

## Champions 611

### Chapter 611: A Perfect Year

“Just like how turkey makes Christmas dinner, I think the best Christmas gift for the Nottingham Forest fans is a victory,” Twain said before the away game against Fulham.

He infuriated Fulham with his nonchalant and self-assured attitude.

Simon Davies, the home team’s midfielder, spoke freely, “We must make this arrogant man pay. Nottingham Forest won’t win!”

The enraged Fulham team launched an offensive at home against Nottingham Forest. The result was that they “attacked beautifully and perished gloriously.”

Although Nottingham Forest was no longer at its wits’ end when up against the opponent’s retreat to defense, Twain still liked it when the opponent pressed out. It gave the Forest team opportunities for sneak attacks. Fulham was successfully provoked and wanted to get rid the Forest team with home-field advantage and momentum. But they counted their chickens before they hatched.

Fulham recklessly pressed up and almost scored a goal at the start of the game, which inspired their determination to attack.

But when they calmed down, they would realize that it was a honey trap.

The Forest team was repeatedly compacted by Fulham, and then suddenly rebounded. They scored two goals in ten minutes and completely stunned Fulham.

In the end, Nottingham Forest took down Fulham, the home team, by 3:1. They really delivered a nice Christmas present for their fans.

When Twain left London, he was roundly berated by Fulham people because he continued to be arrogant at the post-match press conference.

Some might not have understood that he just wanted to provoke the other side into losing their calm. He had already won the game and there was no need to press on. A little graciousness was good. But Twain thought that “psychological warfare” was a normal state. Otherwise, it would be easily detected by the other side. Ferguson was an example of a normal state.

Ferguson was a rather nice old man in private, which Twain was aware of because they had had drinks together before and attended a horse race. However, that was in private and other places, not a football field. Once the two met in a challenge, Ferguson would never let go of the opportunity to needle and provoke Twain by any means. When he mocked Twain, no one could see that he and Twain had drank together in private.

That was the norm. Everyone knew that Ferguson was good at psychological warfare, but not everyone could ignore his sarcasm and provocation, because it had become his character at work. There were times when people did not know if he deliberately provoked them, or if that was how he saw them. The

poor Keegan came to mind. Some people liked to play psychological warfare with Ferguson, such as Arsène Wenger, who had exchanged insults with him for ten years.

Twain would do anything in order to win. What was a little of loss of reputation to him? Other people's affection for him would not allow him to score three points. Therefore, he had to broadcast himself as a fierce character who was arrogant, not afraid to provoke people, and fearless. Of course, he had hints of the traits in his own character, but they were not as obvious as what he displayed. He added some "artistic touches" to himself. When he planned to provoke an opponent, the deceit would be more convincing and others would not know whether he was his true self or if it was just a strategy.

Therefore, he was delighted that everyone thought he was an arrogant and powerless egomaniac. The image and rumors would help create some errors in his opponents' judgment.

※※※

With three points and Christmas cheer, Nottingham Forest's Merry Men were back in their lair... No, turf. On the bus on the way back, Twain announced the holiday arrangements.

"As customary in the new year, we will have a party, but that is for next year. We will prepare small gifts for everyone during Christmas as per normal, which will be placed under the Christmas tree in Wilford. You can go collect it tomorrow. We will have a half day training on Christmas Eve, so that everyone can have time with family and friends or just relax. You can do whatever you want, but don't go too crazy. We have a home game on 26th and regular training on the 25th. All right, enjoy this moment of leisure during this busy holiday season!"

At first, the club only set up a small Christmas tree in the lobby of the training base. Underneath the tree was filled with presents, with the names of the players labeled on the boxes. It was Allan's minor change for the club to win over the hearts of its people, which Twain thought was a good thing to do. He proposed to hold it annually and make it a tradition, and they moved the Christmas tree outdoors and made it bigger. Although the gifts were still inexpensive, small items, it was the thought that counted. Not only the players, but all the club's non-playing employees would receive a gift carefully prepared by the club on the morning of the 25th. Loyal fans who bought season tickets would receive a greeting card in the mailbox.

Evan made a lot of changes after he took control of the Forest club. He and Allan learned from NBA clubs in America to promote and improve the image of Nottingham Forest. In his view, no one would listen if they always brought up the long history of the Forest club. Who was interested in what had happened over the past hundred years? Even if the team was one of the first teams in the world, what was the point? Today's football fans only loved the teams that could now make them like it, such as Chelsea with Mourinho, Barcelona with Ronaldinho, Real Madrid with Beckham, and so on.

Allan made the century-old club put down its airs and took the initiative to be closer with the people. Coupled with Twain's constant victories, the Forest team's new image was promoted smoothly. Today, flurries of letters gushing with affection flew to the clubs from around the world. The Forest team had added a number of new fans around the world. These football fans were not fond of the Forest team because of the Forest team's glorious past or long history. They liked Nottingham Forest because the team was strong, had won the UEFA Champions League title, had an idol-like manager, and had a group of famous star players. Then, they discovered the history and were surprised to find that the team's

forefathers were also illustrious. They became more determined to love the team. Most foreign fans basically went through such a process, whether it was with major teams that had long been world-renowned and had always been the top-level powerhouse teams, or a has-been team like Nottingham Forest.

Teams like Real Madrid had to make films and play commercialized games everywhere to promote their brands, not to mention Nottingham Forest.

※※※

On the 22nd, they played a game. Training on the 23rd was only half a day, and not very intense. It was mainly focused on the recovery of stamina. After all, the schedule was intensive, there was no need to increase the intensity of the training.

After training had ended, Twain wandered around the training base. He was not taking a stroll, but greeting his colleagues, wishing them a Merry Christmas. He distributed the cards he had bought. This gift was not the gift provided by the club. The club's gifts were a means of buying people's hearts. The greeting cards that Twain held in his hands were his own way of showing appreciation. He knew he was lacking in some ways, and without the help of these colleagues, he would not have been able to lead the team to that day. Perhaps he would have been fired by Evan partway. Therefore, on Christmas Eve, it was necessary for him to thank the colleagues who had helped him.

Nottingham Forest was a united team. This unity was not only reflected in the players' locker room, but also among the coaching staff and the other workers.

The team doctors, physiotherapists, youth team coaches, reserves coaches, goalkeeper coaches, fitness coaches, tactical coaches, assistant managers... Even the turf maintenance workers at the training ground and the security guards who looked after the gate received a greeting card from Twain, as well as a thank-you note thanking them for their work and efforts over the year and for their help to him.

The outside world said that Tony Twain was a demon who did all kinds of terrible things and would betray his own conscience to win. To be honest, the people inside Wilford were initially surprised by these claims, and then they were derisive. The Tony Twain in their eyes was not a uncultured bastard at all.

After he gave out all the greeting cards, he walked back to his office with Dunn and packed up to get ready to go home.

At the door, he saw George Wood, who had been waiting for a long while.

Twain and Dunn were not at all surprised by Wood's presence. They both knew why Wood was there.

"You only have to make a phone call, George..." Walking up to him, Twain opened the door

"I think it's more formal to say it in person."

Dunn had already heard the question and answer for two years. And he thought that as long as he worked at the club, and that George Wood and Tony Twain were still in this team, he would continue to hear it.

"Well, up to you then." Twain shrugged and pushed the door open.

Wood followed the two men in and stood straight as he said, “my mother invites you both to have dinner tomorrow night.”

Twain turned and went around to behind his desk. He nodded to Wood. “Okay, Dunn and I will be there.”

Just like the club’s distribution of Christmas presents was a tradition that the club intended to maintain for a very long time, Twain and Dunn would pick one night before Christmas to go to Wood’s house for dinner. There was also hope that it would become a tradition — everyone intentionally overlooked the reality of Wood’s mother’s poor health.

Wood, who had finished his task, turned around to leave but Twain stopped him again. “Merry Christmas, George.”

Wood heard him speak and froze for a moment. Then he said, “It’s only the 23rd.”

Twain glared. “Surely I can say it in advance!”

“Sure, Merry Christmas, boss.”

Seeing the two of them like that, the corners of Dunn’s lips slightly curled upwards from where he stood quietly in a corner.

※※※

The atmosphere of training on the 24th was very relaxed. They only carried out some simple tactical drills. Everyone was in a good mood. Twain joked with the people around him. There were sounds of laughter and cheery talk everywhere. It was almost Christmas.

During the holiday, everyone thought only of happy things and left the troubles until next year. Besides, there were not many people in the Forest team who felt vexed.

They were off after training in the morning. Twain and Dunn went to the bustling commercial district to buy a present for Sophia. Twain also wanted to buy Shania a large Totoro doll.

That evening, the two of them stood on the doorstep of George Wood’s place and rang the doorbell.

It was not George Wood or Sophia who opened the door, but... Billy Woon.

“Hi, Mr. Twain, Merry Christmas!” Woon smiled brightly when he saw the expression on Twain’s face. He turned to Dunn, and the smile on his face waned to become normal politeness. “Merry Christmas, Mr. Dunn.”

