

## Godfather Of Champions

### Chapter 6: Down By Three Goals

Wilford training ground's old security guard, Ian Macdonald had already turned on the radio before the match started. He turned the volume to max and sat inside the guardhouse peacefully listening to the match. At this time, the players who had made it to the team's roster were all at the City Ground, while those who did not make the cut were at home or elsewhere. The training ground was quiet, and the only sound was the commentary coming from the guardhouse.

He still remembered Tony Twain's smile and promise to him, "You will hear us score one goal after another." This filled him with anticipation.

The match started not long before, and he indeed heard news of goals being scored from the radio. However, they were not by Team Nottingham Forest, but by the away team, West Ham. The match was only a half an hour in, and the team he loved had already conceded three goals.

He sat dumbfounded in the chair, unable to believe the voices he had just heard.

"Jermain Defoe! Defoe shoots and scores! What a beautiful assault!"

"Defoe gains possession of the ball outside the penalty area and dribbles past! Will it be 2:0? Yes! Jermain Defoe has scored again! West Ham leads with a score of 2:0!"

"Unbelievable! Unbelievable! A volley shot from outside the penalty area! From Joe Cole! Simply hard to believe that he is only 21 years old! He is the future treasure of English football! This is the third goal from West Ham in this match. They have complete control over the match, leaving Nottingham Forest no chance at all! 3:0, the match ends ahead of schedule!"

Ends ahead of schedule? You worthless commentator, what are you saying? The match is only 30 minutes in, and we still have 60 minutes to make a comeback! Macdonald had never trusted the substitute manager, Tony Twain so much before. At that moment, he believed that this man could deliver what he had promised.

He shook his fist at the radio, as if he was standing alongside his fellow supporters on the viewing platform to demonstrate against the opposing team. Ever since he had assumed the role of the training ground's gatekeeper, it had been several years since he last watched a match at City Ground.

City Ground was almost flooded with jeers. Tang En was extremely familiar with such jeering sounds. Three days ago, when he first opened his eyes and saw this world, what

surrounded his ears were these sounds, and they were coming from their own fans. The target on whom they were venting their discontent was not the opposite team West Ham, but the home team Nottingham Forest.

In a corner of the field, a group of players wearing the West Ham jersey clustered around their team captain. They were celebrating the goal, celebrating their third goal of the match.

Des Walker hugged his head in aggravation, as he sat beside Tang En. From the pre-match preparations, all the way to the tactics, Walker was the one who had planned for this match in the entirety. Tang En said that he believed in him, and so Walker wanted to use a victory to reciprocate the manager's trust in himself. There was no way he had anticipated a massacre before halftime.

The electronic scoreboard's 0:3 score, was red, as if dyed in fresh blood. The number of middle fingers raised at the manager was as numerous as the trees in Sherwood Forest, to the Northeast of Nottingham City. What made the fans furious was not only the score, but the performance of the players on the field.

Tang En saw it clearly. If he were a hardcore fan of Team Nottingham Forest, faced with such a performance in the first thirty minutes of the first half, he would also use vulgarities and a middle finger to express his feelings. He even suspected the 11 people on the field, like him, did not manage to sleep well the night before. Did they assemble as a team to patronize prostitutes? These b\*stards! He thought to himself as he frowned and gritted his teeth.

What Tang En did not know, was that a camera on the opposite side of the field was pointed at him, capturing a close-up on his facial expressions and broadcasted live. The commentator for this match was the same as before. He was famous for his sharp and passionate commentary style. He had just used a series of compliments to praise West Ham's young team captain, Joe Cole's goal. That was also West Ham's third goal in this entire match. He concluded, "This match is already over! Despite Team Nottingham Forest's glorious history, this team is like a group of pitiful souls on their last legs after being stepped on by Joe Cole, worrying about when the next wave of offense will come! Look at Team Nottingham Forest in their red jerseys. This is really heartbreaking!"

