause complications." There was a high probability that even after painstakingly putting in all their efforts to lead in the first thirty-seven rounds, they would be overtaken by their opponents in the final round. Twain did not want such a catastrophe to happen to him.

Furthermore, even if he boosted his team with a number of powerful players during the summer, he did not think Nottingham Forest had the power to compete in two tournaments and take both championship titles. Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea, Real Madrid, Barcelona, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Bayern Munich ... None of these international titans would dare to claim they had the absolute strength to take down a double or a triple, not to mention Nottingham Forest.

Instead of sitting at home to fantasize about their team taking all the championship titles they could win, it was better to be realistic and play well in the Champions League where they were the most confident. Twain was a very pragmatic coach. He was realistic, and he was only interested in things he firmly believed he could grasp.

He currently had no plans for the league title in his mind. But as for the Champions League title, he must have it.

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After the victory over Galatasaray in the Champions League and taking the top spot in the group, Nottingham Forest, seemingly limitless and radiant, was about to experience going from heaven to hell. Nottingham Forest would host Middlesbrough in the seventh round of the league tournament on November 1st.

Having just enjoyed a game with an intact team, Twain had to return to the stands to be a spectator.

Dunn continued to be the acting manager for this game. However, he was just acting as a front. Twain and the coaching staff had arranged all tactics before the game, and the team just had to follow them.

In the face of the Middlesbrough team without Steve McClaren, the Forest team shook hands with their opponents at their home ground. The game was played brilliantly with a total of four goals scored by both teams. The Forest team's second lineup had no problem dealing with a rival like Middlesbrough. Their eventual failure to win the game was entirely due to the lack of a key figure, Tony Twain. A distinctive character and a fearless manager was the real soul of the team.

The good news for Twain was that there was only one more game to go before the end of his suspension. He could almost stand in front of the coaching staff again and direct the team in competition. He had had enough of the days of being a spectator in the stands. He had been a spectator for more than ten years in his previous life. He did not want to live that life again.

The televised footage was focused on Twain's behavior during the game. Whether it was the Forest team scoring or conceding a goal, the camera would quickly pan to Twain in the stands to see his reaction.

John Motson, the BBC football commentator who knew Twain well, said with a laugh, "the English Football Association's only appropriate penalty was to suspend Twain for three games. To Tony Twain, not allowing him to direct the team during games is as good as taking his life!"

Fortunately, such terrible days would be over soon.

On October 14th, as it was the national team competition, there would be a one-week break in the league tournament. Nottingham Forest lost 1:2 to Manchester City in the away game, but Twain could ignore this game's defeat. He even wanted to sneak to the sidelines after the end of the game to shake the hand of the Manchester City manager, Stuart Pearce on behalf of Dunn, but he was stopped by the sharp-eyed fourth official at the tunnel's exit.

"Mr. Twain, that's not going to work. You can't go over there."

"I just wanted to go and say hello to my old friend. Isn't that okay?" Twain asked the fourth official next to him as he pointed to Pearce, who was shaking hands with Dunn.

"You can wait for the next half of the league tournament, Mr. Twain. If you are not suspended again at that time." Twain had become the referees' number one enemy since he publicly slammed the entire English refereeing community after that game. In the few games in the league tournament, the Forest team had been subjected to some inexplicable penalties several times. It could not be said that there was no link to this.

After the fourth official spoke harshly, Twain's good mood disappeared. He looked at Dunn and Pearce, not far ahead, and glanced at the fourth official standing next to him with a fake smile. He knew that if he were to force his way in, he would be suspended again from an unknown number of games.

He grunted and turned to walk away.

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Dunn shook hands with Pearce but did not chat with him. He just walked directly into the tunnel. He was not in a good mood since he lost the game. He did not want to stay any longer in front of people.

As he passed the mixed zone, he was stopped by a voice speaking in Mandarin, "Mr. Dunn, Mr. Dunn!"

Dunn, who initially did not want to pay any attention to the media, could not help but stopped when he heard the familiar-sounding Mandarin.

The person who called him was no stranger. It was Tang Jing, whom he met on the plane. Coincidentally, they both shared the same family name, Tang. They might have been related five hundred years ago.

"Can you say a few words?" Tang Jing huddled in front of the crowd, obvious among the male-dominated sports reporters.

Since it was someone he knew, Dunn could not embarrass her. He went over, intending to say a few words. But before he could speak, he could not think of anything to say.

Tang Jing could obviously tell. She needed to take the initiative for this situation, so she asked, "how do you feel, going from being an assistant manager to becoming an acting manager, Mr. Dunn?"

"They are completely different," Dunn replied succinctly.

Tang Jing was fully prepared for this. She nodded and jotted down Dunn's words. As to how she would play on his words when she got back was up to her.

"What a pity, you have not won the past three games." Her response certainly displeased the other person, so Tang Jing hurriedly changed the topic, "What are your thoughts on the FA's extensive punishment?"

"It's been a couple of weeks, and I don't have any comments about it."

"Oh." Even if she was sufficiently prepared for this, Tang Jing was still exasperated by this kind of uncooperative attitude. She had waited for half a day only to be met with such a result? She was a little

dejected. Twain's noncompliance was intentional, whereas Dunn's noncompliance was entirely inherent – this was what frustrated her the most.

Perhaps he thought that it was not easy for a woman to squeeze in among such a large group of men in search of an interview opportunity. Dunn also felt that it was not nice to treat the other party with this attitude, so he hesitantly opened his mouth to speak, "I'm a little unhappy that I did not win a game."

Tang Jing immediately looked up when she heard Dunn suddenly take the initiative to speak. She looked at Dunn, filled with anticipation. But she only saw Dunn shake his head, "Sorry, I have to go."

"Oh, all right. See you around, Mr. Dunn." Tang Jing waved goodbye first. Although he did not say much, his last remark was enough.

I'm a little unhappy that I did not win a game...

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Dunn ran into Twain on his way back to the locker room.

"Why did you not go straight to the press conference?" Twain asked from where he leaned against the wall.

"It's still early," Dunn replied.

"There's nothing to do here. So why did you come back?"

"There's nothing to do over there either. I'm used to coming back here first."

Twain smiled and said, "you really are suited to be an assistant manager for the rest of your life."

"I met Tang Jing in the mixed zone just now." Dunn switched the topic.

"Oh? What did she ask?"

"Stuff that the Chinese fans care about."

Twain nodded to show that he understood. It was nothing more than the news about Dunn suddenly became the acting manager.

"I'm sorry to disappoint them," said Twain with a shrug. "Or do you want to continue, Dunn?"

Dunn shook his head and waved his hand. "I don't like it. The manager and assistant manager are entirely two different jobs. Luckily you'll be back soon, and I can feel relieved, too."

"Too much pressure, isn't it?" asked Twain, laughing.

Dunn nodded. "Too much."

"But I like it." Twain winked at his partner. "Enormous pressure means there will be a bigger payoff. I have no interest in being an assistant manager at all. I've always liked being a manager from the start. We are really different."

Dunn smiled quietly and pushed the door to enter. Twain remained outside as he watched the players step off the field and walk down. He raised his hand to greet them.

“Hey, guys, good job!”

“Don’t be discouraged, little monkey! You only just lost an insignificant league game. Have you forgotten our aim for this season?”

“It’s no big deal. I’m back.”

That was right. He was the owner of this team.

Chapter 485: Returned Soul

For a period, the results of Forest Team were very unstable. Ever since their painful victory against Reading FC, the team which had great hopes pinned on them prior to the beginning of the season, had gone through three matches without winning. In the eight rounds of the Premier League, they had had four wins, three losses, and one draw, totaling an accumulation of 13 points. They had already gone down to seventh place in the League rankings.

Only George Wood and Ashley Young were barred from matches. George Wood was barred for eight matches, while Young had been barred for one. The latter had already returned to playing. There was not much of a severe loss to the formation.

The true reason behind the unstable performance of the team was Tang En’s suspension from three matches.

As the main manager of the team, he was also the soul of the team. Forest players were already used to having Tony Twain on the sidelines to direct them during their matches. Suddenly, the manager standing on the sidelines changed, and they were very unused to it.

People were mysterious creatures. When Tang En was at the sidelines, all the players were particularly enthused in matches. The moment Tang En got penalized and sent to the spectators’ stand for a span of three matches, the players seemed unable to muster up any interest.

Everyone had gotten used to hearing Tang En’s thunder-like roar of anger whenever they were dispirited. His scolding would jolt them awake from their muddling state. And today, though Dunn was a very capable manager—he already had convinced everyone to put aside their biases of his nationality with his abilities—there was still something he was lacking as a main manager.

Dunn himself knew it in his heart. He and Tang En were such different characters that it created a sort of contrast. The main manager that everyone acknowledged was someone like Tang En. It was useless for him to try anything else.

The experience of being interim manager for the three matches made him deeply aware of this. Although it could be said that Tang En had robbed him of his body and position, the team today was, through and through, Tang En’s team. The team was in sync with his nature.

Dunn sighed in relief when the three matches came to an end. The Chinese media had high regards for him taking on the position of interim manager of the team. Initially, there were a continuous stream of reports showing immense pride and brimming with exaggerated praises. Dunn himself, however, was very lowkey. He did not seem realise Chinese football was rising to the level of Europe’s top-tier League.

Now that there was not a single victory in the last three matches, the strength of reporting in the domestic media also weakened significantly, the enthusiasm abruptly abating. These people were at a complete loss as to what to tell the domestic readers. The person whom they had had praised to the sky was leading the team with such poor results.

England's media was not concerned with Dunn. The person they cared about was Tony Twain. After the match with Man City, Nottingham Evening Post very proudly published a huge title of, "Be wary, that man is coming back!"

It was evident how much the Nottinghamians trusted Tang En.

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Though their prospects in the Premier League were not bright, they were raking in victories on their path in the Champions League.

October 18th. The third round of the Champions League Group Stage. Nottingham won the away match against Bordeaux from France with a score of 1:0. Because of this, Nottingham Forest maintained a complete victory against all the other opponents in their group.

Experts were already sure that it would be no problem for Tang En's football team to advance from the Group Stage. All that was left was for the three teams to fight for the second advancement slot still available.

In fact, there were already people starting to guess about which teams Forest would be meeting after advancing from the Group Stage. Tony Twain had too many enemies in the European football scene. There would be a good show no matter who they met with. Real Madrid, Barcelona, Chelsea, Inter Milan...

These would be massive wars akin to the level of Mars colliding with Earth.

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But Tang En himself did not have the time to imagine the future alongside those people.

Their progress in the Champions League was smooth. The team was enthused whenever it came to the European battles. In this aspect, he did not need to worry too much. Now, he needed to put his energy into the domestic fights. They had already slipped to 7th in the Premier League, three positions from Tang En's goal of being in the top four in the Premier League. If this continued, the situation would only be disadvantageous for Nottingham Forest.

October 22nd. 9th round of the Premier League. They were challenging Everton in an away match, and going up against their old friend, Moyes.

The media was immensely interested in Tang En's return. Numerous reporters waited at the locker room of the away team with their cameras aimed inside. The players were currently changing in the room and preparing to leave for their warm-up. The main lead of the day, Tony Twain, had yet to arrive. He was probably stuck somewhere, held back by reporters.

Dunn walked over. He shook his head at the three layers of reporters surrounding the doors, and walked in.

Just as Dunn was about to enter, an outburst of noise came from the outside. He did not need to stretch his neck for a view to know who arrived.

Tang En saw the reporters surrounding the door and took the initiative to wave and greet them. He beamed. "Everyone, it's been a while."

Some of the reporters greeted him back.

"Thank you very much for your concern, but I hope you guys can make way..." He pointed to the door. It had been completely sealed off by the media.

"If you have any questions, you can ask after the match ends. My apologies, but I don't have much time." The reporters opened a path for him, and he strode into the locker room, closing the doors.

The reporters who had yet to disperse heard a burst of laughter from within the locker room.

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"Everyone. You've all missed me, haven't you? I've missed you too. Do you know why I'm only here now? I'll tell you. It's because I nearly walked up to the spectators' stand."

The players burst into laughter.

"Fortunately, I was stopped by one of the field's staff on my way there. He asked me very strangely, 'Mr. Tony, have you been suspended again?'" Tang En mimicked the expression and tone of the other party remarkably.

The laughter grew even more uproarious.

"I have to thank the staff who boldly spoke up. And I'm sure at the same time, Everton's people would be hopping mad hearing about it, because they've lost a chance to beat us."

Tang En grinned as he watched everyone laugh.

"I'm back, everyone. It's no big deal."