Twain did not go in. He frowned and asked, “why are you here?”

The smile on Woon’s face changed again as he replied, “why can’t I be here? I’ve been busy as George’s agent this year. Isn’t normal for him to invite me to have dinner?”

But there was another reason — George Wood and Billy Woon were related by blood.

This old man!

“Merry Christmas, Mr. Woox. Hopefully you won’t be giving me any trouble next year.” Twain walked in with a straight face.

“I can’t guarantee you that, Mr. Twain. You know, I have to consider George’s interests. You have your opinion and I have mine.” Woox spread his hands.

Over the course of the year, Woox had only signed three contracts for George Wood, but unlike stars who signed endorsement deals with a dozen businesses in one breath, the three companies that Wood for which was the spokesperson were not insignificant: Gillette razors, Armani’s menswear, and Pepsi. Including Nike, for which he had signed the previous year, George Wood only had four commercial contracts. It was obviously not what Woox had said to Twain before he became Wood’s agent. Twain thought Woox was going to drown George with commercial contracts.

Now, he could see that Woox had built a very detailed plan for George Wood. With his taste and status, he would not casually sign any brands. The conditions under which he selected sponsors were harsh. That was why Wood only had four commercial contracts so far.

That was what Twain liked to see. Wood did not have to frequently attend commercial activities and ignore his job on the football field.

Walking in, Twain saw Sophia, who had come out.

She looked a little paler than the last time he saw her. When was the last time he came to see her? It was the end of last season.

“Merry Christmas, Mr. Twain. Merry Christmas, Mr. Dunn!” Sophia greeted with great enthusiasm.

Twain handed her the gift that he and Dunn had chosen for her. “Merry Christmas, madame.” He did not give Woox a gift, firstly because he did not expect Woox to be there, and secondly, even if he did, he probably would not buy one.

Woox did not mind. He went in to help Wood set the table.

Dunn immediately followed him.

Only Twain and Sophia, who had not opened the gift, were still in the living room.

“Merry Christmas, Mr. Twain.” Sophia greeted once again. She looked at the man in front of her with a smile.

Twain rubbed his head, feeling slightly awkward, but he responded with a smile. “Merry Christmas, madame.”

“Are you feeling well?” he added.

“I’m fine. I just can’t overexert myself.” Sophia nodded. “Thank you for your concern, Mr. Twain.”

None of them could find a topic to continue. Although three people were busy in the dining room, the two suddenly quieted down in the living room.

Sophia was the first to stir. She turned her gaze away from the gift in her hand and asked, “How’s Shania?”

Twain nodded. "Ah, she's good... She's just busy with work lately."

Sophia smiled. "She's a world-famous model. Of course, she's going to be busy. But... she has to spend Christmas by herself, even though she's a world-renowned model. I think Shania will not feel too good, will she?"

"Yeah, she kept saying she was unhappy that she couldn't have turkey with everyone."

Just as they were about to become silent again, Wood came out from inside.

"Mom." He stood beside Sophia and looked at Twain.

"Ah, it's time for dinner. Mr. Twain, please come in." Sophia made a gesture of invitation.

Twain breathed a sigh of relief. Sophia went first, but George Wood stopped to wait for Twain.

"What's the matter, George?" Twain noticed.

Wood shook his head. He just looked at his manager but did not say anything.

"I forgot... Merry Christmas, George." Twain said it to Wood.

"You said it yesterday," Wood replied expressionlessly.

"Well, happy Christmas Eve then." Twain shrugged. He did not care how Wood looked at him and went straight into the dining room.

Putting aside the brief interlude, the dinner was a pleasure to have. It was the first time Twain had had dinner with Woox. Even though they bickered, everyone knew it was done in jest.

It was a fantastic experience for both sides.

Twain and Woox had to stand on opposing sides. If they were an office, they were bound to do everything they could to embarrass the other, but it was Christmas Eve and everyone had to be genial. When they clinked their glasses together, Woox winked at Twain, sending shivers down his back.

※※※

After dinner, Twain was in a hurry to leave. "I don't want to be with Woox for too long." That was the reason he gave Dunn.

But in reality, it was another person who made him feel awkward.

On his way home, Twain received a call from Shania. "I'm in America now, but I worked out the time. You're not sleeping yet, are you, Uncle Tony?"

"Of course not." Twain glanced at Dunn and smiled. "How is it going in America?"

"I'm doing fine... Met some people, got to know some people, and that's about it."

Twain could almost see Shania shrugging her shoulders beside him. "What a boring life..."

"I'm going to be busy after the new year." Shania was not in very good mood. "Ah, there's something I need to do now. Happy Christmas Eve, Uncle Tony!"

“Happy Christmas Eve, Shania.”

Twain hung up the phone and looked at Dunn.

“It’s been a perfect year...”

## **Chapter 612: A Good Football Foundation Started from Young**

Nottingham Forest beat the Boca Juniors 4:3 in the FIFA Club World Cup in Japan and picked up the Club World Cup to become the number one team of the Club World Cup that year.

※※※

When the competition schedule was intense, time went by quickly. Time had unknowingly crossed over the end of the year. Twain’s Nottingham Forest Football Club’s memorial calendar had changed from 2007 to 2008.

The Premier League tournament and the English FA Cup arrived in succession. Thanks to the arrangement of the training program, the Forest team did not have problems with fitness and the team’s condition remained stable.

Starting with the game on December 1st to January 3rd, Nottingham Forest achieved a seven-game winning streak. Their league ranking went from third to first place. The brilliant six-game winning streak in December allowed Twain to receive the honor of the best manager of the Premier League for that month, while Nottingham Forest was crowned the best team of the month. The best player of the month was given to Manchester United’s Cristiano Ronaldo.

And the year-end extravaganza — the worldwide and European-wide selection results was announced.

The World Cup was not taking place in 2007. Although there were the AFC Asian Cup and Copa América, they were not significant for the Eurocentric football world.

As an important reference for the awards, the performance of the UEFA Champions League team and players was the most important.

Nottingham Forest was favored as the European champion.

Nottingham Forest had been honored as the year’s best football club in the world. The team’s core player, Franck Ribéry, was named the recipient of the Ballon d’Or by France’s L’Équipe. Although Kaka did just as well and AC Milan being able to break into the final was almost due to Kaka alone, he lost in terms of collective honor.

Franck Ribéry was also awarded “Player of the Year” by England’s World Soccer.

The competition for “FIFA World Player of the Year” was fierce.

Because the selection mechanism was different from the more professional Ballon d’Or, FIFA’s best candidates were selected through votes from managers of FIFA’s various national and regional teams. However, a country’s manager was not the most professional candidate. China came to mind as an

example. Many managers did not really look at a person's performance over the past year to cast their votes, but just gave their vote to the most familiar name.

Kaka had the upper hand in that area. He had more worldwide prestige than Ribéry. The same went for Cristiano Ronaldo and Messi, who were also more well-known.

Kaka's performance in the Champions League and Serie A spoke for itself. AC Milan was a very different team without him.

Cristiano Ronaldo helped Manchester United pick up the Premier League trophy last season after two years, and in the second half of the new season, he was in better form and was now the top scorer in the Premier League.

As for Messi, he benefited from the setting of Barcelona's grandeur as well as the identity of "Maradona's successor." In fact, he could not be compared to the three in terms of performance.

The end result was that Kaka edged out Franck Ribéry by a narrow margin and was crowned FIFA World Player of the Year. Ribéry came in second and was awarded the Silver Ball, while Portugal's Ronaldo won the Bronze Ball award.

The result was enough for Franck Ribéry to be happy for a long time. A few years ago, when he looked out at the sea by the dock and did not know where his future lay, he did not even dare to think about a scene like today. But now, the dream had become a reality. He became one of the hottest young players in the world. He was a Ballon d'Or recipient and a well-deserved new core player for the French national team. His career had reached its peak.

George Wood entered the list of twenty candidates, though he did not receive any of the honors. It was related to him being a full-time defensive player. Defense was not popular and being a defensive player meant not having a chance for major individual awards. Cannavaro's FIFA World Player of the Year award was not so much a personal award as a reward for Italy's entire rear defensive line. He was Italy's captain and just a representative of the brilliant collective.

The FIFA World Player of the Year was the most important award. After it was awarded, there were some miscellaneous minor awards. Perhaps others disagreed, but in Twain's view, they were the unimportant awards. Even when he was named the FIFA World Coach of the Year for leading Nottingham Forest to UEFA Champions League victory, he was not wild with joy.

He felt it was a matter of course, and he could not think of anyone else qualified to stand on stage and accept the award. The second reason was that he was still protesting for Ribéry. He did not resent that Kaka received the award. He just thought that Ribéry was more qualified to pick up the Golden Ball.

Therefore, his speech on the stage to receive the award seemed a little arrogant and angry.

"I'm happy to receive this award," he said. "It shows that the path I have chosen is right: victory and constant victories; a championship title and more titles. As long as the team can win more championships, honor will not be a surprise at all... But there will also be some surprises... I would like to thank FIFA for presenting this award to me. Thank you!"