"Manager Tony Twain also appears to be unsatisfied with the team's current performance. If that is the case, please come up with some sort of strategy! Don't keep frowning and gritting your teeth at the coach's seat. Aren't your teeth in pain? In fact, we have only seen his assistant manager, Des Walker, direct the match so far. Just who exactly is the manager? But who would have any hope that a former player, a newbie to managing who had just retired would be able to direct a League One team to defeat a Premier League team? The doubts cast upon Team Nottingham Forest's substitute manager's ability are not groundless. Until now, Tony Twain has yet to make any change to the team strategy. He is even worse than his predecessor, Paul Hart—according to rumors, it is said that Twain assumed the role of the manager only

because Paul Hart strongly recommended him to Chairman Doughty. What I want to say is, Paul, you always had a discerning eye for players, but in terms of managers, there is still much room for improvement!”

Who knew what Tang En would do if he had heard such disparaging comments from the commentator. Perhaps he might quarrel with this commentator on the spot... However, the current him did not have time to think about other people’s comments about him. He had to salvage the current situation on the field. He knew that West Ham was very strong. Just from looking at some of the players’ names, he could tell how impressive they were. But this was no excuse for Nottingham Forest to be losing.

The reason for their loss was only one, and that was because they were not good enough!

Tang En muttered this sentence softly.

Walker turned his head toward Tang En. He seemed to have heard it, but it wasn’t registering. “What?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Tang En shook his head.

“Tony, you have to think of a plan. We can’t carry on like this,” Walker whispered to Tang En as he moved his mouth closer to his ear. “Bowyer must be waiting for us to fail miserably. I feel like he is hoping for us to lose this match!”

“You’re right, that old man is indeed thinking like this. But the current version of me has no solution.”

Walker was extremely disappointed at Tang En’s reply. The manager should not do this kind of thing: When he loses control over a certain thing, it tends to be when he is at an impasse.

“Do you think our defenders could possibly defend against Joe Cole, Lee Bowyer, Di Canio and Jermain Defoe?”

Walker shook his head. Truth to be told, the team indeed did not have any way of going toe-to-toe with such a Premier League team. Hearing these players’ names, they were either veteran stars who were already very famous, or they were the best new talent from the whole of England.

“Also, do you think with our strikers and midfielders are able to penetrate the defense of Michael Carrick, Ian Pearce, Tomas Repka, and David James, and score?”

Walker continued to shake his head. This defensive line was national team level. James was England’s national team goalkeeper, while Tomas was a member of the Czech Republic national football team. Carrick even transferred over to Manchester United in

the summer three years later. In the entire first half of the match, the two strikers of Nottingham Forest had only three chances to score, but the type of balls they shot were not even sufficient for James to warm up.

With the aid of their group of talented football players, West Ham United easily took control of the entire match's tempo and had complete ball possession on the field. Team Nottingham Forest could only run back and forth after the ball, wasting away their stamina and fighting spirit with this sort of meaningless running. West Ham had extremely miserable results in the English Premier League, only obtaining 16 points in the 21 rounds of the first half of the season, and was ranked last in the League. However, their strength was more than sufficient to throw their weight around in front of a League One team, venting their frustrations from being bullied.

After merely 17 minutes into the match, West Ham United managed to take the lead. The swift and agile young striker, James Defoe managed to break past Team Nottingham Forest's clumsy back defensive line with much ease, scoring the first goal for his team. Five minutes later, Defoe once again made use of his speed and broke past the defensive line. Watching this young talent who would be chosen for England's national team give his utmost performance, Tang En had a feeling of time-space disorientation. He knew of this young lad's future achievements. What made Tang En feel completely powerless was that his team, Nottingham Forest, had to play against such a team which had no lack of talented players.

Looking at West Ham United's players casually passing the ball around, Joe Cole even performed a back heel pass in front of their few fans present. Listening to the sounds of laughter from the West Ham United's fans on the viewing platform as well as the various jeers, Tang En had an ugly thought: Exactly whose home match was this?

This kind of situation made him extremely furious. Although he did not personally experience being passed by Joe Cole and the rest on the field, he still felt himself being humiliated. Because he was the team's manager. When his team was bullied on the field, the responsibility was on him. It was the same as him being pushed around with his players.