Like a dose of tranquilizers, his words calmed the worry and anxiety in the players' hearts. It was obvious from how they could still laugh carefreely before the start of the match.

The mainstay of their team was back. There was truly nothing to be afraid of now. So what if it was an away match? No matter what, they had their Head to back them up.

"We've already gotten no wins for three straight rounds in the League matches, with two losses and one draw. I think the situation can't be any much worse, so there's no need to worry. Just let go and play well. Today, play exactly how you normally would. It's not at all important who our opponents are."

Tang En's confident smile made the team feel as if it were true; it truly did not matter who their opponents were. The low morale from the past few matches rose instantly, returning to the maximum in a blink of an eye.

Dunn quietly watched by the side. With his personality, it was impossible for him to do something like using words to encourage the team.

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Moyes greatly valued this match. Though his opponents were having a rough streak recently, he did not underestimate them. In fact, with Tony Twain's suspension lifted and his return to the team, Moyes was even more alert.

This match was going to be a tough fight; Nottingham Forest was difficult to deal with. He knew all that. But, of course, knowing it and doing it were two different things. The same went for doing it and achieving the desired effect.

On their home field, Moyes sent out their strongest formation to welcome the battle against a Nottingham Forest without George Wood. Since George Wood's suspension, Forest's starting defensive midfielder had consistently been the Chinese, Sun Jihai. It was also the breaking point that gave Arsenal the win. Moyes also hoped to find an opportunity to gain a victory from there; their main offense was set in the middle to launch a strong assault against Sun Jihai.

Naturally, Tang En would not willingly allow the opponents to do that. Albertini donned his armor and entered battle, defending with Sun Jihai. Arteta and Rafael van der Vaart both did not start. Forest had placed two defensive midfielders in the center of their midfield. Their attacks were entirely dependent on the wings and occasional long passes from Albertini.

Pepe had yet to recover from his injury, so Kompany and Piqué partnered up as the center backs.

Tang En showed a defensive stance in the away field. It appeared he was gunning for a draw.

Everton's lineup was not weak. They were considered to be a level of mid-to-upper tier strength within the English Premier. Their goalkeeper was Tim Howard, loaned from Manchester United; centerbacks were the strong Nigerian, Joseph Yobo, and Lescott, loaned from Wolverhampton Wanderers; rightback was Phil Neville, Gary Neville's brother, who transferred from Manchester United; leftback was Nuno Valente, Portugal's national team player; midfield-wise, their core players were Australian national team player Tim Cahill, former Netherlands' national footballer Andy van der Meyde, Scotland's national footballer James Mcfadden, as well as Ireland's national player Lee Carsley; forwards were former South Hampton's best shooter, "Saint" James Beattie, and Andrew Johnson, whose speed was considered incredible in the English Premier League.

With this lineup, it would be no problem for them to fight for the qualifications of the Champions League. On the League rankings, Tang En's Nottingham Forest was currently sitting right above Everton—Forest Team was ranked seventh and Everton was ranked eighth. They had the same number of accumulated points. If Everton beat Nottingham Forest in the match, Moyes' team would surpass Forest. Furthermore, if Arsenal and Aston Villa stumbled in this round, it was very possible for Moyes to shoot up and become the fifth in the League rankings.

Tang En had the same idea.

Wood could not play, so he made the entire team work to make up for the defense of his position. Their offense was entirely dependent on counterattacking. Tang En iced Anelka on the bench, but there was no real loss to Forest's attacking speed. The speed of the two flanks continued to be terrifying.

Forest's attacks were still dependent on launches from the two wings for this match. However, Ashley Young was not the starter for the match. The starter for the right wing was Lennon, who was equally quick and also excelled at dribbling and breakthroughs; he had outstanding control over the ball.

Tang En's intentions were for every offensive player to have the chance of barging into the opponent's penalty zone with the ball and threatening them, or shooting and scoring, all without the support of the team. Currently, the team did not have that much energy to support them, so the offense could only depend on individual capabilities.

Ruud van Nistelrooy was also on the field. His mission, rather than shooting and scoring, was more about providing support for Ribéry, Lennon, and Eastwood, who would all be cutting forward from behind, by attracting the defensive firepower away from the three.

In the 27th minute of the first half, Everton's strategy of forcefully attacking through the middle finally reaped some rewards. Andrew Johnson successfully reversed the offside and received a direct pass from Cahill. Getting past Edwin van der Sar, he shot the football into the empty goal.

"Andrew Johnson—in this moment, he is the hero of Goodison Park!"

Huge waves emerged from the sea of blue on the spectators' stand, as if they were trying to extinguish the red flames squeezed in a corner.

Even faced with a ball loss, Tang En was not mad. He did nothing. He didn't need to worry about some things with Albertini on the field.

Captain Albertini picked up the ball from the goal net. He smacked their faces and drummed up the team's morale. "It's no big deal! Let's return the favor!"

After placing the football in the center circle, he ran to Ribéry, Lennon, Eastwood, and Ruud van Nistelrooy one by one and directly instructed them, "You guys focus on running forward. Don't be concerned about if you can receive the ball. Passing is the responsibility of the guys behind. Scoring goals, that's your job!"

The four nodded. They believed in their captain just as they believed in their teammates.

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"Nottingham Forest kicks off again. Van Nistelrooy kicks the ball out, and he's now running forward. The ball has been passed to Albertini. He's looking around to observe the situation. Cahill comes forward! Oh! He's been passed! Long pass! Albertini suddenly makes a long pass! Lennon has gone all out to chase the ball, beautiful! He stops... and passes center! Van Nistelrooy lets the ball drop forward instead! Freddy... EASTWOOOOOOOD!!!"

"A brilliant combination! The ball is in! Thirty seconds after kick-off, Nottingham Forest equalizes the score! This is incredible! Look at the faces of Everton's players; they are still immersed in their joy of taking the lead!"

Seeing Eastwood head the ball into the net from the drop point further back, Tang En jumped up in excitement. His players were really making him proud!

“This is Eastwood’s fifth goal in the current season! After being absent previously for half a season, due to his injury, his condition finally recovered. With Ruud van Nistelrooy protecting him in front, his forward cut from the back made it impossible for his opponent’s defensive line to guard against!

Tang En lifted his eyes to scan the stands. Even though George Wood was currently suspended and training with the reserves, Tang En still requested for him to watch the matches live as much as possible. There was a lot he could learn from them.

Hey, George. Did you see that? Did you see everything that happened before the goal? That is your goal. When Demi retires, you have to be like him, sending out precise passes to your teammates at crucial moments and helping them break through to score.

Wood was sitting on the stands. Assistant manager Kerslake, who was still suspended from matches, was next to him. He was currently talking to Wood about the goal.

“Because the position of a defensive midfielder is closer to the back, their viewpoint is broader than their teammates in other positions,” Kerslake said, clenching his fists. “The more they can see, the more spots they can come up with. Sometimes, you’ll be able to see and think of positions that your teammates can’t. You only need to pass precisely, and you can send the football to any corner of the football field. Did you know that? Any corner! As long as you want to, you can pass it to a spot that is completely beyond the opponent’s imagination. And then, you can deal a fatal blow!”

Wood did not answer him. He was in a daze looking at Albertini in the field, celebrating the goal with his teammates. Out of all that Kerslake said, only one sentence moved him: “You can send the football to any corner of the football field.” He had to admit, the feeling of being able to think about something and achieve exactly that was incredible.

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The speedy equalization of the score boosted the morale of Nottingham Forest tremendously, and at the same time, dealt a massive blow to Everton’s morale.

After that, Forest Team almost managed to overtake the score before the end of the first half. If not for Phil Neville hooking the ball out when it got on the goal line, Nottingham Forest would have brought a score of 2:1 with them into the locker room.

However, what Forest Team did not achieve in the first half, they accomplished in the second.

Seventeen minutes into the second half, Nottingham Forest used a beautiful direct free kick to pierce through the ten-fingered gates of US’s national goalkeeper, Tim Howard. The scorer was the youngest player on the team, Gareth Bale. He played as a starter in this match, and continuously assisted in the offensive efforts from the left wing, so much so that he squeezed Ribéry into the middle. He had finally managed to score a goal. To him, that was the greatest praise and honor he could receive.

The match was not over yet. After scoring, Bale was even more excited. His assists from the left wing became sharper and sharper. Nearing the end of the match, when Everton was trying to equalize the score and pressed forward, Bale took the opportunity to do a combination with Ribéry on the flank. His

remarkable breakthrough and pass to the center found Ribéry, who had cut into the middle, a fantastic opportunity to shoot at the goal. It was the third time Forest sent the ball into Howard's goal.

Originally, Moyes had made very meticulous defense arrangements to ward against Forest's attacks from the flanks. The arrangements ranged from retreating for defense to using the offense to suppress them. However, he did not expect Bale's activeness to squeeze Ribéry out into the middle. With that, his strategy, which was highly specialized, lost its target.

Though Ribéry's movement to the middle was done out of helplessness, it sparked a magical effect. Bale sprung to life, getting one assist and scoring one goal. Ribéry regained his liveliness as well. Without being constrained to the flanks, he became more threatening. Moving from the wings to the middle, he managed to score a goal.

Everyone around cheered for their victory. Tang En however, sat in the manager's seat, rubbing his chin in contemplation of something he had thought of.

Until the final moments of the match, he sat there in a stupor. No one knew what Tang En was thinking about.

He only refocused when Dunn abruptly made contact with his arm.

"It's time to shake hands with Moyes." He pointed to the left. Moyes had already gotten up from his seat in the technical area.

"The match is over?" Tang En was surprised.

"What were you thinking about, Tony?" Dunn was taken aback as well.

Tang En chuckled in delight. "I'll tell you when we get back. You'll be interested."

He stood up and walked towards Moyes with an outstretched hand, ignoring the mystified Dunn.

"I'm really sorry, but we've won again, David." He winked.

"Looking at your face, I really have the urge to punch it," Moyes, the losing party, said helplessly.

"Haha! There are too many people who want to punch me. You'll have to get in line, David."

Chapter 486: The Storm Chapter 34 Brewing Transformation

Twain kept quiet on his way back from Liverpool. Everyone in the bus was celebrating their first win in four games, but Twain did not say a single word. Some people thought he was angry again, but that was not the case. He was mulling over that inspiration he'd found during the game.

After his breakout performance in the first two seasons, Ribéry's traits had been thoroughly studied by his opponents. He was no longer a secret weapon in the Premier League team. Everyone knew that Tony Twain needed Ribéry to break through on the flank. Providing that the flank was jammed, the threat of Ribéry would be gone.

Let's take a look at this season ...

By right, Ribéry should be more capable than that ...

Twain carefully searched his memory. After the World Cup, Ribéry went to Bayern Munich and quickly became a core player. If he was a player who could only serve a purpose on the flank, how could he become the core of a powerhouse team like Bayern Munich?

Twain rarely watched the televised broadcast of the Bundesliga. He also did not care much about the news over there. But he knew that Ribéry could immediately succeed in a different position. It must have had something to do with his ability. If he could be the core at Bayern Munich but was restrained in the Forest team, then surely it must be him who was not doing his job well here.

Twain had thought about this issue before the game against Everton. Why did Ribéry's performance show an overall downward trend as they entered into their third season in the league tournament? There was definitely something wrong.

In the game against Everton, Twain believed he had found the problem: his position.

A player like Ribéry should never be confined to just be active on the flank. He was not like Ashley Young and Aaron Lennon. He was more of an all-rounder and had remarkable awareness. To only keep him on the flank was like putting shackles on his running legs.

During the game against Everton, as Gareth Bale was unexpectedly in an excellent form, he not only took on the two missions of offense and defense alone, he also squeezed Ribéry into the middle. It was due to lack of a better option, but it allowed the team to reap a third goal.

What did this signify? There must be a reason for anything that happened. The third goal would not materialize for no reason.

All Twain had to do was to connect the dots.

Obviously, the goal was made after Ribéry went to the middle. On the flank, Ribéry did more passes and assists, with fewer direct shots at the goal. He would have the best chance of a shot only if he went to the middle. Gareth Bale had matured and could take on more responsibility on the flank. By handing him the left flank, Ribéry would be freed up.

In other words, by placing Ribéry in the middle, he could maximize the roles of the two players. There was no doubt about it.

All right, here comes the problem.

If everything on the football field is so simple, there won't be so much unpredictability.

If Ribéry goes to the middle... What about van der Vaart? What about Eastwood? What about the Arteta?

I can't just sacrifice the interests of the rest of the players in the middle in order to unshackle Ribéry?

Changing his position was not an issue, but the possibility of the actual operation was very low.