Nottingham Forest's offensive core player, Ribéry, did not complete the grand slam and take the Ballon d'Or, Player of the Year, and FIFA World Player of the Year awards, which was the only blemish. Other than that, the Forest team's year was almost flawless.

A year full of honors had passed, and the new year with its endless challenges had arrived. All glory would soon pass, and they would not help the Forest team in the new year.

In the first round of the league tournament in the new year, the Forest team achieved a victory and raised their winning streak to seven games. In the English FA Cup, Twain deployed the Second Team to play and they encountered Roy Keane's Sunderland team.

Due to the different situations of the two teams, the amount of importance placed on the game was different. Twain set out to train the players while Keane hoped to break through the FA Cup so that they could get out of the team's current predicament — 21 rounds had passed and his Sunderland team only accumulated seventeen points. They ranked third from the bottom of the league and were in the relegation zone.

To stay in the league was important, but Keane would prefer a win to boost the team's morale, even if it were just a FA Cup. As long as they could beat the powerful Nottingham Forest team, he had a way of leading the team out of the woods again.

Twain would not throw a game just because the opponent was Roy Keane. While all the players he sent were from the Second Team, the Second Team players were scarier to Keane. For the Nottingham Forest's main players, the FA Cup could not lift their fighting spirit, but it was the Second Team players' great opportunity to perform in front of Twain. No one wanted the chance to be the only one, and nobody wanted to cause the team to lose because of their own performance. As a result, the game was very dangerous for Sunderland. The only thing Keane could rely on was to send the strongest squad and fight it out with the opponent at home.

He won.

After ninety minutes of extremely intense competition, Sunderland edged out Nottingham Forest with a score of 3:2 and smoothly advanced to the next round of the FA Cup.

Since he lost the last chance to train his young players, Twain began to seriously consider putting some of the promising players, who were fated not to have a chance to play in the current Forest team, out on loan on his return to Nottingham from Sunderland.

The youth team's Adriano Moke, who had been on loan at Sunderland since the start of the season, was now Sunderland's First Team regular player. While he was not yet guaranteed to play as the main force, he was not a fringe player sitting on the bench. He was in the starting lineup and played the entire game in the FA Cup match against the Forest team. He performed pretty well and Twain watched Moke's performance at all times during the game. He was a little independent, but young players still had time to correct their faults. Cristiano Ronaldo was nothing like when he first arrived at Manchester United.

He wanted to loan out some of the youth team players, even to teams in the English Football League Championship. They would not improve much if they just trained at Wilford and played in the Youth FA Cup. If they wanted to move to the next level, they would have to go out to compete and play in real matches.

He had to settle the matter when he returned to Nottingham. In addition, with the window opening for the winter transfer, did Nottingham Forest have any players that needed to be bought or sold?

At present, Nottingham Forest's rotation system was more mature. Every position was filled by a capable player. Ribéry returned to the team after recovering from his injury and Pepe's injury also progressed in a better direction. He thought about it and it seemed like there was no particular urgency to bring in new players.

He decided to focus on the type of young player who could be purchased and loaned out for development.

There were many conditions to be met, so it was not easy to locate player. First of all, they had to be young enough to have time to wait for opportunities. Secondly, they had to have enough talent to move Twain. Average players were not worth cultivating and waiting for a few years. Next, they had to still be unknown and not aim too high. Twain did not want a player who wanted to be the leader right away. Lastly, it would be best if their price was cheap. The Forest team's new stadium had broken ground and started construction. The club's available funds were woefully low. Twain would not and could not bid tens of millions of euros for a young genius.

Restricted by those conditions, most well-known young geniuses would be struck off the list. For example, Giovanni dos Santos and Bojan Krkić from Barcelona's La Masia training academy, Carlos Vela, who was out on loan from Arsenal, Jack Wilshere, who recently found big success on Arsenal's youth team, the young French talents, Karim Benzema and Samir Nasri, Italy national youth team's most precious asset, Giuseppe Rossi, Alexandre Pato, who had been snapped up by AC Milan, and so on. Twain would not be able to grab these players, as he did not have the financial resources.

He did not have to worry too much about finding good talent. Nottingham Forest could afford to hire soccer scouts all over the world. In addition, they had a collaboration with SI. The company had a host of amateur and professional scouts. In addition to their FM production, they followed the original agreement to create another version of the player database which was slightly different from the more game-oriented FM database. The database was more rigorous and had more reference value.

With the start of the winter transfer period, Twain needed to speed up his efforts.

※※※

Twain informed his scout team that he needed a list of potential players between the ages of fourteen and sixteen from around the world, and an organized report appeared on his desk two days later.

Instead of studying the report during training time, he took it home to study it with Dunn.

Twain first set his sights within the United Kingdom. He could benefit from the geographical proximity, and it could play a role in weakening his opponents. Following that, he looked at the European Union region, the Americas, Africa, and finally Asia.

After he read all the reports with Dunn, it was already past midnight. Although he was tired to the point of dizziness and his eyesight was blurry, they identified a number of candidates, their names circled in red pencil. The next day, they would hand the list over to the youth team manager. Then, after confirmation, the Forest club would apply to purchase from the clubs the players were located at, or go

to the players to sign contracts to become a member of the Forest team. There was no need for observation as some of these players were under observation by the Forest Team scouting system for a long time.

Two days later, the Forest team launched a worldwide initiative for the foreign acquisitions. How many of the names would eventually come to Nottingham as Twain wished? He did not know. It was like casting out a wide net. No one knew how the harvest would go until it was fished up.

In London, Crystal Palace's genius, John Bostock, who had just turned sixteen, faced the first choice in his life: sign up with his own Crystal Palace team and become a full member of the club's youth team, or sign up with Nottingham Forest and join the European champion team?

In Glasgow, Scotland, sixteen-year-old John Fleck met a man who identified himself as a Nottingham Forest scout. He brought a contract from Nottingham Forest to the main player of the Scottish national team U16.

In Mexico City, the father of Cruz Azul's fifteen-year-old midfielder, Martín Galván, received a call from the UK. The man, who identified himself over the phone as a scout from Nottingham Forest, was very interested in his son.

In southern Brazil, in the port city of Porto Alegre, the famous Grêmio Foot-Ball Porto Alegrense received a fax from Nottingham, England, hoping to have a serious discussion about the future of the sixteen-year-old center back, Gerson Vieira, from the Grêmio youth team.

The same fax was placed on the desk of the Colo-Colo manager in Santiago, Chile. But the player's name on the fax was Nicolás Millán, who was Colo-Colo U16's number 10.

Many more young players around the world received similar notices.

How many of these players would end up like Fàbregas, George Wood, Cristiano Ronaldo, or Kaka?

Twain did not know. Even if they currently had impressive talent, the path to becoming a superstar player was still long. Just talent and strength did not guarantee success. Sometimes a little luck was needed, but more importantly, the effort that they gave on the journey from now to becoming a superstar player was required.

That was why Twain wanted to cast the net worldwide. He could not guarantee that every kid in the scouts' reports described as "the second Maradona," "the second Zidane," "the second Ronaldinho," or "the second Ronaldo" could really get what they wanted. The scope of the search was large and the numbers were many. Even if the elimination rate was eventually high, it could still guarantee to produce one or two stars.

Arsène Wenger's keen eye for talent was not anything new in the international football circle, but he could not guarantee that all the players at Arsenal's youth camp would become superstar players. The ones who ultimately succeeded were not many compared to the young players that Wenger gave up part way.

Twain once thought about if he had transmigrated a few years earlier, whether or not he would have used the advantage of the knowledge to sign on Messi, who still had no money to treat pituitary dwarfism in Argentina, Kaka who almost gave up football when he hurt his spine during a diving accident

in Brazil, or an extremely tender Wayne Rooney at Everton, Cristiano Ronaldo, Francesc Fàbregas, Jack Wilshere, Carlos Vela, Bojan Krkić, or other wonderkids, geniuses, bosses, and prodigies in one fell swoop.

That was something almost all of the FM-ers dreamt of: to be able to gather all the star players to be their men and play for them. Even just the thought of it was exciting.

But it was only a thought.

The current situation was also good, because there were more possibilities in the future. A future that had gradually become unfamiliar to him would give birth to the geniuses he had not yet heard of. It was just like a treasure hunt. He would excavate the treasure once he knew its location. If he did not know where the treasure was, he would search all over the world.

Twain believed that the latter had a greater sense of accomplishment.

George Wood was the first gem he had dug up under unknown circumstances. The first and nth times held completely different meanings, so he did not intend to let go of George Wood.

※※※

These excavations would not come to fruition so quickly. The team had other work that needed to proceed as usual, in addition to waiting for further feedback.

The youth team's center-back, Aaron Mitchell, who was more than two meters tall, was on loan to the English Football League Championship team, West Bromwich Albion. The eighteen-year-old right back, Gavin Kavanagh was on loan to Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club, who was also in the English Football League Championship. Another eighteen-year-old midfielder, Lewis McGugan, was on loan to Stoke City. Mark Byrne went to Watford.