Michael Dawson was currently the strongest player on Team Nottingham Forest, even though he alone was unable to defend against West Ham's relentless offense. The responsibility for the three misses did not lie with him. It was just that the team was too weak overall. After watching 30 plus minutes of the match, Tang En decided to pass the captain armband over to this young lad. If the 21-year-old Joe Cole could become the captain of "The Hammers", why couldn't the 19-year-old Michael Dawson? A talented player nurtured from the Nottingham Forest youth training system that was full of fighting spirit, who else could be more suitable than him to lead the current team?

The north viewing platform in City Ground near the Trent River was the viewing platform for Team Nottingham Forest's fans. The highest floor had a row of long corridors enclosed by glass windows. There were two rows of old but neat chairs, as well as two

television sets. That was City Ground's suite. Compared to a wealthy and powerful football team's suite, Team Nottingham Forest's could only be described as shabby.

Naturally, there was hardly anybody in there to witness such a terrible match. Only two people were currently in the suite. They did not sit on the chairs, but instead chose to assume a standing position—watching the match in front of glass windows.

They were this team's chairman, Nigel Doughty and his son, Edward Doughty.

Edward Doughty glanced at the television in the corner before looking at the football field. "So this is the formerly glorious team you love, Nottingham Forest?" His tone was heavy with sarcasm, completely unlike the polite man Tang En saw the other day.

The words were meant for his father, but old Doughty did not mind his son's sarcasm, and spoke while slightly nodding his head, "During halftime, you and I will go to the changing room. I need to let you and the players meet.

Edward knew that his words had been ignored by his father yet again. "But I feel that there's no need for it. Besides, now is not the best time for us to meet," he advised, hoping that his father would call off his plans to make Edward meet the players and managerial team.

Nigel Doughty did not answer his son, as he focused his full attention on the match.

Seeing his father's behavior, Edward could only shrug his shoulders and sigh. As for the boring, one-sided match, he was completely uninterested in it. He decisively sat down and drank a Coke while shaking his legs and looked around at his surroundings out of boredom.

The worn-down suite, worn-down place, mediocre match and completely unattractive team... He simply could not understand why his father loved this kind of team, and so much that he was willing to invest more than ten million pounds into it—he had never invested so much money into his own son.

When he was watching the NBA, he was originally a fan of the Chicago Bulls, before he switched over to Los Angeles Lakers. Recently, he was becoming more inclined toward the San Antonio Spurs, despite his house and company being located in Houston. The only reason he kept switching his favorite team was because the previous team lacked sufficient star players and champions. In his opinion, it was simply hard to comprehend why someone would even like teams that were not famous, did not have star players, nor were even worth being in a lower-level professional league. Were they able to derive any pleasure or profit from avidly supporting this kind of team? Not only were they unable to enjoy the amazing performances brought on by star players, they were also unable to have pleasant summer memories of obtaining championship trophies one after another. There was a further lack of glorious match records for them to relish in during their free time...

He looked at the tiny human heads beneath his feet on the opposite viewing platform, and their countless flailing arms. It was unbelievable that such a poor match had a full house. He shook his head in disbelief.

What were these tens of thousands of fans, like my father, even after? Every weekend afternoon, sitting down in this worn-out stadium and seeing the players waste time on the field just like this. So pitiful.

What puzzled the commentator Motson was that even after Tang En and Walker spoke to each other, there was no action taken at all. Even the previously active Walker appeared to have his butt glued to his seat. The two of them only watched the match quietly, not doing or saying anything.

It was very strange. Even after seeing their own team losing so miserably, were they not anxious? Were they not angry? They should display some sort of emotion right? But there was none of this. The close-up swept across Tang En and Walker's face numerous times, but the two people continued to watch the match, without even frowning.

Motson, who felt that he had lost face, could only mutter to himself, "Did they escape from Madame Tussauds Wax Museum?"

West Ham United's manager, Glenn Roeder, was very satisfied with his team's performance. The bitterness from the first half of the season appeared to have been forgotten by this group of young lads. He had very similar managerial experience to Tony Twain. They had both been transferred over to the first team from the youth team due to poor team performance. During the contest between the two managers, he had the upper hand. It was his first match as a manager, and the match started off pretty well. He believed that as long as the team continued to play with the standards they displayed in the first half of the match, they would have no problem retaining their position in the current league.

He stood at the sideline immensely proud and satisfied, as he began considering the next English Premier League match.