This required the manager to deliberate. How could he maximize everyone's function without sacrificing the interests of the rest of the team?

Twain thought about the tactics often used by Real Madrid during Vicente del Bosque's time. Even when Real Madrid had midfield superstars like Figo and Zidane, they did not set up an attacking midfielder. The famous Spanish manager, Bosque, used a bizarre approach to solve the problem of too many Real Madrid superstars.

Figo was still active on the right flank which he was most familiar with, while the attacking midfielder, Zidane was not positioned in the middle of the midfield. He went to the left flank and was a left midfielder in the formation. In practice, however, Zidane played as an attacking midfielder in the left midfielder position; he would constantly run to the middle. His left midfielder position was just a front. He did not function as side midfielder. It would have been such a waste for Zidane to play as a side midfielder.

Therefore, he was a left midfielder in the formation but played as an attacking midfielder in the actual game. It did not affect Zidane's play, and also did not affect the rest of the other players' performances in the midfield. What about the left flank? As everyone knew, Roberto Carlos' assists on the left flank were unbeatable. If Zidane was fixed on the left flank, it would render Carlos's power useless. When Zidane moved to the middle, Carlos was given free rein in the left flank. He could plunge in to attack or withdraw for defense. In any case, the small-statured Brazilian fullback could run fast.

How was this similar to the current situation with the Forest team?

Although Gareth Bale was not as good as Carlos, he was considered outstanding among the younger generation. His ability to assist was really good for a fullback. It would be inefficient to just let him be a fullback.

And Ribéry was known as "the new Zidane." The two players even played the same role. What about if he took a leaf out of Real Madrid's book?

Twain deliberated for a long time and finally rejected this idea. The Real Madrid of that time and the current Nottingham Forest were still different. Zidane went to the middle in order to give full play to Carlos's ability to assist on the flank. At that time, Real Madrid's offense in the middle was dependent on Zidane and Figo. Makelele was a defensive midfielder, similar to what Wood was currently.

However, the Forest team also had van der Vaart, an indisputable attacking midfielder. If Ribéry went over, what would the Dutchman do? Originally everyone played their own roles, minded their own positions, and played together in harmony. If Ribéry were to go to the middle, it would break the current balance. The Forest team's entire midfield would have to be rebuilt.

It would be another transformation.

Transformation implied an uncertain future, which was a risk.

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The bus drove into the Nottingham area, and Twain snapped back from his contemplation.

"Tony?" Dunn quickly asked when he saw Twain stir. He had been observing him as he sat next to him.

"Ah—" Twain did not answer Dunn. He raised his hands and stretched his back. He moved his body, stiff from sitting on the bus.

“Were you asleep, Tony?” David Kerslake asked, concerned. “I saw that your head was turned to the side and you were quiet.”

“I’m not Zhang Fei,” murmured Twain.

“Who’s Zhang Fei?” Kerslake was confused.

Next to him, Dunn explained to him, “He was a very powerful general in ancient China. Legend had it that he slept with his eyes opened.”

“Oh, I see. Then what were you thinking about?”

“I’ll tell you when we’re back.” Twain looked out of the window at the night view, becoming increasingly familiar as they quickly entered the Nottingham district. “Stay back after the team is dismissed.”

The two men nodded.

The bus bypassed the glittering city center and drove straight into the Wilford training base, where the players were dismissed. They went home or somewhere else to have fun. It was already late in the evening. Bars and some red-light venues were lively.

Twain did not ask what the players were going to do. He just reminded them to be on time for tomorrow’s training in the afternoon as they were dismissed.

After everyone left, Twain walked back to his office with his two assistant managers.

Twain turned on the lights and took a videotape of the season’s games from Dunn—the Forest team would record every game, which was different from the televised broadcast footage. They did not take the viewers’ feelings into account. They only recorded for their own use. With the game shot from the coach’s point of view, it was not meant for those ordinary fans to watch.

After putting the videotape into the VCR and waiting briefly, the image of the game appeared on the television screen.

“There’s nothing to watch in the front portion,” Twain said as he pressed the fast forward button on the remote control.

It was not until he saw Ribéry shoot the goal that completely locked in the victory that he released the button and rewound.

“Here, watch closely.”

He repeated the scene of the goal several times and then asked, “What do you think?”

Dunn stared at the television screen wordlessly, and Kerslake opened his mouth several times but did not say anything.

“We didn’t let Ribéry go to the middle before this game, did we?” Twain asked. He did not like to open up a topic as soon as he started a discussion. He liked to slowly steer and let the other party in the conversation to speak out themselves.

Kerslake shook his head. “No. The tactics for this game are no different from what we use normally.”

“Bale’s play stemmed entirely from his remarkable individual form,” Dunn added at the side.

“The little monkey has been in good form during training these days,” Kerslake continued, “because you’re back.”

Twain smiled at the last remark. He was well aware that Bale worshipped him.

“Bale’s play was a nice surprise for me,” said Twain. “His hyperactivity caused Ribéry to lose his flank position, and he was forced to go to the middle.”

The two assistant managers nodded in agreement. They saw it.

“Initially, I thought Ribéry went to the middle because he had no other choice. I didn’t think...” said Twain as he pointed to the frozen television screen. “Bale assisted Ribéry to make that goal. This goal brought up a lot of questions as to how it happened. Why was it from this position? Why did Bale assist Ribéry, rather than assist van Nistelrooy or Eastwood?”

Twain threw these questions at his two partners.

Dunn was in deep contemplation again. Kerslake also stared at the television screen. Although the video was paused, the entire process of that goal was imprinted in their minds. It was clear in their minds without the need to watch the video again.

“Regarding the decline in Ribéry’s state this season, do you have any thoughts?”

When Dunn heard Twain say this, he looked up. “Ribéry and Bale were both unfettered.”

Twain clasped his hands together and laughed. “Dunn is smarter. That’s right, that’s what I’m getting at.” He immediately revealed everything about the issue he had pondered on the bus.

He listed the upsides and downsides of doing it.

Kerslake was excited when he initially heard the upsides and wanted to put this idea into practice. But after he listened to the downsides, he suddenly became quiet.

“This is a double-edged sword,” Twain said. “I think it’s time for the Forest team’s tactics to change. We can’t stick to the previous set. Our strength and goals were different then, and our tactical ideas would obviously have to be different. The two flanks work well together, but if we only rely on our flanks to soar, we cannot go beyond England for the rest of our lives. Why did we lose to Fulham? Because our flanks were restricted and our offense in the middle was still not fully formed. We had no other way when we faced our opponent’s tight defense. Luckily it was just the Fulham team. If we were dealing with a strong European team in a crucial Champions League game and we lost, you and I would have had a hard time.”

The two men nodded repeatedly at his words.

“I used to think too much ball possession was useless. Now I have to make a change. We used to be an underdog team and our opponents were better than us. We had to huddle and defend. We could only score through counterattacks. Under these circumstances, too much ball possession would only slow down the speed of our attacks and was not conducive to our counterattacks. Our situation is reversed now. Look at our game with Fulham.” Twain attached great importance to the first defeat of the new

season. He often used that game to illustrate the problem. "Our opponent withdrew and defended. They waited for the opportunity to hit us from behind. And our team was pressing on them and had absolute control of the ball. Isn't that ironic?"

Having said that, he came to a sudden stop and just stared at the television screen in a daze.

Twain suddenly remembered the time he was in Kenny Burns' pub talking to Des Walker and Ian Bowyer about his theory on the "futility of ball possession."

At that time, he had just transferred. He was an unfortunate man facing an unknown fate and could only take one step at a time. He impulsively pushed his new theory to them in the pub. Now that he thought about it, he did not consider what he would do if his suggestion had been rejected at that time. His luck was surprisingly good; everyone accepted it.

Those coaches, Des Walker and Ian Bowyer, were completely jolted by his outstanding speech and did not consider too many details.

What kind of real ability and knowledge did he have at that time? Not a d*mn bit! Besides being able to bullsh*t, he was only a hardcore fan who had nothing better to do than to blindly learn by watching the games. He did not understand anything until he read the notes that Dunn had left behind. He only knew how to put his head down and tackle things head on. And he actually managed to break through.

Should I say I was blessed?

Ah, life...

A dumbass could also become a professional football team manager. A young boy who should have had a bright future ahead of him but lost his life in a fans' riot... Destiny, if it does exist, must be rotten to the core.

Michael's answer to his questioning in the pub was now clear in retrospect. He could still clearly recall it. But that man was gone now. He had left this country that brought sadness to him, far away from the sport that he once worshipped but hurt him the deepest.

"What the f**k are you talking about, Mr. Twain? Of course we love winning and we would also love for the team to return to the Premier League after this season. What we would love the most is for the team to be the next season's f**king champion in the damn league, and to be the king of Europe the season after that!"

Apart from not getting the league title, we almost became the motherf**king king of Europe. Do you see all this, Michael?

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"Tony?" Kerslake called out when he saw Twain suddenly lost in thought.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Where were we?" Twain snapped out of his reverie and met the two men's concerned gazes.

"You said we should have a lot of ball possession in the game," Dunn prompted.

“Well, yes. It’s time for us to have more ball possession than our opponents. Although I’m reluctant to, I have to accept this reality. We’ve been treated like a strong team in the league tournament by our opponents. We can’t expect otherwise anymore. So, we have to change some things from the past: ideas, tactics. It’s time to re-emphasize ball possession.”

The team’s status and mentality had changed, so the thinking had to change as well.

The theory that ball possession was ineffective was no longer applicable to Nottingham Forest anymore. Previously under the guidance of Twain’s tactical thinking, Nottingham Forest was used to the fast-paced competition, and even their blunders were fast-paced. But now they had to learn to slow down their pace. They needed to have a solution for when they were dragged into a quagmire by their opponents and could not accelerate. Otherwise, Nottingham Forest would always be a dark horse and disruptor.

They needed to learn how to control the ball and how to rely on their own ball control to mobilize the opponent’s defense so that the opponent would follow their pace, all of which were new subjects to Twain’s Forest team.

When they heard Twain say that, the two assistant managers looked at each other. They knew what this decision meant. The training program that the team had always adhered to would be revised. It was not a simple matter of standing in front of the team to say a few words of encouragement. To play a smooth and beautiful coordinated offense in the game would cost continuously repeated drills on the training ground. This would require the hard work of the entire coaching unit behind the scenes.

The Forest team’s coaching unit had long been used to letting Twain to appoint the policies, and then they would refine and implement the specific work models.

Dunn nodded. “I also think it’s time for the team to make a change.”

Kerslake agreed as well. “Ribéry’s position is just a start. This is a transformation of the entire team.”

“We don’t have to worry too much yet.” Twain waved his hand when he saw that his two partners agreed with his ideas. “Such massive transformation has to be handled slowly, we can’t rush. I don’t want the transformation to be a big shock to the team. The results are certain to fluctuate, and that’s fine. But we have to make sure we don’t lose the Champions League, whether it’s the qualifier for next season or the title of this season!” He clenched his fist.

“Okay, I’m sorry to have delayed you for so long. Come back tomorrow morning and we’ll discuss with our colleagues in the coaching unit to see how we should make the changes. Go home and don’t make your wife wait too long.” He got up and patted Kerslake on the shoulder.

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On the way back into the night, Dunn, who was walking with Twain, suddenly asked, “What were you thinking about just now when you were lost in thought?”

“Just thinking of the days when I first came here.” Twain did not use the poor excuse of “nothing” to avoid the past. There was nothing to be ashamed of during that time.

“Is it unbearable to recollect? Dunn saw that Twain was frowning when he was immersed in his memories.

When he heard Dunn’s question, Twain turned to look at him and then smiled. “No. To me, there may be no better memories than of those days.”

“Even if you win more championships?”

“It can’t match it.” Twain shook his head with determination. “Dunn, a thing like a championship title, if I want to win it, there will be plenty for the take. I can win so many I’m tired of them. But there are some things and some people that once they are lost, you’re never going to get them back.” He looked up at the bright moon in the night sky.

Chapter 487: The Reserve Team

Before the day’s training began the next morning, Tang En called for a meeting with the other coaches in the team. He wanted to discuss the matter of reforming their strategies. Tang En related to everyone about what he and the two assistant managers had discussed. Everyone felt differently about the matter.

Some felt that Forest Team’s previous strategy was very successful and did not need to be reformed. Losing to Fulham FC was only an accident. The loss of a single match could not be used as a reference. On the other hand, there were also others who felt that a reformation was needed, just not right now. After all, the team had just gone through a period of turmoil; some stability would be important at this point.