A few of the most promising players in Nottingham Forest's youth team had been out on loan. It was their own business to learn what they could in those teams. Twain did not look at the process, he only looked at the results. Those who made something of themselves could stay, and those who did not would be sold.

The young players who left Wilford were equally clear headed. From then on, they were no longer rookies waiting for opportunities in the youth team. They were full fledglings that needed to fly out and make their chances. Their feet determined what the future would hold. As for how many players could eventually come back and stay, that was still a mystery.

The league tournament was still in progress.

The Forest team that lost the English FA Cup seemed to be ensnared by bad luck. They first faced Derby County in an away game and had the upper hand during the entire game. They pressed on the opponent and bombarded their goal, only to accept the result of a 2:2 draw with the opponent. It annoyed Twain that they could not get three points from the underdog team, but what made him even more annoyed was the performance of the opposing home fans after the game.

Due to the historical feud between the two teams, Nottingham Forest and Derby County, the Derby County fans were joyous when they saw Nottingham Forest eventually be forced to a draw by the newly promoted Derby County. So in contrast, Twain's face looked grim.

Before this game, the Forest team returned to the top of the league with seven straight wins and fifty points, and surpassed Arsenal with its forty-nine points and Manchester United with its forty-eight points in one shot.

But with the draw, it was immediately overtaken by Manchester United, which won a game. Both teams had fifty-one points, but Manchester United was number one because they had scored more goals.

In the next round, the Forest team lost to Everton at home again and was overtaken by Manchester United and Arsenal, who both had victories. They were back in third place in the league.

There were some ups and downs in the team's form and Twain found the problem — the rotation system.

The rotation system was designed to give the team plenty of stamina while it competed in multiple tournaments, while it also ensured that most players had games to play and stayed in shape. But if the rotation was too frequent, it would leave the players at a bit at a loss. The lineup in the previous game played well, but the manager changed the lineup and tactics in the next game. How could they guarantee the overall continuity and stability of the team?

After Christmas, the team's schedule was not intense. They had already been eliminated in the English FA Cup and the Champions League knockout stage had not yet begun. They only had the league games once a week, and thus, did not really have to use the rotation system.

Therefore, after they lost the game to Everton, Twain temporarily gave up the rotation system, or at least, the large-scale rotation.

Things got better. Nottingham Forest defeated Middlesbrough by 2:0 in the final game of January.

In the meantime, there was also a steady stream of good news with regards to the plans to invest in the future.

※※※

John Bostock accepted the Forest team's contract and chose to go to Nottingham Forest, where he could receive a better deal once he reached the age of sixteen. The Forest team's recent string of honors was the reason for his decision.

While Martín Galván was in Mexico's famously strong team, Cruz Azul, Nottingham Forest and Europe's top football standards were clearly more attractive. He agreed to join Nottingham Forest. But there was some trouble: Mexico ruled that players under the age of eighteen were not be allowed to play abroad. Martín was only fifteen years old, so he would have to wait at least three years. Was Nottingham Forest willing to wait? Twain agreed to wait.

The Forest team and Cruz Azul reached an agreement that Martín's permanent ownership belonged to Nottingham Forest, but before he reached the age of eighteen, he would play for, train in and compete

for Cruz Azul. Not only was his salary paid for the Forest team, but the Forest team would also pay an additional amount each year to Cruz Azul as a “training fee.”

Chile did not have such a rule, so Nottingham Forest spent 500,000 pounds to bring Nicolás Millán to England and place him in Nottingham Forest U16 youth team for specific observation.

Even having cast such a wide net, only those three players were signed at the end. However, Twain was satisfied. The development of the youth team and the excavation and purchase of young talents were normal. It required long term persistence, so the result of the three players that time was very good. Rome was not built in a day. A youth training academy that enjoyed prestige in Europe and internationally would not be able to rise up in a day.

Nicolás Millán and John Bostock came to Nottingham Forest. Twain went to pick them up, met them, and introduced himself. Then, he handed them over to the youth-development manager. But everyone knew he would pay close attention to the performance of the new young players.

It had to be done. In the next few years, as long as the Forest team’s new stadium was not complete, Twain had to tighten his belt. It was much more cost-effective to search for young geniuses and cultivate them than to spend large amounts to buy the famous stars.

## **Chapter 613: 9527**

“One, two, three, start.”

“Hello everyone, I am the thirteenth contestant and my name is Chen Jian. I’m nineteen years old and from Chengdu, Sichuan province.” A dark-skinned teenager, standing in front of the camera, introduced himself with a grin that revealed his striking white teeth. He turned his head to look to the side, and there was a man gesturing to him.

“Shout out a slogan and strike a POSE!” the man mouthed to him.

The teenager, who called himself “Chen Jian” turned back and thought about it. The camera’s monitor entered a brief silence.

“I want to play professional football and hopefully everyone will... like me.” He laughed nervously. He wanted to say, “I hope everyone will support and vote for me,” but he remembered that the talent show did not have an audience vote, so it was useless even if the audience supported him. He had to change his words. Therefore, when he thought about it, he laughed.

“Good!” The cameraman put down the camera and muttered, “luckily it wasn’t live...”

“Next!” The man waved to another teenager waiting at the side, and motioned for him to go up for his introduction. Chen Jian returned to a group of teenagers of similar ages.

It was the training camp for the finals of The Football Kid talent show held by the Hunan Television and a number of local and foreign media and companies.

The audition for the country’s six competition districts had already ended, with fourteen lucky winners selected from the six areas. Now they were gathered in Changsha, the capital of Hunan province to

participate in three and a half months of training. A variety of assessments and competitions would be conducted with the contestants to gradually eliminate them and three contestants would advance to the finals. After that, three judges on live television would rate the three contestants based on their performances over the past three and a half months. The top two contestants would be rewarded with a one-year trial in England's top teams. For these Chinese teenagers who liked football and desired a future in professional football, it was a good dream and more exciting than one million dollars.

Chen Jian was one of them. Watching him stand in front of the camera and introduce himself with a smile, how many future television viewers would know the story behind the smile?

※※※

The nineteen-year-old youth, who spoke Mandarin with a slight Sichuanese accent, initially auditioned for the Beijing division where he attended the Justice Jingtuan School in Tianjin, close to Beijing. However, he was eliminated. The reason for his elimination was simple — he was not strong enough.

Out of the ten thousand people who auditioned in the Beijing division, his strength was not enough to even enter the top one hundred.

The majority of the youth who came to audition were able to enter the final one hundred and then face the British coach's personal assessment. Most of them were professionally trained, from a sports school or from a third team of a professional football club. Chen Jian had not received even a day of professional training. He got played football as a hobby. He was one of the best in terms of amateur playing and as a hobby. Since he was young, he was the main player in the school teams, including in Tianjin Justice Jingtuan School, where he was also a main player who represented the university in the China University Football League. That was also what gave him the confidence and motivation to participate in this talent show.

But compared with people of similar ages who had received professional training, he was not strong enough as an amateur player who adopted football later in life. He barely made it into the top one hundred before he was eliminated by the British coach.

When an average person was eliminated, they would be depressed and return home dejected. Chen Jian was not the average person. He was only frustrated for one night. Once he heard that the people who were eliminated in that division were also free to participate in the other division selections. He rekindled his hope. He felt that he had a turn of bad luck. In the next division, he would be able to play to his strongest level and impress the coaches.

The next day, he called his instructor to apply for a leave of absence, packed his bags, and left from Beijing for Wuhan.

This time, he stopped at the top fifty. The first time, he did not make it to the top fifty, but what was the point? He was still eliminated.

Chen Jian refused to admit defeat. He continued to apply for leave and went to Changsha to participate in the auditions in the Changsha division. He got into the top thirty.

As Changsha was the location of the organizers, there was some preferential policies. The other divisions only had two candidates who could enter the final training camp, whereas Changsha was allowed to

have four spots. The extra places might let some people achieve what they wanted, but if one could not get in that division, the remaining Chengdu division was basically pointless.

Chen Jian still did not pass the assessment. Did he give up?

No. Chen Jian did not even apply for a leave and skipped class to take the train to Chengdu.

It was his last chance to try. He would give up if he failed again. He would set his mind at rest and study to become a policeman, work to support his family, and find a decent girl to start a family with. As for my love of football, I can at least play football in my spare time and watch the games.

The road to happiness was paved with hardships. Chen Jian did not manage to buy a train ticket for the right day. The train ticket he bought to Chengdu was on the afternoon of the audition. He even did not have time to rest before the selection.

To make matters worse, he was burning up with a fever from the mental stress and being constantly on the move. He also had the runs from eating contaminated food on the train.

When the train arrived in Chengdu, he felt weak as he dizzily walked out of the compartment. He did not know how he rushed to the selection venue, Sichuan Gymnasium.

When he arrived outside the stadium and saw the sea of people at the scene of the audition, he felt faint.

After he obtained a number, he found a shady spot to sit down and rest. It was 2:30 in the afternoon. He had not had breakfast or lunch. Although he was hungry, he did not have an appetite to eat. His fever had not receded and his limbs were sore and weak. He felt dizzy and cold.