Tang En shot a glance at Roeder, who was directing the match at the sideline. He wore a pair of golden-laced spectacles on his white and clean face, giving off an air of elegance. Tang En knew this man, even before Tang En came over. This person would later become Newcastle's manager, but before that he was the manager of the Magpies Crusaders youth team. He only stepped up as the manager after Souness had been fired due to Newcastle's poor performance. After he assumed "the world's most attractive position", Newcastle's performance did not improve much. The only thing was that he was much luckier than his predecessor, in the sense that, when the team performed poorly, he could use the team's extensive injuries and illnesses as an excuse. As such, he had widespread support among the club. However, he still quit his post in the end, because the team's performance was simply too poor. Under him, his



team attained the record for victories in a single Newcastle season, and was the most in the history of Newcastle since the time it was established in 1951—a consecutive 500 minutes of not scoring in its home match.

As Tang En knew Roeder had such a history, he knew that he had nothing to fear in Roeder. West Ham's current good performance had nothing to do with this gentleman manager. It was only because they had a batch of talented players.

Disregarding the players on the field, we only had to take a look at the players on the substitute bench to know of this team's abilities: England's national team player in the 2002 World Cup, Trevor Sinclair. Mali's national team football player Kanoute, who later became La Liga's famous shooter, who helped Sevilla Football Club clinch the UEFA Europa League championship title twice. He became an integral player in the team's dual championship title in the 06-07 season La Liga and UEFA Europa League. Looking at these names, then comparing them to the team's standing in the post-season—third from the bottom—they were relegated.

After the team's miserable losses of 0:5 to Everton and 1:7 to Blackburn Rovers, this manager still claimed that the team's poor performance was not his responsibility. He said it was because the players his predecessor, Redknapp, had bought were too disappointing. However, Roeder's poor management was not a biased "fallacy" which only one or two people concluded. In fact, the entire English media had never once stopped criticizing him nor stopped questioning his ability. Tang En's observation in the first half of the match once again reaffirmed his thoughts regarding Roeder's ability.

Tang En shrugged his shoulders. He had already discovered the way to deal with this team. However, now was not the time for adjustments, since it was only five minutes before halftime. He decided that, as soon as he entered the changing room, he would give these half-awake players a good smack to wake them up.

Tang En suddenly heard a very sharp and clear jeering sound from behind him, and what ensued after was a series of furious scolding noises. He thought that it was very strange, as it had been very quiet mere moments ago. Why had it become noisy all of a sudden?

He turned his head to look at the source of the commotion, and saw Michael and gang making faces and flipping him the bird. The gauze on Michael's head was simply too conspicuous...

"Scram back to your youth team! This is an adult team, not a place for little kids like you. Go back to your mother and behave! Hahaha!"

"Oh—Oh—" the people beside him began taunting as well. These people were mostly the same bunch who ridiculed him that day in the bar. There were a few unfamiliar faces, but it was certain that they were in the same clique as Michael.

Walker's attention was also attracted by the scolding noises coming from behind. He stood up and scolded them loudly, "Michael, what are you all doing?!"

Michael completely ignored Walker and said as he tilted his head slightly, "Walker, you better not interfere. This is a personal grudge between us and Mr. Manager."

"Personal grudge? Between your group and a single person?" Walker snorted.

"Alright, pay them no mind." Tang En said as he pulled Walker down.

"Tony, what is going on? I seem to recall that you never got into conflict with other people. Moreover, Michael is also an ardent fan of Team Nottingham Forest, so why do they detest you so much?"

"Nothing much. I just threw liquor in his face at Burns' bar, and we got into a scuffle—it only lasted for a short while, after I knocked him onto the ground and called that fatty 'fatso'." Tang En briefly illustrated what happened, but Walker's mouth was open so wide that he could almost swallow a football ball. The Twain he knew hated drinking and smoking, and never got angry at other people, much less got into a fight with someone. What exactly was going on?

Tang En knew that Walker was extremely shocked, because anyone that knew him would feel the same way if they heard what he had just said. "I'll explain it to you later. Right now, we need to put the match first. I've found a way to deal with them."

Walker turned his head and took another look at the rowdy gang of people, before he continued watching the match with a focused mind.