Tang En had also considered the various objections himself. He did not use his own position as the Head of the Sports Department to pressure his peers. He answered their doubts one by one and explained his own thoughts.

While a single match loss could be said to be a mere accident, there was always a certainty behind it. Things did not occur without a reason. There had to be a reason for its appearance. After all, “what is reasonable is real, and that which is real is reasonable.” Their loss to Fulham was of course somewhat attributed to manager Tang En’s arrogance in underestimating their opponents. However, when Tang En stopped taking them lightly, he found himself without a different set of strategies to break through the opponents. Perhaps Tang En could have the team be more alert and go all-out the next time they meet such an opponent. That way, they could use the overwhelming difference in their abilities to end the match. But what if they met with a team at about the same level of capabilities as them? What would they do then?

When the time came for them to have to face that, raising their alertness and doing their best might not be enough for a victory. A manager’s wisdom was not solely for the purpose of reminding everyone not to underestimate their opponents.

Regarding the question of changing the strategy now or later, Tang En felt that he did not mind some more unrest since it was already so unsettled currently. He would rather have the terrible things happen all at once than have it come around more frequently. Furthermore, a reformation did not necessarily

mean that unrest was inevitable. While there would surely be some ups and downs, there would be no harm to the foundation of the team if they managed it well. This was only a strategic adjustment, not a major cleansing of the lineup.

At last, he managed to convince everyone. They agreed that it was necessary for the team to change.

But how were they going to proceed with the reform?

That was Tang En's homework for the coaches.

"We have all the time to do this. We can proceed slowly; I'm in no rush," Tang En said. "This is a massive undertaking, so we can't rush it. I have a beautiful picture in my mind, but I need everyone's hard work to help me complete it!"

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The directive for a change in the team became fixed. With a goal, things became much easier. Everyone's job was to take steps to reach their goal.

Dunn had a strong operational capability. With him around, Tang En did not need to worry about such matters. The team was training every day as usual. After winning a match, everyone's morale was high. The dreadful situation before had already passed. Even if the next opponent they welcomed was a strong team like Chelsea on their home grounds, they believed that the future held something wonderful.

Although their next opponents were Chelsea, Tang En did not spend his whole day holed up in his office doing research on them. It was simply unnecessary to specifically analyze Mourinho's Chelsea. This was not because Tang En was underestimating his opponents again, Tang En was simply too familiar with the team. In fact, he believed that it was a team that all the other opponents in the English Premier League were also extremely familiar with. Mourinho's wild and arrogant personality, while bringing him success in his career, also brought him tremendous attention. Everyone hoped to defeat that arrogant man, just as they all hoped to defeat Tony Twain's football team. Furthermore, there was an important difference between Chelsea and Forest Team: Chelsea was extremely rich. The mentality of viewing the rich with enmity could be found anywhere. So, every team became particularly enthused when it came to fighting Chelsea. It was not difficult to understand why Reading FC would be so crazed about beating Chelsea back in the world Tang En lived in.

Thanks to Tang En, nothing happened in the match that just happened between Chelsea and Reading FC. Čech very peacefully guarded the goal until the end of the match. Chelsea took away an easy win with a score of 3:1.

Instead of researching his opponents, Tang En took out time to watch a reserve team match instead.

After George Wood got suspended, Tang En placed him in the reserve team. On the record, he made it sound as if he was punishing Wood for his rashness. In truth, however, it was to prevent Wood's condition from deteriorating from not having any matches to play in. Usually, Wood would train with the First Team. When it came to the weekends they needed to go for matches, he joined the reserve team instead.

The matches for the reserve team oftentimes took place a day earlier than First Team matches. On the day before their match with Chelsea, the team only trained for half a day. Tang En, who was free in the afternoon, dragged Dunn along with him to City Ground to watch the reserve team's match.

In the first half, Tang En discovered that Wood was obediently glued to his position as a defensive midfielder, doing the usual job of defending.

In this match, the opponents of Forest's reserve team were Chelsea's reserve team.

Forest's abilities were not as strong as Chelsea's. However, because of Wood's presence, the attacks from Chelsea's reserve team were of little threat. However, Tang En was shaking his head as he watched from the outside.

"It shouldn't be like this," he told Dunn, who was standing by his side. "If we let Wood continue to do this, it'll be no use for him to continue to play on the reserve team."

"Are you intending to talk to McParland?" Dunn pointed to the reserve team coach sitting at the manager's seat.

Dunn and Tang En did not inform the reserve team coach of their intent to watch the match, nor did they watch from the manager's seats. Instead, they chose to watch from the spectators' stands, which were from a higher viewpoint.

There were not many people watching the reserve team's match. Most of those who came were hardcore fans. The two stood in a corner of the stands and did not attract much attention.

"I'll have to say something. If this goes on, it'll be a waste of a training opportunity for Wood."

When halftime arrived, Tang En and Dunn walked off the stands and went to the locker room. There, he asked for the reserve team coach, McParland.

"You're here, Tony?" As Tang En did not greet him prior, McParland was not expecting him to come to watch the match.

"We've watched half of it." Tang En nodded. "Ian, push George slightly forward in the second half. Give him more opportunities to participate in the offense and tell him there's no need to defend."

Ian McParland was surprised. "We're not letting him defend?"

Dunn supplemented from the side, saying, "Tony wants to see George's performance in the offensive."

McParland understood what he meant and asked, "Should it also be the same for the next three matches?"

"Yes."

"Alright, I understand. Uh, do you want to go in and say a few words?" The reserve team coach pointed to the locker room.

Tang En shook his head with a smile. "No need. You're the boss here."

McParland was elated to hear Tang En say this. He extended another enthusiastic invite. "Why don't you watch from the manager's seats instead?"

Dunn shook his head again. "It's good watching from the angle at the spectators' stands too. Thank you, Ian."

"Go ahead with your work, Ian." Tang En let him return to the locker room. Then he and Dunn went back to the spectators' stands.

This time, however, they were recognized by some fans on the stands, and everyone surrounded them asking for signatures. Tony Twain was a star. It had nothing to do with Dunn, so he slipped out stealthily.

"I would really like to know the kind of thoughts manager Dunn is having right now." All of a sudden, a woman's voice sounded from behind him.

Without turning back, Dunn already knew who it was saying it. A woman speaking in Mandarin? Who else could it be other than the reporter, Tang Jing?

"Why did Ms. Tang come to watch a reserve team match?" Dunn asked with his head cocked.

Tang Jing stood in front of him, smiling as she said, "Because the two of you are here."

"How did you know we would be here?"

"Because George Wood is here." She pointed to the field below. "Everyone on earth knows how concerned manager Tony Twain is about his beloved general. It was announced that this was a punishment for George Wood's rash behavior. But in truth, he's afraid of Wood's conditions deteriorating because he couldn't play for eight straight matches, no?"

"This isn't the time for an interview, Ms. Tang."

"Can't we even chat casually?" Tang Jing showed him her hands. "Look. I didn't bring anything. No reporter's ID, recorder pen, camera, or notebook. I even bought a ticket to get in." She took out a football ticket from her pocket and waved it.

Faced with such persistent people, Dunn would be unable to frighten her into backing down even if he purposely put on a cold face. So, he asked, somewhat helplessly, "Why are you so curious about Tony?"

"Manager Dunn, you're wrong. I'm not interested in him."

Dunn looked up at her.

"I am interested in you." Tang Jing smiled gleefully as she pointed to Dunn, who was surprised.

Dunn decided to respond with silence. That was a difficult topic.

Tang Jing did not back down because of Dunn's silence. She continued, saying, "although the club specially called for a press conference, because of you, to answer everyone's questions, why do I still feel that the matter is not as simple as you have said? An average Chinese man became a member of the managerial team so quickly just because he had so fortunately met an English professional manager over the internet? I am very curious."

“Curiosity killed the cat.” Tang En’s voice abruptly sounded, causing Tang Jing to flinch. It had really startled her.

“Are you threatening me, Mr. Tony Twain?” Tang Jing retorted with furrowed brows. Coming around, she was a little annoyed by her own shakiness.

Tang En laughed as he waved his hands. “No, no. Please don’t misunderstand, Ms. Tang. This is not the mob drama, The Godfather. A woman’s intuition can be a very scary thing, right Dunn?” Tang En said, looking at him. The fans by his side had already dispersed. There were only the three of them now.

Dunn was not sure about what Tang En had up his sleeves, so he kept quiet.

“You’re right, Ms. Tang. This man, Dunn, indeed has a secret. And it is an enormous one,” Tang En said secretly to Tang Jing. “But this thing can’t be publicized. Lean a little closer, I’ll whisper it to you.”

Tang Jing felt strange about having to lean closer when there was practically no one in the area. But her curiosity compelled her to obediently place her head beside Tang En’s mouth.

Taking a deep breath, Tang En said, “So, it’s Head and Shoulders...”

“You!” Tang Jing immediately leaped back when she realized she had been deceived, her shame turning into rage.

Tang En, the rogue, laughed even more delightedly. “I’d said that curiosity killed the cat. If I was really a gangster, it wouldn’t be as simple as getting a whiff. You’re really a naive woman who trusts easily.”

“Mr. Tony Twain, would you pay attention to your own image!” Tang Jing said this sternly with a sense of righteousness.

“Do I still have any image to preserve?” Tang En shrugged with open hands. “Don’t you, the media, report that I am an ungentlemanly b*stard demon with horns on my head, wings and tail on my back, sharp teeth and who spews cruel and poisonous words?”

Upon hearing Tang En say so, Tang Jing was momentarily stunned. “That—that is only the evaluation of the English media, not me.”

“Doesn’t that newspaper office of yours do nothing but reprint overseas media all the time?”

“I’ve never done that! Every word I’ve written was typed by me!” Tang Jing could not stand being doubted of her professionalism. She was constantly in an environment filled with doubt of her; entering the newspaper office and coming to England for the long-term, she was always secretly thought of by the others to have achieved it because of her father. No matter what she did, it always seemed as if she depended on her father while her own efforts and talent went completely unseen.

“Mr. Tony Twain, if you’re angry about my insolence the first time we had met, I can apologize to you! But bearing a grudge like that, are you still acting like a man?” Tang Jing angrily rebuked Tang En and turned to stomp away furiously.

Dunn finally opened his mouth from beside him. “Hey, Tony. That wasn’t very nice? No matter what, she’s a woman...”

Tang En glanced at him. "You should thank me. I saved you."

"That's another matter..."

"Oh, oh. You couldn't watch anymore?" Tang En asked in return. "You were feeling sorry for her? As a man, you wanted to take care of her?"

With his verbal skills beneath his opponent's, Dunn decided to keep quiet.

"Hey, Dunn. Shouldn't you consider love?"

Dunn continued to be silent.

"If you don't say anything, I'll take it as a silent agreement. But it's nothing really. As the saying goes, which young lady wouldn't yearn for love, and which young man wouldn't think of romance. Although you're already past the age of a youth..."

"I'm going, too." Dunn made a movement to leave, and Tang En hurriedly grabbed hold of him.

"Alright, alright. I won't say any more if you're upset. But I'm not holding a grudge against her. It's just that every time I see her gleeful face, I want to cut her down and make it impossible for her to throw her arrogance around me. Hey, Dunn. Do you think I'm someone who is especially dark on the inside?"

"It's no use telling me that. Why don't you tell it to her..."

Tang En grinned at Dunn.

Dunn also noticed he wasn't acting like himself. He coughed and went quiet.

"To be honest, if that woman would stop assuming that haughty air, she'd be a real looker..." Tang En said with a rub to his chin.

"The second half is starting," Dunn reminded him coldly.

The two stopped their unhelpful discussion and put their focus back onto the match.

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As expected, George Wood was pushed to the front in the second half of the match. He was already close to becoming an attacking midfielder.

McParland was not allowing him to defend, but he was still rather uncomfortable with the position he was in. He did not know what he should be doing, or how he should do it. Many times, he could not help himself but retreat to take part in the defense. Very quickly, however, he would be yelled at by McParland to move up.

After over ten minutes of discomfort, George Wood finally realized that he could do nothing but participate in the offense. As a result, Tang En watched happily from the stands as Wood experimented with passing balls to his teammates in front. Although the intentions of his first pass were too obvious and got intercepted midway, it was a good sign.

McParland started hollering at the sidelines again, asking Wood to pass the ball in a more covert manner. The second time, Wood managed to pass the ball accurately to the forward, a direct pass that ripped the defensive line apart.

It was a pity that such a good pass was wasted by his teammates.

Outside the field, Tang En felt as regretful as Wood having missed a goal.