There was no contestant more wretched than him.

Most people would have gone to the hospital for an IV drip and headed home after they recovered. It's not my wish to meet with such an awful situation and it looks like God does not want me to pass. So why should I still bother to do it?

A lot of people would think that. But Chen Jian was not the average person. He was tough and obstinate. He refused to concede. He would take that last chance to finish.

He leaned against the concrete border of the flower bed. Around him, competitors were either eating a simple lunch to replenish their strength or doing warm-up exercises and drills. He leaned there lethargically and did nothing. It was not that he did not want to warm up. He did not have the strength to warm up. He could only save his strength at the most critical moment.

He sat like that until he heard the speakers in the square blaring the contestants' numbers from 9500 to 9550 and pushed himself against the platform to stand up. He staggered into the crowd.

He did not know how he had held on, nor did he know how he passed each of the assessments. All he knew was that the sky had dimmed, and the bustling crowd outside had dispersed with only the trash littering the ground. He could not hear the buzzing noises. He stood in the grassy stadium. With the exception of five coaches, three television camera men and reporters, only ten of his peers wearing training vests were left.



And he, Chen Jian, stood among these ten men.

He was in the top ten of Chengdu division, which was his best result after his participation in the four competitions.

Among the five coaches, there was also the chief judge whose face was familiar to Chen Jian. He was the British coach who had eliminated him in the Beijing division. He saw the man twice again in the Wuhan division and Changsha division. Chen Jian could not remember this person's name until now. It was useless for him to know. He had to rely on his own strength to pass the assessment rather than claim connections with the chief judge to climb higher.

He glanced a few more times and averted his gaze to stand in line to wait for the next assessment. As he had not eaten for a day and could barely stand, but he clenched his teeth to persevere. He smiled on the outside and looked confident while he gritted his teeth behind his closed lips.

The chief judge, Kenny Sansom swept his gaze across the ten lucky contestants standing in front of him and discovered a familiar face — Number 9527 with his smiling face, tanned skin and strong body. If he had only seen the face once in the Beijing division, Sansom would not have remembered the youth at all. But he saw the smiling, tanned face four times: Beijing, Wuhan, Changsha and Chengdu.

He had a deep impression of the smile because he could see that this kid was trying his hardest to hold on.

The Chinese coach at his side looked at him, and he nodded to his colleagues who worked on this with him.

The local Chengdu coach stepped forward and faced the ten lucky contestants. "Your strength to be able to break into the Chengdu division's top ten. I know a lot of the contestants who came here are not Chengdu or Sichuan natives. Some people were even unwilling to give up and come here for the last fight because they were eliminated in the other competitions. So, I can say without exaggeration that the Chengdu Division is the strongest, most competitive, and most brutal division among the country's six divisions!"

He raised his voice, and the ten youths in front of him applauded in response.

"So, to be able to get into the top ten is enough to show how strong you are. However, according to the rules, only the last two contestants in this division can advance to the finals' training camp, so that means eight of you will be eliminated. But don't give up on your love of football even if you don't win." The coach's words stirred everyone up.

"Now..." He looked back at the British coach and other colleagues behind him and turned around to continue, "there's no final assessment."

The ten contestants had a look of surprise on their faces. They thought that there had to be the most brutal and severe assessment waiting for them at the end and they would have to push past their limits to pass.

"This is the end. There is no more assessment or test. The final two places will be awarded based on the performances the ten of you gave throughout the selection process. The two people who score the

highest will be given tickets to Changsha.” He raised his hand and somehow two envelopes appeared in his hand.

Everyone knew what was in there. It was not a ticket to Changsha but a ticket to their dream.

With that, he stopped talking and just stood aside. The Englishman, Kenny Sansom, stepped forward. His job was simple but was the one with the most attention. He just had to read the two winners’ numbers. He was the one to announce their fate.

Sansom looked at the ten Chinese teenagers in front of him. Over the months in China, he followed the entire process of the selection in the various competitions and interacted with a wide variety of people from the top — the Chinese Football Association officials and people from the media — down to the ordinary fans and these young players. He recognized that football in China was different from in the United Kingdom. But there was one thing in common: the passion and love for football.

In an earlier interview with BBC Television, he said that given the poor results of the Chinese national men’s soccer team in the AFC Asian Cup, their early elimination in the World Cup qualifiers in South Africa, the continued slump in Chinese football, and other factors, he had thought the event might not get as good a response as expected. He did not think that the auditions would be a sea of people each time, not to mention how much attention the media paid. It was not known how high the show ratings would be. When he saw so many adolescent faces hopeful with dreams appear in front of his own eyes, he felt... How could he put it? It was incredible. It was hard to understand why there were so many football-loving teenagers in this country when the football standards were so low.

“Boys, among you... there can only be two people to advance, so good luck to you all.” He spoke in English before he announced the two numbers. “3084.”

The teenager, who stood on the right side of Chen Jian, screamed with his arms held high. Everyone turned their heads to look at him. The number on his chest was “3084.”

Someone congratulated him, but more people were worried and anticipating the last spot. Who would get it?

For the nine remaining boys, the cruelest moment had arrived. This was the last chance. Unlike the previous five divisions where they could move on to the next division and continue to try to win after being eliminated, if they were eliminated there, there would be no a “next time” again.

Although Hunan Television had publicized that there might be a second season, it depended on the impact and earnings for the first season in China. Who could predict it?

Chen Jian was still smiling. He did not want anyone to see his nervousness.

Sansom looked at the teenager, who was still cheering, with a smile on his face. He beckoned the lucky kid to come forward and stand to the side. His excitement was too out of step with the nervousness of the other nine people.

“And...9527.”

The lucky “9527” contestant answered and fainted. It was not due to excitement, but exhausted. After Chen Jian heard the results, he could no longer hold on and fainted because he had not eaten the entire day, his fever still ran high, his head was dizzy, and his legs trembled.

※※※

Chen Jian had a dream, which was short but wonderful. He dreamed of the beautiful Qiuxiang Sister embracing him in deep concern and anxiously calling his number —

“9527? How are you feeling?”

“9527? Wake Up!”

“Someone fainted, someone fainted! Quickly!”

“9527... Chen Jian, Chen Jian... Wake up, wake up!”

Someone shook him awake. After some haziness, he looked clearly at the people in front of him. Where was the appearance of the beautiful Qiuxiang Sister? There was only a Caucasian man’s face. Then he turned his head and saw more concerned faces.

“You’re awake.” The Caucasian man had a reassuring smile on his face.

Chen Jian did not understand. He turned his head and looked at the people around him in confusion.

“You fainted when we announced the result,” the Chengdu coach said as he crouched down. Chen Jian realized that he was lying on the ground. There were nine other peers next to him who were also concerned about him.

“You’re running very hot. Do you have a fever?” The Englishman asked quickly, but Chen Jian looked confused. He immediately remembered and asked the man next to him to translate for him.

After he understood the translation, Chen Jian bobbed his head. “I had a fever on the train ride here and I also had food poisoning. I didn’t eat for a day because I was worried about what would happen during today’s assessment.”

Sansom was moved when he heard the translated answer.

Even the Chinese coaches and his competitors who were familiar with the situation were very surprised. It turned out that he competed with them in such a condition and still emerged the winner.

“Hey, buddy.” A teenager with a Beijing accent who had also rushed there from other divisions stepped forward. “I’m impressed.” He patted Chen Jian on the shoulder and gave him a thumbs up. “You’re awesome!”

Chen Jian remembered him because he was also eliminated and came from the Beijing division, but he was in the top ten in the Beijing division before he was finally eliminated. He once trained in the youth team of the Beijing Sinobo Guoan Football Club and could be considered a professional. He always thought highly of himself and felt that his elimination was only a matter of luck, not strength, so he went to Chengdu to prove himself again. He did not expect to lose to Chen Jian.

Initially, he was unwilling to accept the outcome: how could someone like him with a professional background lose to an amateur player? Now he was sincerely convinced and ready to concede because he thought he could not even get through the primaries with his physical condition.

The majority of people would probably not even participate in the selection and give up because they were not feeling well.

Sansom laughed. "OK, kid. Now you can go have a good meal, take a hot bath, and then get some sleep. When you wake up tomorrow, whatever discomfort will be gone. Of course, don't forget to take medicine." He reached his hand out and congratulated Chen Jian.

"Congratulations, 9527, Chen Jian."

### **Chapter 614: The Dark Horse Prince**

After he tore off the January page in the calendar, Twain learned a new update. The news made him very angry, but he could not express it in person.

Evan Doughty approached him and informed him that on February 4th and 5th, he would lose his most trusted assistant manager for two days.

"Is that The Football Kid talent show again, isn't it?" He grunted. He actually wanted to swear the moment Evan told him about it, but when he planned to do so, he thought of Mourinho, and quickly calmed down.

He was not as arrogant as Mourinho. He was very much aware of who the club belonged to. He did not want to be considered "insubordinate" by Evan, which would not benefit him at all. He did not want to own the entire club; it would not do him any good. It would give him a headache instead.