English stadiums had a unique feature, in the sense that the manager's seat was rarely set in the spacious area between the field and the viewing platform, which is very different from most of the football stadiums most people know of. Their manager's seats were located on the viewing platform and were surrounded by normal fans' seats. The two sides of the players' passageway were the technical area and the substitutes' bench. Unless they had to direct the match, managers usually sat on the viewing platform. Team Nottingham Forest's home stadium, City Ground, was not previously like that. Their manager's seats were below the viewing platform on the sideline. They were even on a lower ground than the football field—as if the manager's seats were holes dug at the sideline, with a ceiling made of concrete above their heads to shelter them from the sun and rain. Later, only because the 1996 UEFA European Championship, it was renovated to be like most English stadiums, with the manager's seats very near to the fans' viewing platform. This way of closing the distance from the fans had its pros and cons. Tang En was currently enduring the "cons" of it. Michael and gang who were seated behind the manager's seats did not stop heckling and using all sorts of flowery vulgarities to humiliate Tang En, challenging his endurance.



Even the substitute players of the team could not help but stand and stare at them for a while. Tang En still did not turn his head, fully focused on the match.

“You coward, full-fledged scaredy cat! Did you see, I’m scolding you and your entire family! If you feel like you are strong enough, come and give me another punch! Where did that courage of yours go when you punched me? Trash! You b\*stard! Son of a gun! Loser!” Michael scolded loudly, even attracting the television broadcasting crew’s attention.

Emboldened by the cameras, he continued to scold on top of the viewing platform, while Tang En who was seated less than three meters below him watching the match with his arms folded. Tang En was captured on screen and broadcasted to countless television sets. Burns, who happened to be helping out at his bar, also saw this scene. At that moment, sounds of applause and cheering for Michael enveloped the entire bar. Looking at the full bar, Burns could only nonchalantly shake his head.

Perhaps it was just as Michael and the gang had scolded, Tang En was a full-fledged “scaredy cat” and “coward”, who did not even dare to retaliate or refute. His performance disappointed many football players. Truth to be told, Michael’s words were so unbearable that even the players who knew him could not carry on listening to what he was saying. However, Tang En continued to sit in his seat without even budging an inch, as if he completely could not hear what these people were saying.

Motson saw this scene and became excited yet again. “I discovered a very interesting phenomenon. As long as Manager Tony Twain is around, the most entertaining and impressive moment would definitely not be on the field, but instead in a ten-yard radius around him. Currently, there is some commotion behind the manager’s seat, as if the fans had something to say to him. Looking at their agitated behavior, there is no doubt that what they have to say will not be pleasant at all. I think that for the Match of the Day program tomorrow night, we will invite professional lip readers to decipher what they are saying. If West Ham defeats their opponents 3:0, then there will be absolutely nothing worth reporting, because they should win this match. Instead, the commotion off the field is more worthy of our attention. ”

The timer on the match ticked and passed by the second, and the situation on the field remained unfavorable for Nottingham Forest. However, after leading by three goals, West Ham had also slowed down their attacking pace. They were rather casually passing behind then kicking the ball forward. Perhaps the players were like the manager, already thinking about their next English Premier League match.

The scolding noises coming from behind the home team manager’s seats did not let up for a moment. Quite a number of players could not take it anymore, as they voluntarily requested to do some warm-ups on the side of the field, in order to leave that extremely uncomfortable substitutes’ bench. Tang En ignored their requests. Walker could only sigh, as he let the substitute players do their warm-ups. The substitutes’ bench was suddenly half-empty, leaving behind only the managerial staff.

Des Walker looked at Twain worriedly, as he felt that there was something wrong with Twain all this while. Walker's face was extremely gloomy, just like the past two days' weather.

As his gaze shifted downwards, he saw Twain's hands tightly clenched into a fist. Due to the over exertion of force, even his knuckles were turning white...

The referee's whistle gave everyone a brief relief, as this extremely unbearable first half had finally ended.

Tang En immediately stood up and left his seat, leaving behind those fans who were still hurling insults at him and made his way to the passageway. Walker gave Michael and gang another stare, before he proceeded to the sideline to console the players. He patted them on their shoulders saying it was normal to concede three goals to an English Premier League team.

After all, they were merely a League One team...