“He has the capability to pass the ball forward,” Dunn said from the side.

Tang En nodded. “You’ve noticed that too? In the last season, both his assists involved this sort of abrupt forward passes in the middle. I think that he would be unsuitable for the wings. Some people are naturally suitable to develop in the wings, while others needed to be put in a broader area, so they have more freedom. George belongs to the latter group. Demi was right. This boy has talent in the aspects of attacking. It’s just buried deeply. Even he himself was not aware of it.”

Following that, Wood’s forward passes increased in frequency. However, due to the crowd of people in the middle and his obvious intentions when passing, his rates of success were not high.

But Tang En did not care about that. What he saw was Wood daring to take the initiative in passing forward. If the lad did not even have the confidence for that, there would be no hope in getting him to perform at his full potential. Having such thoughts was a positive sign.

This was what Tang En was really hoping to see. He was not expecting Wood’s performance today to be like Pirlo or Redondo, directing the team’s match pace with ease and dealing with it all so smoothly.

Tang En and Dunn left before the end of the match. They had seen what they wanted to, and there was still a tough battle awaiting them tomorrow.

“George!” McParland called after Wood. “Good job!” He gave a thumbs up to the First Team captain.

Wood was not as satisfied with his own performance and furrowed his brows. “I don’t think it was any good.”

“It’s progress as long as you’re moving forward, George.” Wood was representative of the team’s Youth Training standards. The coaches at various levels were all especially caring of this genius footballer.

“Rome wasn’t built in a day. Similarly, our future midfield all-rounder isn’t going to be shaped in a single match.” McParland proudly patted Wood’s strong shoulders.

It was no exaggeration to say that these shoulders carried the glorious future of Nottingham Forest.

Just like how AC Milan had Maldini, Real Madrid had Raúl González, Barcelona had Messi, and Liverpool had Gerrard, it was hoped that Nottingham Forest in the future could be proud of George Wood.

You’re our representative, George.

Ian McParland did not say this out loud, but in his heart, he truly believed so.

Chapter 488: Other than Offense, It’s Still Offense

Tony Twain had forged an indissoluble bond with Chelsea since he became the manager of the Forest team. The Chelsea manager, Mourinho and he were considered the two most idiosyncratic managers still active in the current football world. Although the media exaggerated a bit, it was pretty spot on.

Subsequently, as soon as the two of them appeared together in the Premier League, they would be brought together for comparison. Under such circumstances, it was difficult to avoid any relationship even if they wanted to.

The outside world said Twain and Mourinho were archenemies. They assumed that from the way they both ground their teeth every time they played against each other. But if that was truly the case, how would one explain the fact that Mourinho came forward to help Tony Twain's player testify in court to solve his work permit issue?

Twain never gave much consideration to his relationship with Mourinho because thinking about it would not help him win a game. It was not as if their relationship was so good that he could call Mourinho to throw a game. And why would he be afraid of Mourinho even if he were an enemy?

Besides, Mourinho was not a beautiful woman. What was the point of him killing his brain cells over worrying about his relationship with him?

He did not care what he and Mourinho really were. He only cared about his team's record against Chelsea.

Since Nottingham Forest's return to the English Premier League, it had maintained an unbeaten record against Chelsea, which gave the Forest team a psychological advantage. Last season at this home ground, the Forest team did not lose even under such difficult and risky circumstances. They eventually relied on Bale's brilliant free kick to break through and score, which turned the tide.

Mourinho's team rampaged through the English Premier League. No matter what game they played, there were no longer any rivals who had not been beaten by him before. His only sore point was Nottingham Forest under Tony Twain's command.

This was a good opportunity for him. Since the Forest team's main defensive midfielder, George Wood, was banned, and thus the midfield barrier was missing, Chelsea's attacking lineup was unhindered.

Lampard was finally able to play undisturbed. His plug-ins and long shots were quite menacing.

Twain was aware that his team's weak point was the defensive midfielder. No matter how hard Sun Jihai played, he could not make up for a weakness in ability. If Wenger knew how to make use of that, then Mourinho definitely also knew. Twain decided to give Sun Jihai a break.

However, Twain did not want to his opponent to know. The team had a few days of closed-door training at the last minute. Luckily, the outside world did not think about Twain's semi-annual "date" with Mourinho.

It was not until an hour before the game, when the media received each team's list of starters, that everyone was surprised.

John Motson picked up a piece of paper and fluttered it at the camera. “We’ve just received the starting list for both teams. What were we just analyzing just now? Mark?” He looked next to him at the commentator, Mark Lawrenson, who was doing game commentary with him.

Mark Lawrenson touched the newly smooth skin above his lip, having just lost his mustache in a bet against Motson, and said, “I think Twain will stick to his defensive strategy in this game on the home ground. After all, his team is in a bad situation now. Without George Wood, the Forest team’s midfield will struggle to stop Chelsea’s Lampard and others from attacking. Making the young defensive line — made up of Piqué and Kompany — directly confront the Chelsea’s attacking players is just too much pressure.”

Motson nodded. “You’re correct based on the analysis of the pre-match situation, Mark. But if Tony Twain didn’t pull some kind of surprise, he wouldn’t be Tony Twain. We don’t know his specific tactics yet, but from this starting list, we can see that defense is definitely not what he wants.” Motson picked up the list. “The goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, center-backs, Piqué and Kompany, left-back Gareth Bale, right-back, Chimbonda.” He stopped to glance at Mark Lawrenson. “In the midfield, Franck Ribéry, Ashley Young, as well as Albertini and van der Vaart!”

Lawrenson raised an eyebrow.

“The forwards are van Nistelrooy and Eastwood,” Motson continued.

“Gareth Bale is an offensive full-back. His defense is not as good as Leighton Baines’. The defensive midfielder, Sun, was not listed, but rather the Dutchman who is far stronger in offense than defense,” Lawrenson analyzed. “Tony Twain wants to attack Chelsea on his own home ground? Gosh, this game will be a record. This is the first time Manager Twain chose to attack in a game against Chelsea! Furthermore, it’s on his home ground!” Lawrenson mocked.

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“What’s going on here?” Mourinho frowned as he took the other team’s starting list from his assistant. “I thought that coward would be playing defensive tactics again.”

“Evidently Twain wants to play offense with us on his home ground,” His assistant manager, Steve Clarke, said.

Mourinho glanced at him. Any fool could see that Twain was going to attack.

But was the problem that simple?

“Twain is a very cunning man. Something’s not quite right.” Baltemar Brito, another assistant manager, frowned. “Would he deliberately make us think they are going to attack to make us let our guard down?”

This time, Mourinho glanced at the Brazilian. Do they think we’d assume they’re going to attack so we’d let our guard down?

However, Brito was right about one thing: Twain was a very cunning man. Things should not be so simple.

“In any case, we were prepared to use offense to deal with their tight defense. It’s nothing if they decide to press ahead and play. If they want to go head to head with us, they will only have more loopholes.” Mourinho threw the Forest team’s starting list aside and turned to walk into the locker room. It was time to prepare the players for the game.

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On the other side of the field, Twain was already giving his men the day’s task.

“We always retreat to the back of the field, wait for our opponent to attack, and then wait for an opportunity for a sneak attack when we play at home. Does that frustrate you?”

There was a silence as the team processed the boss’s random question. Eventually, Eastwood stood and shook his head. “We’re not frustrated, chief. We enjoy winning.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Twain waved his hand. “I was very displeased whenever I saw our opponents strutting around and pressing on us on our own ground. How could energetic lads like yourselves bear it?”

Someone laughed mischievously.

“We should look and behave like a home team on our home ground. We’re not afraid of Chelsea because they have never won against us. Your job in this game is to score goals and score more goals. Let those Chelsea boys see that we can remain unbeaten by them without relying on defense alone! Attack! And attack! Other than the f**king offense, it’s still offense!”

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While the players of both teams lined up on the sidelines for the media to photograph, Twain and his coaching staff were already seated in the coaches’ seats.

“Tony, do you think depending on offense alone can stop Chelsea?” Kerslake asked..

“Don’t tell me there’s another way we can do it? Defense?” Twain asked.

Beside them, Dunn helped Twain answer, “Attack is the only solution to resolve the crisis. I don’t think Chelsea’s offense is that powerful. We’re not necessarily going to lose by competing in scoring goals.”

Twain smiled at Kerslake. “I’m on the same page too. Assimilating Shevchenko and Ballack with the team did not go well. Mourinho went around a circle before he realized that last season’s lineup could be trusted. Now all of England is saying that without George Wood, our defense is a weak spot for everyone to exploit. I want to show those people why ‘offense is the best defense.’ Hey, David, aren’t you looking forward to it?”

“Looking forward to what?”

“Looking forward to the scene where we press all out and go crazy on offense.”

Kerslake looked up at the sky, as if such a scene was presented in the blue sky.

“It’s really a little hard to imagine. We always seem to be repeatedly on defensive counterattack”

“Then you’d better take a good look at this game today.”

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Just like the analysis from the starting list, Nottingham Forest did not intend to continue with defensive counterattack at its own home ground.

The team captain, Albertini beat out the Chelsea’s captain, Terry in the coin toss. Nottingham Forest made use of their ball possession and began an attack on Chelsea after the kick-off.

Unlike in the past, the Forest team did not launch a quick counterattack. Instead, they kept the football under their feet for a while, looking for a weakness in the opponent’s defensive line.

It was rare for the Forest team to control the ball like this.

After the Forest team moved the ball around for a while, they suddenly launched an offensive. Albertini passed the ball straight to van der Vaart when he had the chance to receive the ball in the middle. However, with his back against the Chelsea player, Essien, van der Vaart found that it was not easy to turn around, so he returned the football to Albertini.

Just as everyone thought Albertini would pass the ball again, he suddenly kicked for a long shot from nearly thirty meters away from the goal.

“Demetrio Albertini!”

Thought the ball was a little far from the goal, Čech did not ignore it. His intuition told him that the shot was dangerous.

“Petr Čech! Beautiful save!”

The Czech Republic national goalkeeper flew to the right and used a single punch to strike out the football.

However, it did not go out. The football did not fly toward the sidelines or straight out of the end line. The ball flew towards the flank after Čech hit it. Ashley Young stepped in front of Ashley Cole and intercepted the ball. Cole was smart enough to choose not to pounce on the ball, but to stay ahead of Young’s way forward, instead.

Everyone knew Ashley Young was king of assists in the English Premier League last season and players like Cole did not dare to be careless. His passing ability was excellent. If there was a slightest bit of inattention, he would pass the football into the penalty area.

Even though Cole was already being careful, Ashley Young still managed to catch a chance. Instead of breaking through with the ball, he directly passed the ball. He kicked quickly and covertly. Before Ashley Cole could even react, the football had flown past his face.

“Head it out!” Čech had not finished speaking and Terry had already jumped up and headed the football away from van Nistelrooy.

When van der Vaart saw the football fly toward him, he did not hesitate to widen his stance, take aim, kick his left leg, and level his body to volley.

It was clever of the Dutchman to choose to shoot directly because the shot was sudden enough to be hidden. The penalty area was filled with players. If the ball accidentally brushed against someone, it was likely to change direction. It could go out of the end line or directly into the goal. Furthermore, with Čech's showing off in the crowd, his line of sight was bound to be blocked, which would affect his judgment on the direction of the ball.

As long as it held down, it would be...

There was an eruption of loud cheers at the City Ground stadium, as if they had already seen the football hit the net. But this time, they were wrong. Čech still made the right call under such difficult circumstances.

Van der Vaart's shot did not touch anyone and flew straight to the goal. After Čech stepped slightly to the left, he found that the football had appeared in his field of vision. He immediately leapt out without any hesitation. At a height of 1.97 meters, the goliath stuck his hands out and firmly grasped the flying football from the air.

"He pressed it on the goal line! Nottingham Forest fans were joyous for nothing!"

Van der Vaart held his head in regret when he saw that Čech had stopped his shot through the cracks in the crowd.

"He's indeed a world-class goalkeeper, comparable to Buffon!" Motson exclaimed. He did not know what else he could say. Čech's performance with this shot was perfection itself.

Twain saw the scene off the field and considered what could have happened to the Czech Republic goalkeeper. But I had sacrificed Paul Gerrard and saved him instead.

He does not have to wear a tank helmet to goalkeep now and he does not have to worry about his form slipping due to injury.

I'm really the living Lei Feng of the new era, a selfless model citizen.

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"Even though they did not score, Nottingham Forest's offense has made the Chelsea players nervous. They've gotten used to the opponent pulling back in the back half of the field and counter-attacking. Now it's time to change the impression."