Therefore, he just grunted to express his displeasure.

Evan smiled. "No one is more suited to be there for the finals of the show than Dunn. Because he's..."

Twain nodded. "Yes, I know. He's from China and also an assistant manager of this team. He's popular in China and the audience will be delighted to see a familiar face appear in such an occasion. It is a way to woo the Chinese audience and market."

"I've always said that Tony Twain is a very smart man," Evan said with a grin. He did not mind that Twain interrupted him.

This was what Twain liked about Evan more than Abramovich. He was not as wealthy as the Russian, but because of this, he was a little smarter.

Twain knew that with a temperament like his, he was more amenable to coaxing and not coercion. Mourinho was the same. He could not get angry at Evan's grinning face, but if he encountered such a hardline boss like Abramovich, Twain would push back hard against the other man to the end. At the most, they would separate. In this day and age, who would be afraid anymore?

“Flattery is useless on me, Evan...” Twain waved feebly. He was upset about it, but not to the point where he would turn his back on the club owner for it. “I think Allan is a little too shortsighted with this. Some things are too rushed... I’m afraid he’ll suffer later.”

“I’ll convey your worry to him, Tony. Let’s talk about this matter. In fact, that talent show can be counted as a success so far. The ratings are very high, and the social impact is also good.” Evan brought up the data from China, but Twain doubted how much weight there was to it. He cautiously agreed. “Also, you don’t have to worry about this taking too much time. Allan will go to China with Dunn. Dunn’s job is very simple, and he will return once it’s finished. Allan will be in charge of the other things. It’s just two days of events that won’t delay too much.” He patted Twain on the shoulder.

Twain shrugged and helplessly said, “all right. It would still happen even if I didn’t agree.”

“Thank you for your understanding and support, Tony. Finally, I would like to congratulate you for becoming the best coach in the world.” Evan held out his hand.

Twain patted him on the hand. “You said it last year.”

“It doesn’t hurt to say it one more time.”

Evan went back with satisfaction, and Twain sighed helplessly. He had no choice since he worked for other people. But Twain still insisted on the idea of not being a boss. He knew he was not cut out for it.

※※※

On February 2nd, Nottingham Forest had a minor victory of 1:0 over West Ham United at home. Since Manchester United was forced into an away draw by Tottenham Hotspur, the gap between the Forest team and Manchester United narrowed while Arsenal, who won its game, took the opportunity to overtake and return to the top of the league.

Halfway through the league tournament, the battle for the league title was becoming hotter.

Dunn packed light and set off again on a flight back to China. The initial climax of the show had intended Allan to be the hidden boss. However, Allan decided to let Dunn, whom the Chinese people found more acceptable and familiar, to complete the glorious task.

Setting aside Twain as a factor, the choice that he made was really good.

Although he was an assistant manager, Dunn already had a group of fans in China. They liked and chased after Dunn. They paid attention to him and gathered all the news about him. It might be the result of the warped environment in Chinese football — it did not make sense to worship the players, so they might as well worship the coaches.

Anyway, Dunn was someone who could give mental comfort to the vast number of Chinese fans abroad. With so many players in a slump overseas, only Dunn was still strong enough to appear in the technical area at the sidelines of the Premier League games every week. Therefore, from the standpoint of wooing the Chinese audience and market, Dunn was indeed the perfect candidate for the trip to China.

His job was really simple. On the day of the recording of the grand finale, he only needed to appear at the last minute of the show and announce a result that was unexpected to everyone, and that would be the end.

When Twain sent Dunn off, he repeatedly urged him, “come back when you’re done. Don’t be late by two days like the last time and not come back. You should know that punishment for being late does not just apply only to the players...”

Dunn nodded. “Tang Jing will not be going this time.”

“That’s good.” Twain snorted and added, “come back early.”

※※※

“9527” Chen Jian had a farewell dinner party with the friends he had been together with for over three months.

Because the fainting incident made him famous on the show, many viewers were very fond of the resilient lad, but it also made the number his new nickname. His mates often said it to make fun of him. It was only one of his nicknames. The Englishman, Kenny Sansom liked to call him the “Smiler” because his smile left a deep impression on Sansom. Not only that, the teenager always had a smile on his face, which was also very popular among the television audience.

He sat with his fellow contestants for drinks and dinner. It was the last dinner they would have together.

Of course, there were already fewer than thirteen people sitting next to Chen Jian.

The finals training camp was very cruel. Because the British directed the training camp, the selection criteria was only based on football and not who was more handsome or who could do hip hop or other boring stunts.

The British coaching staff had developed a number of training subjects for the Chinese teenagers. Their assessment was to complete the sporting events. Each sporting event was scored separately, and a comprehensive evaluation would be taken.

It ensured the intensity of the competition, so that the program had more suspense, making it more attractive to the audience.

For example, some people could obtain high marks on the skill segment, but lost points in their stamina. Some people were in top form physically, but less skilled. Some people were good at scoring goals while the others liked to assist their teammates or defend. Everyone had things they were good and not good at. If the coaches did not announce their results, no one would know if they had won the final game.

In three months, they had sent away seven people, and today they were going to “send away” four more.

The eliminated people would not leave immediately. The seven contestants who were previously eliminated would be invited back to the final episode of the recording.

Kenny Sansom announced the names of the three lucky contestants who reached the finals on the training ground before the meal.

They were Wang Yang and Song Hui, as well as Chen Jian.

Once again, he made it to the end.

In fact, after the start of the training camp, Chen Jian was “the hot ticket” slated to be eliminated. He was the only one with no professional training among the fourteen contestants. He was purely an amateur. The most brilliant part of his resume was that he had won the Sichuan Guangyuan All High School Football Cup title in his high school football team.

But the amateur player was able to go all the way to the grand finale and become one of the top three, as well as have the chance to get one of the two tickets to the United Kingdom.

What was his secret? It was very simple and comprised of just three words. “Practice makes perfect.”

He practiced hard on the areas he was not as good at and doubled the time the others practiced. He wracked his brains on how to improve his results in the events he was inferior in and maintain his own advantage in the events he was good at. For example, his skills and awareness were not as good as the professionally trained contestants, but his stamina and physical fitness were good, and he was fast. He was always in first place every time the training camp organized fitness and speed tests. The score of that event greatly contributed in his achievement in the final top three.

At the same time, his achievements in the areas he was not good at were steadily improving. Everyone at the training camp saw his progress. Kenny Sansom particularly liked the kid, who was focused and worked hard.

On top of that, Chen Jian started practicing his English. The people around him did not understand. His answer was “I have to be tested on English in university anyway. If I’m not selected, I will have to worry about English papers.”

His mentality was optimistic and good.

He was underestimated every time, but every time he became one of the contestants who stayed in Changsha. Until then, he had the worst result out of the three people, but he continued to stay. This was a victory.

Wang Yang and Song Hui were the two contestants with the highest odds. Their selection was not a surprise from the beginning. Chen Jian was really a dark horse. With his tanned skin, he also had the nickname “the Dark Horse Prince.”

A tall man stood across the table with a beer mug in his hand. “No matter who among the three of you can go to England, I have nothing to say. We’ve all been brothers these three months.” The person, the seventh contestant from Dalian, spoke Mandarin with a Northeastern accent. He was Zhao Rui. “Since we’re all brothers, I, Zhao Rui, will be happy to see any of you go to England. Whoever goes goes on behalf of our Chinese people. But I have add one more thing...” He looked at the smiling Chen Jian in the crowd.

“9527.” That was the most widely accepted of Chen Jian’s nicknames. “I’m impressed!” Zhao Rui gave a thumbs up. “I may not necessarily lose in terms of skills and standards.” Zhao Rui was qualified to say that. He came from Dalian Shide youth team, which was a very good team. He was almost on par with Song Hui and Wang Yang. His elimination was really just a little bad luck. On the day of the most critical assessment, he caught a cold and ran a high fever, so his performance was a mess. He hid in the bathroom to cry after. After that, he came out with reddened eyes and said, “it’s just an elimination. What’s the big deal?”

“But I’m blown away! 9527! I really admire you! You’re the man! Truly!” Zhao Rui had a little bit to drink, so he was in an exuberant mood. “Damn it... just because I had a cold and fever, I was eliminated whereas you could still pass the audition assessment. Ten thousand people! And they can’t hold a candle to your fever and diarrhea... Just on this, I really admire you!”

Chen Jian smiled from start to finish. He did not know how to cope with such an enthusiastic friend. Furthermore, that kind of open praise embarrassed him a little. He was aware of the extent of his own abilities.

“Forget it! I’ll stop talking nonsense. Come have a toast...cheers!”

Chen Jian stood up. He clinked his glass against Zhao Rui’s and drained the full mug of beer. He won another round of praise from Zhao Rui, who exclaimed, “good! Honest! And straight! I like!” He also knocked back his drink.

Some of the other people congratulated and toasted the three finalists in turn. Chen Jian drank a lot and was a little dazed. Even if he had not been forced to drink so much, he would still be stunned.

I actually got into the final three and have a chance to compete for one of those two spots. Am I dreaming? My standard... My standard has not even reached such a strong level. Although I do work harder than others, to be able to... go to England... Can I really do that? Will I embarrass the Chinese people if I go?

The draft was still a talent show, after all. The commercial nature could not be discounted. Even if he could finally go to England, the English football clubs did not expect to pick a genius out of it. Therefore, the biggest possibility was that they finished the contracts and let the two lucky Chinese winners train there for a year before they returned to where they came from. At best, they could experience what real professional football was, broaden their horizons, and enrich their life experiences. Could they really expect to play professional football based on it? Hey, buddies, wake up. Stop dreaming.

Everyone sitting there hoped to become famous and fulfill their dream of playing professional football. Even an amateur contestant like Chen Jian had the idea, not to mention those who came from professional teams.

But when such an opportunity was in front of them, they were a little afraid. They were afraid that their standards could not keep up with other people’s demands and return a year later with their tails between their legs.

“Hey, what are you daydreaming about? 9527! Let’s have a toast! You lucky son of a gun, so lucky...” Someone came up to clink his glass again.

That was also a way of putting it. Some people speculated why the obviously weak Chen Jian could stay every time and hold on to the end to get the ticket to the finals. Perhaps there was an inside story?

It was a pity that there was no inside story. Luck did have quite a part in it. The audience who supported the other contestants thought Chen Jian’s luck was too good. The last competition to decide who would be in the top three relied a lot on luck: a penalty shootout!



The vast majority of people would agree that the winner determined by the penalty shootout, relied not on their skills and awareness or anything else, but merely on luck. The viewers thought so, and naturally some of the fellow contestants also thought so.

Chen Jian did not care about the prattle. He raised his glass and clinked the other person's glass.

Everyone drank to their hearts' content. Song Hui, Wang Yang, and Chen Jian drank because they broke into the finals. While a few other people might have been trying to drown their sorrows, or perhaps they were truly happy for them, or maybe... there were other options, and they did not matter.

When the show aired the next day, there would be no more assessment. They did not have to worry if they had a hangover.

It was a farewell party. After today, and when the recording of the program was over tomorrow, all the answers and surprises would be revealed.

Life should be enjoyed to the fullest when times are good, let's get drunk!

### **Chapter 615: Ah, Life Is Full of Ups and Downs**

Twain was watching the DVD discs Dunn brought back from China for him.

Unlike the box of discs brought back by Dunn last time, this version was edited to be more like a reality television show with protagonists and supporting actors. There were voice-overs and scripted lines.

Therefore, he watched it with relish, and did not feel impatient, even though he had been watching it for an hour and a half.

If the three months of the training camp leading up to the grand finale was more professional and suitable for the vast number of fans to watch, then the grand finale program was more entertaining, which could be discerned from the number of live female audience members.

Football was full of male charisma, so there was no reason for it not to be favored by women. With neutrality flooding the current entertainment circles, The Football Kid presented another kind of beauty to the general audience — the beauty of male strength, speed, power, passion, victory, and failure.

Therefore, the final stage of this television program would be entertaining.

During the live show, a few singers were invited to sing to liven up the atmosphere, and all the fourteen contestants presented their own choreography and skill performances to the audience.

Twain had little interest in the cultural program, so he fast-forwarded to watch later segments.

※※※

Even with the artistic segment, the show producers had not forgotten the real purpose of the show.

The contestants' videos began to play on the big screen at the live show, from childhood video footage to audition highlights, as well as clips of the general training camp. Coupled with their evaluation from both the Chinese and British coaches, they re-introduced the two lucky contestants.

Why was it only two contestants?

Twain turned his head and looked at Dunn, who sat next to him without a word.

“Why are there only two people? What about Chen Jian’s introduction?”

Dunn shrugged his shoulders. “There wasn’t one.”

“None? What does that mean? There were three finalists, but they only introduced two people in the video. The other person had nothing except a simple image.” Twain glared and looked a little angry.

“What the hell are these idiots doing?”

“I don’t know either.” Dunn answered. He really did not know.

※※※

Indeed, the introduction videos of Wang Yang and Song Hui appeared on the big screen, but Chen Jian did not have one. When the contestants appeared in turn from the background, the presenters grandly promoted Wang Yang and Song Hui.

“This is China’s future Fàbregas — Wang Yang!!”

“Song Hui! He could become the future Rio Ferdinand of China!!”

Then it was Chen Jian’s turn.

“Let’s welcome Chen Jian from the Chengdu division in Sichuan!”

And it was over and done with. The introduction was finished.

Amid the joyous atmosphere of the scene, no one noticed the episode. Everyone followed the presenter, and no one had time to consider if the introduction held any deeper meaning. The results came out before this final, but no one knew.

Chen Jian did not take it to heart. In fact, before he appeared, he waited in back stage and watched his two fellow contestants run out. When he heard that the formerly famous commentator-turned-presenter speak to the audience with his usual enthusiastic tone, he actually looked forward to it. What would the presenter shout when his turn came? Which future player would he be from China?

He was no one or anyone.

He was pushed onto the stage.

Wang Yang was the most handsome among the three finalists and the most popular contestant online. Song Hui had been the team leader of the training camp. They could be better than Chen Jian in every way, so even if they finally got the tickets to the English Premier League, it was well-deserved and to be expected.

But Chen Jian still had hope in his heart. There were people who said that his advance to the finals was due to good luck. Only he knew that that was not the reason.

Earlier today, the three finalists were asked to record their introductions for release before they appeared on stage to introduce themselves.

As a midfield playmaker, Wang Yang's manifesto fit his position. He declared, "I believe football is a game to be played using brains and I will play with wisdom like Fàbregas!"

Song Hui also introduced what he was best at. "Speed, coordination, and stability are my specialities. I'm fit for the English Premier League."

During Chen Jian's turn, the first sentence he came up with seemed frustrated, which made people feel that he had given up before the fight. "I may not have the best football skills..." He paused before he continued, "but I'm definitely the most persistent. My name is Chen Jian, my family name is Chen, which means East, and Jian as in strength. My father gave me this name because he wanted me to persevere and be strong. I firmly believe that attitude determines everything." That was how he was able to get to the final top three — definitely not luck.

But when he said that, many people still thought they were just beautiful words for the occasion.

Chen Jian stood in the middle after his appearance, with Wang Yang to his left and Song Hui to his right. The two presenters stood on the left and right. They briefly interviewed Wang Yang and Song Hui. One of them asked Song Hui how he left. The other presenter praised Wang Yang for his good looks and how he was so popular that he snatched away many fans of the handsome presenter, which drew laughter from below the stage.

No one interviewed Chen Jian. The two presenters turned to introduce the two coaches at the live show. They were a former China national footballer and the former Arsenal team captain, Kenny Sansom.

Chen Jian stood in the middle, his tanned skin and dark sports jacket almost blending in with the dark stage. He was quiet and still had a smile on his face.

After the introduction of the coaches, it was time to introduce the work units that participated and supported to the talent show — the Chinese Football Association Youth Department, the Everton Football Club, and the Bolton Wanderers Football Club. There was no mention of Nottingham Forest, which was still a secret.

Allan Adams sat in a corner in the auditorium, looking at the scene with interest. The audience had been brought into the pre-arranged setting by the presenters. When they came out at the last minute, it would be sensational and impress everyone.

Things were going according to plan...

※※※

Dunn waited backstage. He only needed to make his appearance at the last minute, and he had nothing to do until then. There was a television in the lounge, so he sat down to watch the live broadcast on the television.

Perhaps other viewers focused their attention on Wang Yang and Song Hui, who the presenters had formally introduced. But Dunn kept his eyes on Chen Jian.

He had little interest in that type of entertainment shows. He only cared about what was relevant to his mission. He already knew the result. Except with the gift that he was going to bring back, would Twain like it?

There were four breaks during this fifty-minute live broadcast. When the presenter said, “We’ll come back live after the commercial break.” Then the lights were dimmed, and everyone had a five-minute break for a restroom break or to do whatever. Most people stayed in the auditorium for the sake of convenience.

Dunn finally had the opportunity to look away from the television and went to the restroom to relieve himself. The program had reached its final segment. Once they returned after the ad break, the final mystery would be revealed.

※※※

Chen Jian looked around at the noisy crowd and decided to go to the restroom. He did not have to relieve himself.

He was just nervous.

The show had been going on for forty minutes. What needed to be said had been said and what needed to be performed had been done. What was left? It was obviously the announcement of which two lucky contestants would be the ones to go to the English Premier League, which was the main theme of the episode.

No matter how happy the beginning was, the hidden blow was inevitable.

Consequently, Chen Jian was nervous. No matter how calm and tenacious he was in the tests, he could not help being nervous in the face of an elusive fate.

He went to the restroom and bumped into a person at the entrance.

That person apologized to him and hurried off. Chen Jian thought it was a little strange, because the person he bumped into looked somewhat familiar. He could not recall where he had seen him or what his name was, however.