Mourinho turned his head from his seat to look at Twain, who was also seated in the coaches' bench.

The Forest team had changed a lot this season. He could no longer look at his opponent in the same way as before.

"José, Twain wants to play offense with us." His assistant coach, Clarke, could see it.

"Then let's play." Mourinho shrugged his shoulders. He did not care.

"Do we want to pull back for our defense and play their counterattack?"

Mourinho glanced at him. "What for? Did we ever withdraw to defend when we played against this opponent?"

Clarke shook his head, "Never."

"That's right. Our original plan is to attack, and it just so happens that they want to attack us. I know what that bastard Twain has in mind. They can't defend against our offense, so they want to attack instead. If we pull back due to their offense, then we would have fallen for his ploy. We are not going to withdraw. If they attack, then we will attack. We'll see whose offense is stronger!" Mourinho absolutely could not stand to be pressed back by Twain and let this sort of thing happen. Tony Twain was not simply an ordinary league opponent to him.

He didn't just want to win this game. He wanted to win it beautifully. Otherwise, it would give this foul-mouthed guy an excuse.

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Twain was not worried at all by the clash between Chelsea and Nottingham Forest. He simply relaxed on the coaching bench.

"Coach Twain doesn't seem worried about his team's fragile defense." Motson lamented, after seeing Twain cross and swing his legs.

"John, you're right. He does not consider at all whether he can hang on with any of his defenses because it would be useless even if he did. He chose, unexpectedly, to attack in this game and put pressure on Chelsea with offense to make his opponent pull back. This would achieve his purpose for defense." Mark Lawrenson froze for a moment, suddenly realizing something. "At the end of the day, this man still wants to defend deep down! He's still a conservative utilitarian coach!"

Lawrenson made no secret of his dislike of this man.

Motson, who also had no intention of improving his perception of Twain, laughed. "But for now, he has succeeded, hasn't he?"

"Succeeded? Other than an EFL Cup title, has he ever won any of the other tournaments? He did not even win a friendly tournament like the Amsterdam Tournament. John, I don't know where you get the word 'success' from."

Motson shrugged and did not continue to tangle with this topic.

Bringing a once magnificent team that was close to demotion to England's third-tier league and plagued by a financial crisis back to the English Premier League, getting to the top in their first season of the UEFA Europa League, and becoming the Champions League runner-up the second season; if these did not count as successes, then countless professional managers in the world would be considered useless.

The BBC's arrangement was also very interesting. Whenever there was a Nottingham Forest game, and the BBC had the right to broadcast at the same time, the pairing of the commentators would always be "pro-Twain" John Motson and "anti-Twain" Mark Lawrenson. Gary Lineker and Alan Hansen would occasionally come on as guests, but only rarely.

If Twain were to hear Mark Lawrenson's evaluation of him, he would agree with the evaluation of him by his "enemy."

He did not think that he was successful now. The reason was simple. He already had experienced four seasons, and all he had gotten was an EFL Cup title, which was of dubious worth. On top of that, he was always one step away from real success. In Twain's heart, evaluating his success was definitely not based on the tactical accomplishments, the discovery of young players, and the affinity with his players. He valued these as results. Only a championship title would prove his success.

Chapter 489: Reciprocity

The two teams that played more reservedly within the English Premier League, Chelsea and Nottingham Forest, chose otherwise when they came across each other. They launched into attacking. Their openness in strategy and play greatly surprised the audience watching the match and had them cheering in excitement.

They discovered that it was spectacular whenever Chelsea and Nottingham Forest went out on the attack against each other. In truth, neither party was lacking good players in their offense. Everyone's lack of impressions was only caused by the teams' strategic choices.

What kind of carefreeness did the forwards feel when they no longer had to frequently dash between the two penalty zones?

"Drogba! Long shot! Edwin van der Sar makes another beautiful save! With the two teams clashing head-on, their two goalkeepers are going to be busy."

"The ball is being passed in front of Chelsea's penalty zone. Rafael van der Vaart passes it to the side. Gareth Bale comes up and receives the ball. He's faced with Chelsea's right-back, Boulahrouz. It's a new opponent!"

Despite how famous they appeared to be, Bale was not at all afraid of Chelsea. When it came to playing against Chelsea, his psychological advantage was greater than anyone else's because the battle where he first came to light was also a League match against Chelsea.

He did not care about whoever it was that dashed in front of him. Whether it was Paulo Ferreira, Carvalho, or the new guy, Boulahrouz, he only had one thought in his mind: to break through and then pass to the center.

Boulahrouz had become famous when he successfully marked down Ronaldinho in the match against Barcelona. He was not worried about facing Bale. Would a mere child be as strong as Ronaldinho?

If Bale wanted to break through, he would put himself right in Bale's path. If Bale kept going forward, they were guaranteed to collide.

"Bale!" Ribéry shouted from the side. He had noticed Boulahrouz's intentions. He could not let Bale rush into it. "Pass the ball to me!"

It was as if Bale did not hear it. He appeared timid when he was off the field, but he seemed to transform into an old veteran of a hundred battles when he was on it.

Bale pulled the ball towards the outside, running alongside the side lines. Boulahrouz saw his movement and was delighted. Bringing the ball to this sort of dead area, I would like to see how you're going to break through this!

The Netherlander full-back moved his body to block the inner route and then stretched out his leg to steal the ball. He had it mapped out. Bale would surely avoid nudging the ball inwards because he himself was boxing the position out. If Bale nudged it over, Boulahrouz only needed to swoop in between and Bale would become separated from the ball. Bale certainly knew this, so Boulahrouz predicted that Bale would move from the outer path.

Now that the football was so close to the side lines, it would be all too easy to kick the ball out if Bale took the outer path.

Boulahrouz did not necessarily need to take the ball down himself. So long as he forced Bale to kick the ball out of the side lines, it would be considered a successful defense.

His act of stretching out his leg was only to force Bale into kicking the ball out himself.

Indeed, Bale chose to bump the ball; his right foot nudged the ball outwards to the left, but a second after, his left foot immediately kicked the ball straight forward, and the ball rolled past Boulahrouz along the side lines.

Boulahrouz raised his hand to indicate to the referee that Bale's ball had gone out-of-bounds but failed to hear the referee's whistle. Instead, he saw Bale flit past his defense zone; a breakthrough!

"A brilliant breakthrough! Boulahrouz did not expect that!"

After breaking through, Bale lifted his head to look at the penalty zone. Rather than choosing to blindly pass center to the front of the goal — the majority of younger players would do exactly that, an irresponsible and brainless method — Bale passed the ball to Ribéry who had had his hand raised to request for the ball since earlier.

"Shoot!" Bale shouted as he passed the ball out. In the previous League match, it was in precisely this position and with such a combination that Bale assisted Ribéry in scoring a goal. He clearly wanted to go at it again.

But Chelsea did not let him do as he wished. Ribéry already had many Chelsea players surrounding him. It would be more than enough if he could just stop the ball.

Ribéry himself also had no intentions of taking a shot. Before receiving the ball, he had already observed his surroundings. If he tried to take a shot, there was no guarantee as to where the ball would go. He was not so foolish as to waste such a precious opportunity to attack.

From the crowd surrounding him, he suddenly saw a familiar back.

How did he get here?

Ribéry did not care about the details about it, nor did he have the time to. He used the arch of his foot to kick the ball that had just rolled over, and shot it through the space between Essien's legs.

"Freddy Eastwood!!"

The man who appeared in the gap of Chelsea's defensive line was the person who had been hiding behind Ruud van Nistelrooy's back; the low-key shooter, Eastwood!

When Bale broke through, he was still outside the penalty zone. Ruud van Nistelrooy had attracted the attention of both Terry and Carvalho within the penalty area. As for defending against Eastwood, Mourinho had suggested focusing on guarding his activities whenever he was in the penalty arc area. The Romani had scored quite a few goals in this season, and most of them broke through the goal gates with long shots from this position. His long shots packed a punch.

Everyone took note of his long shots, but no one expected him to be a shadow forward.

What was a shadow forward? It was a character who hid behind the center-back and dealt fatal strikes where there were opportunities.

Eastwood nimbly found a hole he could use within Chelsea's defensive line. He did not know if Ribéry would pass the ball to him, because he did not tell him that he would appear there. He only resolutely cut forward and believed that Scarface would see him.

True to his prediction, he saw the football rolling between Essien's legs as he turned back.

Beautiful work, Scarface! Eastwood praised him in his heart. He turned sideways to let the ball pass. Without waiting for Terry and Carvalho to leap at him or giving Čech a chance to rebalance, he lifted his foot and kicked.

Čech did not expect the Romani to take such a decisive shot. He did not drag his foot around it; he immediately kicked without adjusting. Čech didn't have the time to move over to block it at the right angle. He could only do his best to leap for the ball, hoping to block the ball out.

The Czech's national goalie used all his abilities but was unable to stop the ball from flying past his body and into the goal.

"GOOOOAL! A remarkable combination! This is Eastwood's sixth goal in the season! Romani Rooney is back again!"

"After seeing such a beautiful shot, I'm wondering again: why isn't he a member of Team England?"

Before Eastwood got injured, he had already been selected for the national team. However, it was not England's National Football Team. It was Wales' National Football Team. Back then, he was not yet famous. Naturally, England's National Team was disdainful of such small-time characters. As Eastwood was born in England, he had the right to represent England. But his grandfather was Welsh, so he had the same right to play for Wales' National Team. When he had to choose his loyalty to either teams, Eastwood made the choice of being loyal to his grandfather, and therefore Wales.

At the time, England did not think that such a choice had any effect on them. They had so many forwards; Rooney, Owen, Crouch, Walcott, and more. They were not lacking even without the Romani.

Now, however, there were more and more voices who were regretful about Eastwood's initial choice.

What a marvelous thing it would be for such a consistently scoring forward to serve England!

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Putting aside the matter of which national team Eastwood chose to serve, Nottingham Forest's fans were surely feeling the greatest bliss at the moment.

"Nottingham Forest takes the lead in their home field against Chelsea. To be honest, I'm not at all surprised about this situation. Tony Twain's team has a lot of experience beating Chelsea." The commentator offended all of Chelsea's fans by saying this.

"What do you mean you're not surprised! They're only leading by one goal. What's the big deal?!" Chelsea's fans shouted at the television screen, waving their fists. "That d*mned Motson. Now everyone knows he's a fan of Nottingham Forest!"

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On the sidelines, Tang En's celebrations after Forest took the lead over Chelsea were always the wildest and most eye-catching. Everyone could still recall an instance in the last season, where Tang En somersaulted to celebrate Bale's winning goal. This time, everyone watched as Tang En threw punches madly in the air at the side of the technical area, as if he was boxing.

He had absolutely no restraint in front of Mourinho. He was doing this on purpose just to annoy him.

Mourinho's gaze was attracted to his wild performance, but only for an instant, before shifting away.

"This clown." he cursed quietly.

The best method to deal with this sort of arrogance from Tang En was not to rush up and scold him for being an idiot, nor was it to ask his subordinates to hurl provocations at the opponent's technical area. That would only make Tony even more smug. Mourinho understood what kind of character his opponent was.

If he wanted to render Tony speechless, the best way was to score a goal against Forest Team.

Now was a good opportunity to understand Tang En's true intentions in the match.

Was Nottingham Forest intending to shrink back for defense after scoring a goal, showing no difference than how it had been in the past? Or were they planning to attack all the way to the end and clash head-to-head with Chelsea for the whole 90 minutes?

Mourinho did not become annoyed and anxious because his team had lost a ball. In fact, he did not even stand up from his seat. Five minutes passed. Forest Team did not show any intentions of withdrawing at all. Under Tang En's strategic direction of "Attack, attack! Other than going on the f*cking attack, keep attacking," the Forest Team continued to put pressure on Chelsea's defensive line.

The players earnestly wished to have a hearty fight on their home ground against their old opponents.

It did not feel good being constantly suppressed by their opponents and always going on defensive counter attack.

"Nottingham Forest did not choose to retreat for defense." Even Clark noticed it.

"That's good." Mourinho grinned. "Nothing's changed. Just keep at our pace."

Unlike Nottingham Forest's fiery attacks, Chelsea, who was battling on an away field, was more stable. They did not seem to mind having lost a goal; it did not create any changes in their rhythm. The performance of the players on the field was the same as usual, and Chelsea's attacks were unhurried and calm. They patiently waited for an opportunity.

Mourinho had already told his own players to be mentally prepared to lose goals when they were playing against Forest. They had to be ready to play an extremely tough match. This was not said on a whim. It came from the experience after having played against Forest Team repeatedly over the past two years. Therefore, it was normal for Chelsea's players to be able to perform in that manner.

Mourinho firmly believed that the holes in Nottingham Forest's defensive line would grow as their attacks grew fiercer.

They only had to grasp that one chance, and they would be able to crush Forest Team.

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As the match progressed, both parties fought a spectacular battle against each other. The switch of pace between offense and defense took place rapidly. Throughout the game, the football would be near Chelsea's goal, causing their rear guards much panic, and 30 seconds later, the ball would have flown to Nottingham Forest's goal gates, forcing Edwin van der Sar to make another difficult save.

Of course, the audience was incredibly entertained watching it, but it was not necessarily a good thing for the teams to experience such rapid switching of the match's rhythm; it also meant a greater number of unforced errors.

When they enjoyed the match, the players would be in a state of excitement. They had more than enough enthusiasm and a lack of coolness. Only Albertini and a few other old veterans were able to keep their heads on straight. Everyone else only thought to attack.

The number of unforced errors committed by Forest Team was gradually increasing. Mourinho looked at the mini laptop his assistant cradled, showing the latest data from the match.

"It's only the 37th minute of the match, and they've already made fourteen unforced mistakes, huh."

He believed that his players would have noticed this.

After cutting off Lampard's pass, Chimbonda intended to pass to Ashley Young in front. However, the pass was abruptly stolen by Robben, who dashed up from behind Ashley Young with remarkable speed.

"Chimbonda's pass was too weak!" Motson exclaimed.

Robben was truly fast. Even Ashley Young could only chase after the Netherland's "Flying Dutchman," unable to overtake and intercept the ball.

All he could do now was pray that Chimbonda could stop the fast horse and force him to slow down, giving Ashley Young an opportunity to overtake him.

Chimbonda dashed into Robben's path.

Robben was running at high speeds and had no intentions of reducing it. Facing Chimbonda, he did not make any excessive movements. He only nudged the ball to the left and at the same time rounded past Chimbonda rapidly on the right side.

He passed separately from the ball.

Chimbonda had already turned towards the ball, but when he realized that Robben was in fact trying to get past separately from the ball, there was already no time for him to turn around again to defend against Robben. He also knew that once he allowed him to break through, it would signify a failure of the defensive line. In his anxiousness, a moment of inspiration struck and he abruptly stuck out his bum.

Robben did not expect Chimbonda to use such an ugly posture to defend under the situation. He had calculated the space needed for Chimbonda to turn, so he used the shortest path and fasted speed to break through. However, he failed to factor in calculations for Chimbonda's bum.

He slammed directly into it and stumbled for a bit before falling to the ground.

Ashley Young caught up from behind and easily took the ball back. Simultaneously, the whistle of the main referee sounded.

"Foul! Chimbonda, blocking!"

The referee ran over to show a yellow card to Chimbonda. Chelsea's players, however, were dissatisfied. They felt that Chimbonda should have been fouled out with a red card.

"He's incredibly fast." Chimbonda felt remnants of the fright he had felt even after escaping that ordeal.

Ashley Young patted him on his shoulders, giving him a thumbs up. "You already did great. That protruding bum was fabulous!"

Of course, the main referee was not about to change his own judgement call. Chelsea's players were only trying to vent their grievances and relented very quickly.

As the location of the foul was at the wings, they were not particularly close to the penalty zone. Forest Team's human wall only consisted of two people while the rest had gone back to defend against the Chelsea players who were prepared to ambush any opponents in the penalty area.

The two full backs, Terry and Carvalho, rushed forward, preparing to head the ball. Naturally, they were prime targets to mark down.

Robben stood in front of the ball. It seemed like he was going to take the penalty himself. Meanwhile, the people who had gone into the penalty zone squeezed against each other and had a minor clash. The main referee went over to mediate, warning the players from both teams not to continue such acts of pulling and pushing. After that, he retreated from the penalty zone and blew his whistle at Robben, signaling for him to take the kick.

Naturally, Forest Team's players were all focusing on the taller players in Chelsea to prevent them from heading in a goal. But Robben did not follow what they had expected of him — to lob the ball towards the penalty zone — and instead swept the ball twenty meters away horizontally!

This was not a shot at the goal going wide; it was a pass!

His target was Frank Lampard, the player who had been hiding outside without joining the bustle in the midfield from the beginning and could kick outstanding long shots.

“Lampard shoots!”

“There are so many people in the penalty zone. What the heck is he doing, taking a long shot!” Tang En cursed internally. Shooting at the goal under those kinds of circumstances meant there was an 80 to 90% chance of the shot getting blocked out by the crowd who could not tell friend from foe. Chelsea’s player must be muddled from thinking too hard about levelling the score. Choosing to take a direct long shot in such a situation — what could it be but blindness?

Just as Tang En thought that Forest’s crisis was over, he spotted the football changing directions — it was now going completely the opposite direction from Edwin van der Sar’s leap. Furthermore, it seemed like the ball had yet to leave the goal range.

Tang En watched the ball slow down as it rebounded and shakily flitted into the empty goal.

“I- F*ck!” He could not help but explode into a mouthful of Chinese swear words.

“Ah, ah, ah! This is too lucky! Lampard’s shot landed on the body of Forest’s full back, Kompany! It changed directions and did not fly over the end line but found its way into Forest Team’s goal instead! Chelsea equalizes the score!”

“Doggone luck! This is ability! Cheers for Lampard! Chelsea’s got to win!” Chelsea’s fans in the bar raised their beer mugs towards the television screen.

Chapter 490: The Sun Show

After the first half of the game was over, Twain looked terrible and walked straight back into the locker room with his head lowered. He did not blame the players for their poor performance. He was upset about his bad luck.

Chelsea’s equalizing the score really rendered him speechless. Even though there were so many players in the penalty area, Lampard’s long shot went in.

He thought there was no threat to that reckless shot, but it ended up scoring a goal instead. How could his mood improve?

However, when he saw his players coming back one by one, Twain kept a smile on his face. He could not affect the players with his mood.

“You guys did a good job. We just had a little bad luck, that’s all,” he comforted. “We will still play like that in the second half. Score goals and score more goals. One goal is not enough.” He wagged his index finger.

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On the other side, Mourinho also praised his men, telling them they played well and that he was grateful that they did not panic after they fell behind.

“But I don’t want to get just one point here.” Mourinho shook his index finger and stated, “we have been the league champion for two consecutive seasons. This is the only opponent that we have not won against before. I think this is a disgrace to all of us. In the second half, we’ll still attack. If Nottingham Forest wants to go head to head with us, we’ll show them the consequences!”

“Another thing, Chimbonda already had a yellow card on him. Make use of that in the second half and focus on breaking through him.” Mourinho made a cross in Nottingham Forest’s right back position.

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Both team managers’ layouts during the halftime interval were very simple, as there was nothing wrong with the tactics used in the first half. Any conceding of the goal was within the plan, as was the scoring of the goal. Therefore, no adjustment was required. All the coaches needed to do was continue to boost morale and stick with the tactics and form from first half in the second half. They would only think about making adjustments when a situation arose.

At the start of the second half, the state of the game was the same as the first half. No one could completely suppress anyone, and both sides had a chance. The two teams were evenly matched.

“Two years ago, if we had said that Nottingham Forest and Chelsea were evenly matched, we would have been laughed at, but take a look at this game. What more needs to be said? A year ago, we called Nottingham Forest a dark horse. We would be wrong if we were to call them a dark horse again this season. Tony Twain has succeeded in bringing this team to this point. They should be heading for the championship next, right?”

Mark Lawrenson did not speak. It was a well-known fact; he could not refute it.

Two years ago, everyone would have felt disdainful, unfamiliar, or nostalgic at the mention of Nottingham Forest, but now? One could hate Twain and his team, but no one could ignore what he had accomplished.

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“Chelsea’s offensive is concentrated on our right flank,” Kerslake said to Twain, next to him.

“I can see it.” Twain nodded.

In the first half, Chelsea’s offensive was largely concentrated in the middle, as Albertini and van der Vaart could be exploited. Albertini was older and not as nimble as he used to be. When facing the Chelsea’s ferocious players in the midfield, there was bound to be a moment of inattention. Van der Vaart was solely in offense and not very involved in the defense, so the Forest team’s middle was really a breakthrough point.

Wasn’t Lampard’s goal scored from the middle? If George Wood were around, at least someone would come and cover the position, rather than helplessly watching Lampard kick outside the penalty area and not doing anything.

In the second half, they focused their offensive on the Forest team’s right flank. Obviously, they had discovered a more favorable breakthrough point than Albertini’s — Chimbonda with a yellow card on him.

The entire Forest team was terrified of red cards. Due to the clash with the Reading team, as well as the manager's accusations of the England's referee community after the game, the Forest team had become the recipient of the referee's "special care." If they were not careful, they could be piled with yellow cards.

Therefore the football club reminded the players to pay more attention to their actions during the tournament and not to be foolish enough to set off the trigger during the crackdown period.

Chimbonda was certainly aware that he had a yellow card on him. If Chelsea took turns bombarding his area, he could not guarantee that he could stop the opponent's offense and not foul.

He knew his opponent's intention, and he had to play a corresponding countermeasure.

Twain called Sun Jihai back from the warm-up area and instructed him on the things to take note of after he got on the field. Sun Jihai knew it was time for him to perform.

"I know it's a bit of a heavy task." Twain briefed Sun Jihai in English. "Almost all of Chelsea's offensive has been planted on our right flank. Now that Chimbonda has a yellow card, we can't keep him on the field. You get it, Sun?"

Twain could speak Mandarin. He and Sun Jihai would have no problem communicating in Mandarin, but they only used it in private. While with the team, Twain insisted on using English when speaking with Sun Jihai. He did not want Sun Jihai to think that since he had a manager who could speak Mandarin, he could give up using English with the others.

Sun Jihai nodded and said, "I understand, boss."

"Don't let the referee grab a hold on you, and don't give Chelsea any chances. Go on then." Twain patted Sun Jihai on the shoulder and sent him to the sidelines.

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"Nottingham Forest has brought off Chimbonda, who has a yellow card on him, and brought on the Chinese full-back, Sun Jihai. Sun played at Manchester City for many years and was transferred to Nottingham Forest. It is said that Manager Tony Twain can usually communicate with Sun in very fluent Mandarin. Sun had marveled at the standard of Twain's Mandarin." Motson provided an anecdote about Twain in passing when he announced the appearance of Sun Jihai.

Sun Jihai played right-back when he came on and was mainly in charge of defense. Chelsea's offense was currently quick and violent, and Twain was not eager to attack.

Sun was a good utility player. After Wood was suspended, he filled in the position of the defensive midfielder. When Chimbonda needed to avoid the risk of getting a red card, he stepped up to play as the right-back. Twain believed that if a left-back was needed, Sun Jihai could do the job as well.

"So, bringing on Sun Jihai, does this mean he wants to strengthen the defense in the right flank?" Mark Lawrenson finally found an area where he could heavily criticize. "I don't think the Chinese player is as capable as Chimbonda. Sun is a good substitute, but he's still a substitute. Whether he's playing as the defensive midfielder or full-back, he's not that reassuring. I can understand that he wants to replace

Chimbonda because he's afraid that he would get a second yellow card and be sent off with a red card, but will bringing on a less capable Sun be enough to withstand Chelsea's offense?"

"He was once Manchester City's main full-back. If he had not been hurt... his strength isn't as bad as you think, is it, Mark?"

"But he has suffered serious injuries."

Motson could not find a way to counter Lawrenson. Indeed, since Sun Jihai suffered that serious injury, not only did he lose his main position at Manchester City, his strength had also been affected.

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Sun Jihai was very much aware of his own capabilities and shortcomings. He did not need Mark Lawrenson to remind him of his previous serious injury.

After the China men's soccer team failed to charge into the Germany's World Cup, Chinese football fell to its lowest, whether it was the country's domestic league teams or its individual national players who played abroad. After all, they were Chinese people and players. Who would not want to do better when they left home to play? On one hand, they wanted to seek out their best interests, and on the other hand, they wanted to strive on behalf of all Chinese people for validation.

Chinese football was in a slump, and as a sport, football was quickly becoming a joke. As a footballer, Sun would inevitably feel the effects. He still wanted to use his performance to give fans in his country a sense of pride and excitement. The appearance of Dunn, a Chinese assistant manager, gave a lot of people hope, but he did not gain a win during a three-game stint as the acting manager, and many cynical voices immediately appeared among the Chinese people.

The Chinese people felt inferior about their football abilities and felt that failure was inevitable.

Sun Jihai acknowledged that the performance of China's football was underwhelming, but what could one player do?

He alone could not revive Chinese football and change the deep-seated problems in the Chinese football institution. The only thing he could do was to train well in the club and fight for chances to play on the field, so that those who were still not disappointed in Chinese football could have a sigh of relief.

Robben dribbled the ball and charged towards Sun Jihai. Lampard and Shevchenko cruised near Robben, as well.

Chelsea really valued him, so Sun Jihai dare not neglect him. He anchored down his center of gravity and faced Robben with the ball. He did not rush to put his foot out. As an experienced veteran who had played in England for years, he knew how to deal with Robben even if Twain did not specifically instruct him.

Robben could dribble fast, but he needed to run to do it and space to break out and accelerate. As long as Sun could push his speed down and halt his control of the ball, the threat would be reduced by a third.

Sun Jihai was not foolish enough to extend his leg to intercept the ball when he saw Robben in action. It would be irrevocable once he was bypassed by him.

All he needed to do was to pull back and follow Robben. He would slowly suppress the other party's speed. If he forced Robben into a dead end, he would cease to be a threat.

His idea was sound, but Robben did not give him such a chance. He made a feint to cut inside, but suddenly knocked the football outwards, and then turned around to break through.

Sun Jihai was caught off guard and staggered when Robben swung past him. He saw that Robben was going to break free, but Albertini suddenly slashed across and kicked the ball that Robben had knocked out of the sidelines.

In order to completely shake off the cautious Chinese full back in front of him, Robben had kicked the ball too hard. The football went a little further away from him. The more experienced Albertini seized the opportunity and successfully lifted the siege.

Robben kicked the air in disappointment at wasting his efforts. When he broke through Sun Jihai, he put all his energy on the opponent ahead of him. He did not notice that Albertini had come up to support and defend.

Sun Jihai got up and prepared to thank Albertini.

He did not expect Albertini to give him a thumbs up first and say, "Well done, Sun. That kid wasn't going to get through you if he hadn't kicked so hard."

Sun Jihai smiled.

Lawrenson had another perspective in the commentator's seat. He found evidence which could prove his point. "Take a look, John. Sun was powerless when he was up against Robben's swift breakthrough. If it hadn't been for Albertini's desperate rush to help, Robben would have broken through him."

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Robben stomped on the turf under his feet. The turf in this area was overturned now because of his sudden acceleration. He still wanted to break through this area a lot so if the turf was not good, it could affect his sprint.

As he set the turf, he looked up at the serious-looking Chinese man.

You won't be so lucky next time.

"Robben has the ball again! Shevchenko raises his hand for the ball next to him, but the Dutchman does not plan to pass the football. He faces Sun Jihai and wants to break through!"

Robben did see Shevchenko next to him, but he was confident about his breakthrough. He relied on his speed to gallop into the English Premier League and seldom came by an adversary. He was absolutely confident that he could break through Sun Jihai, and then threaten the Forest team's goal.

He intended to break through. Sun Jihai was very cautious and would never rush to put out his feet. Robben was going to repeat his tactic again. However, when he was about to fake an inside cut, Sun Jihai suddenly kicked with his foot instead and intercepted the ball that had just left Robben's foot.

“OH YES! Terrific defense!” Motson, who remained quiet when Lawrenson criticized Sun Jihai just now, exclaimed. “Beautifully tackled, and no foul! Nottingham Forest takes the opportunity to launch an attack! Robben is still on the ground, demanding for a free kick. The referee is ignoring him!”

This time, it was Lawrenson’s turn to be quiet.

As the game progressed, everyone could see that Twain’s replacement would not fail.

Sun Jihai’s performance was not like his former self since his injury, but his courage and professionalism had not been affected. These good qualities made up for some of the inadequacies in his ability.

Sun Jihai fought boldly without a yellow card on him. Chelsea was somewhat powerless against such a determined and cautious defender.

The situation on the field gradually turned into a situation where Nottingham Forest regained its leading edge after a period when Chelsea prevailed.

As it turned out, Sun Jihai’s play effectively eased the defensive pressure facing the Forest team.

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With Nottingham Forest’s offense on the rise and its formation pressing ahead, Bale frequently stepped forward to assist with the attacks at Twain’s behest. After an attack, he did not hurriedly return. Instead, he wanted for the opportunity to attack again in the front field. He often looked more like a side midfielder rather than a full-back.

Even the center-back, Kompany put up several good shows of dribbling and plugging ahead.

With the team in a good situation, the center-back could not help but get in on the action. Still hard at work, only Sun Jihai stayed back to defend. It was not that he was less aggressive than the others or that he was not fond of being involved in the attack, but just that the manager brought him on to defend and not to let him attack.

While everyone was occupied with the offense, someone should think about defense, right?

Nottingham Forest was awarded a corner kick. Kompany and Piqué rushed up to head the ball to score. The left-back, Gareth Bale, took the free kick. The Forest team’s back field was empty. In addition to the goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, only Albertini and Sun Jihai were left behind to defend. Even so, their positions were still pressed up to the midfield line.

Bale’s ball was not headed by Kompany, Piqué, or any of the Forest players. The ball was directly plucked by Čech, who jumped to catch it. Čech, who intercepted the Forest team’s corner kick, threw the ball directly to launch another attack. He threw the football to Shevchenko in front.

The Ukrainian was just as fast as Robben. He was frustrated that he could not find his form when he changed to a new environment this season. Now he had a chance to prove himself again.

Shevchenko already scoped out the Forest team’s situation in front of him before he caught the ball. There was about sixty yards of wide space between him and the Forest team’s goal, but only two Forest players. One of whom was his former AC Milan’s teammate, the veteran Albertini. It would not be an issue to break through him with his own pace.

The other one was the Chinese player.

The two of them stood in parallel positions... Breaking through one of them would be equivalent to breaking through the two of them. This was truly a great opportunity to score a goal!

“Shevchenko dribbles the ball to break through. The Ukrainian nuclear warhead has taken aim at Nottingham Forest’s goal!”

A huge uproar immediately erupted over the City Ground stadium, with the boos of Nottingham Forest fans intermingled with the cheers of Chelsea fans.

Sun Jihai wanted to come up and be the first line of defense. He did not expect Albertini to shout at him amidst the thunderous noise, “Go back! I got this!”

The captain’s choice was the right one. The slower Albertini could only do the first line of defense. If he followed and withdrew, he would be shaken off immediately. Sun Jihai was faster. He was the most suitable person out of the two of them to take the second line of defense.

Sun Jihai gnashed his teeth to turn and run back.

With tightly pursed lips, Albertini met Shevchenko who dribbled the ball and charged towards him.

I didn’t think we’d have a day like this where we face off each other... Come on, Shev!

When Shevchenko saw who was in front of him, he slowed down a little. This gave Albertini the chance. He suddenly rushed up and swiftly narrowed the gap between him and Shevchenko. After which, he blocked him to intercept the ball.

Just as he thought he had succeeded in doing so, Shevchenko suddenly thrust the football to the side and sped around the statue-like Albertini.

“Albertini has been bypassed! It’s too easy!”

It was too easy ... That was what Albertini thought too. When Shevchenko suddenly sped up, he was too late to even foul and the other party broke away from his range of control.

I’m really getting old

After he saw that Albertini was cracked open, Sun Jihai, who was pulling back, had already run to a distance of just five meters away from the tip of the penalty arc. He heard the visiting team fans in the stands that he was facing. When he saw that they were standing up with their arms in the air, he hurriedly looked back, just in time to see Shevchenko broke through Albertini.

He clenched his teeth and turned around and rushed back.

In order to shake off Albertini, Shevchenko kicked the ball a little too hard. Sun Jihai thought of the scene where Albertini helped him defended against Robben just now, and he decided to repay the captain.

The two players chased the rolling football at a high speed, as if they were two meteors about to collide, with a dazzling flame lingering behind them.

Who would win this competition?

Sun Jihai knew he could not outrun Shevchenko. When he was still some distance away from the football, he took a moment before he immediately slid to the ground to tackle.

Manager Twain's exhortation was still ringing in his ear. He did not forget. This was not a foul. He completely aimed at the football. Even if he took down Shevchenko in passing, under the circumstances where the two players did not fully control the football, the referee absolutely had no reason to blow the whistle for a foul even if he did not like the Forest team.

However, the world-class striker must have his talents. Shevchenko could perceive Sun Jihai's intention. Even though he was not fully centered, he suddenly leaned his body forward and stretched out his right foot to stab at the football first!

Sun Jihai did not shovel the ball!

"It's the second one! Shevchenko's beautiful breakthrough! He's going to prove to people that he's by no means the most underwhelming player in English Premier League history!"

Sun Jihai slid on the ground as he looked up and saw the Ukrainian nuclear warhead glided across above his body, casting a shadow.

Oh no! What did it mean to have such a striker face the goalkeeper one-on-one? It was harder not to score a goal than to score one ...

Shevchenko did not care to look back at the loser he had just broken through. Because he forcibly poked the ball, his speed and center of gravity had been affected and he had to adjust everything before Edwin van der Sar struck back in his position. He had to swing past the goalkeeper and easily send the football into the empty goal ...

The speed of van der Sar's strike was a bit unexpected. By the time he managed to adjust the football, Edwin van der Sar had already rushed to the edge of the penalty just as he happened to step in.

That meant that van der Sar could intercept the ball with his hands which was not what happened in last season's Champions League final.

The television cameras locked in this area. Whether it was the live fans or television viewers, everyone focused their gazes firmly at the two players.

If the shot went in the goal, Chelsea would reverse the score and their morale would be boosted.

If not, Nottingham Forest would have a narrow escape.

Shevchenko could not adjust in time and directly break through. Edwin van der Sar did not fall for it. He waited for the Ukrainian's next move. As expected, Shevchenko moved the football crosswise to go from the middle, intending to shoot directly.

The 1.97-meter tall Edwin van der Sar opened his arms wide and tried to lengthen himself, with the intention of stopping Shevchenko's next shot.

The commentator, Motson's voice unknowingly went up an octave. His butt cheeks almost left his seat as he held the microphone and loudly shouted, "Shevchenko deceived Edwin van der Sar! Shevchenko ... swings wide! He did not center himself! The goal is empty, the goal is empty! Swings his leg and shoots—!!"

Just behind the goal, the Chelsea fans stood up and held their arms high, ready to celebrate the goal. The Forest fans' earth-shattering boos surged forward as if they were going to hiss the football out of the goal range.

A red figure suddenly stormed into everyone's sight.

It was not over yet, it was not ... f**king the end!

Sun Jihai sprinted with his eyes staring at the ball that Shevchenko shot -because in order to get past Edwin van der Sar, Shevchenko did not fully anchor himself before he was compelled to make a shot. The shot that he kicked was not a ball rolling close to the ground, but a half-high ball in which it fell towards the goal in a parabola curve.

Sun Jihai, who returned to defend, still had a chance.

The football was getting closer to the goal. If he did not put out his leg now, there would be no chance... Sun Jihai unwaveringly soared. With his right foot forward and eyes firmly on the football in the air, he wanted to confirm whether his leg could stop the ball.

Shevchenko, who fell to the ground, also stared at the ball he had shot out. He too wanted to confirm that the football had entered the goal.

"Bang!" The football and Sun Jihai's foot met in the air. Once it was kicked, it then changed direction and flew sideways out of the end line!

"Sun Jihai! Sun Jihai Incredible... Unbelievable! It's amazing! He saved the team!" Motson had already stood up from his seat with the microphone in his hand and his saliva splattering across. "A perfect comeback!"

In the stands behind the Forest team goal, all those people clad in blue who had their arms aloft, dejectedly held their heads instead.

The other three sides of the stands burst into deafening cheers.

"SUN! SUN! SUN!" They chanted Sun Jihai's last name.

Piqué, who had been sprinting all the way but not yet caught up, did not stop. He simply slid to the ground towards Sun Jihai, who was still lying on the ground, hugged him as he pressed his forehead against his and hollered at him. That scene was exhilarating.

The second player to join in the rumble was the team captain, Albertini, and the third was Edwin van der Sar, who was saved by Sun Jihai. More and more Forest players rushed up to celebrate Sun Jihai, as if this Chinese player had scored a goal.

Twain swung a few punches off the field. Then he turned around and fiercely said to the coaches, "Who the hell will still think that we bought him for the Chinese market!"

Motson was still yelling and Mark Lawrenson was completely silenced.

“This was by no means Sun Jihai’s first such performance. He used to be the final savior at Manchester City! With a different team, he has made a rescue again! This was not a coincidence or luck ... This Chinese player never gives up!