While he was trying to figure out who the familiar face was, his train of thought was interrupted.

“Hey, 9527!” Wang Yang’s voice came behind him. “You have come to the restroom, too. I can’t believe you would be nervous as well.”

Chen Jian turned around and smiled at his competitor. “Sure, this is the final.”

“Just like a penalty shootout! Haha!” Wang Yang laughed. Everyone who could enter the top three had confidence in their abilities. Wang Yang felt that he was bound to be one of the two ultimate lucky ones. His skills and awareness were among the most outstanding out of the fourteen contestants, and his popularity was high. He did not feel that he would be eliminated.

When he did not see Song Hui, Chen Jian asked, “where’s Song Hui?”

“Ah, he’s...” Wang Yang’s mouth twitched. “Chatting with his parents. He doesn’t look nervous at all.”

“Well, he’s the team leader after all.” Chen Jian continued to smile.

Wang Yang looked at Chen Jian’s face with a strange look. “Say, 9... Chen Jian, when do you ever stop smiling?”

Chen Jian found it a strange question and asked in return, “why wouldn’t I smile?”

“Let me say something honest... Out of the three of us, you have the lowest chance, right?”

Chen Jian froze for a moment and nodded. He had some self-awareness.

“So, how are you still able to smile? It’s like you have a card up your sleeve.” Wang Yang was a little frustrated. Even when he was stumped, his smile quickly returned to Chen Jian face.

“Wouldn’t I feel less confident if I did not smile because I feel uncertain?” Chen Jian asked. “At least I feel more confident when I smile.”

“You are deceiving yourself!”

“It’s just a psychological cue...”

“Well, whatever.” Wang Yang shrugged. “Anyway, the spirit is not omnipotent. This is.” He pointed to his temple.

Chen Jian did not refute his words and continued to smile, so Wang Yang could not fathom what was going on in his mind. Wang Yang mumbled with frustration and turned into the restroom.

Wisdom and experience on the field required and relied on time and continuous competition to accumulate. Until then, the only weapon Chen Jian could rely on was spirit.

With the spoiler from Wang Yang, he did not want to go to the restroom. He did not need to relieve himself, so he turned back and quietly waited for the judgement from fate.

※※※

After the five-minute commercial break, the footage cut back to the broadcasting studio site.

The three contestants sat in chairs on the left side with the coaches’ table opposite them. One of the two seats was empty. Other than the two presenters standing in the middle, there was also Kenny Sansom. When the audience saw the setup, everyone knew that the final results would soon be announced.

Even the contestants who had been eliminated felt an inexplicable tension and... excitement, not to mention the three finalists sitting in the chairs.

Song Hui, whom Wang Yang considered “not looking nervous at all,” had a serious expression, while Wang Yang himself was so nervous that he did not know where to set his gaze. Chen Jian still had a smile on his face, but the smile seemed a little stiff to other people.

“The most exciting moment has arrived!” the presenter shouted. He already knew the result, but he had to act excited to stir up the audience’s mood.

“Yes, it’s finally here!” His partner, that young handsome presenter who he used to poke fun at Wang Yang echoed.

A drumroll began, and the heavy drumbeat sounded like the heartbeats of the three finalists. The televised broadcast gave the three finalists a close-up of about ten seconds each, which seemed to

convey: Who will be the last two lucky contestants to go to the English Premier League? Is it him? Him? Or him?

"I believe that everyone already knows that only two of the three finalists will eventually be able to go to the English Premier League clubs and receive the highest level of professional football training in the world." The presenter repeated the cruel rule and intensified the already tense atmosphere. "Who can finally go to Everton and Bolton Wanderers?"

He smiled briefly. For a person who already knew the results, it was wonderful to see the nervous expressions of the three finalists in front of him.

"The following will be announced by our British Head Coach Kenny..." He handed the command over to Kenny Sansom.

Kenny Sansom also did not waste any time. He pointed to Wang Yang. "Wang Yang, go to the box on the left."

There were three boxes on the stage, lined up in a row. The three boxes were covered, and no one knew what was in them — a jersey from Everton or Bolton Wanderers, or nothing.

Therefore, being called to stand up did not count as winning. Wang Yang stood up and headed for the box on the left and stopped in front of it.

The presenter's voice rang out. "Open it up! And take a look at what's in it."

Wang Yang obediently opened the lid. A brief smile flashed across his face, but soon disappeared. He pulled out a white jersey.

He thought he could go to the stronger Everton team.

Cheers erupted on the scene, mostly Wang Yang's fans.

"Bolton Wanderers! Congratulations to Wang Yang!" the presenter screamed excitedly. His tone made it feel like he had just found out the result as well. "Come, show to everyone what's in your hands!"

Wang Yang raised the Bolton Wanderers jersey in his hands. His happiness made his movements a little clumsy. He went around to the coaches' table to hug the Chinese coach in gratitude and then returned to the stage to hug Kenny.

The presenter invited Wang Yang's parents to stand up and give a thank you speech.

There was only one chance left.

"Now there are two finalists left. They each still have a fifty percent chance of going to the UK. Who will it be?" The presenter paused for a moment.

"Song Hui." Kenny wanted to call Song Hui to stand in front of the box.

The presenter came up with a better idea instead, one that would keep the suspense to the end. "Chen Jian, you go too. Both of you go stand at the same time. Song Hui, you go to the middle box and Chen Jian, you go to the right."

Chen Jian also got up from his seat. He tidied up a corner of his clothes and steadied his emotions. He was trying to calm himself down, lest he made a fool of himself.

“Walk slowly, then stop in front of the boxes. Stop for a moment...” The presenter was still stirring up emotions. “You can close your eyes and think carefully about the road you’ve taken over the last three months. Think about everything you’ve given... Now that dream is in the box in front of you, covered with a lid. Once it is lifted... your dream will break out and be revealed!”

Song Hui closed his eyes, but Chen Jian did not.

“All right... Open them up! Take a look at what’s...”

The presenter was still talking when the two teenagers had already opened the lids in front of them at the same time. Within the same camera frame, Song Hui froze, and Chen Jian only lifted the lid halfway and covered it back up again.

“... Inside!”

Chen Jian closed his eyes this time and lifted his head. He did not want to let others see his expression.

Next to him, Song Hui reached in with his hands and pulled out a blue jersey from the box. It was the second ticket to the English Premier League!

The entire auditorium was jubilant.

※※※

“I have to say the scene that this bastard set up is quite effective.” Twain turned and said to Dunn.

Dunn just smiled and motioned him to keep watching.

※※※

“Everton! Congratulations to Song Hui! He has received the last dream ticket!” The presenter continued to be rousing.

Amid the cheers, Chen Jian looked a little lonely. He turned to walk back.

The camera shot swept across the contestants’ seats. Zhao Rui looked disappointed as he shook his head repeatedly.

Song Hui came up and hugged Chen Jian. Everyone’s gaze immediately focused on him. Not many people were optimistic that he would be able to achieve the final victory... Did not he say it himself? “My football skills are not the best.”

The presenter would have liked to say stirring words like “the ‘Smiler’ has finally shed tears...” But he carefully observed and did not see a trace of tears on Chen Jian’s face.

The kid did not cry even though the curled-up corners of his mouth were replaced by tight pursed lips. His brows were knitted, but he did not cry.

The discovery disappointed the presenter, who could not use the stirring lines that he had thought of.

The organizers created the stunt in hopes that they would dissolve into tears and move people to propel the program's atmosphere to its climax. Then, when the last surprise came, it would be so impressive that everyone would exclaim "ah, life is really full of ups and downs."

Without the down, would the shift of events have any dramatic effects?

He was eager to make Chen Jian cry, so he said, "Chen Jian fell outside the threshold of the dream. This is really such a shame! But sports is this cruel, there will always be winners and losers..."

Chen Jian and Song Hui had walked back to the stage. Wang Yang also came over to hug Chen Jian. The presenter still did not see tears on Chen Jian's face, not even a hint of tears to come.

He sighed silently at his failure. The kid was more tenacious than he thought.

The program had to go on. He could only shift the target to the victorious Song Hui and heap praises on him, while Song Hui's father was invited to come forward to say a few words to his son.

It was a heart-warming scene.

No one noticed Chen Jian, who was not on the television camera shot. His parents were there too, but they did not get a chance to stand up and say something big to show a heart-warming scene of their family.

Allan Adams looked on with interest at Chen Jian on the stage. He was clearly disappointed, dejected, and in pain. The best way to vent was to cry, but the Chinese teenager chose one of the most uncomfortable ways. He made himself hold back the tears in front of everyone so as not to let others see his weak side.

Surrounded by the joyous atmosphere, Chen Jian suddenly thought of the Northeasterner, Zhao Rui, who stood up first to give him a toast last night. He thought of how he hid in the restroom and cried after he was eliminated in the last test due to his poor condition from a cold and fever that he did not even get to do the penalty shootout.

How was it possible not to vent? His chest felt like it was crushed underneath a boulder. He was so uncomfortable that he could suffocate. He could only hope now that the program ended early so that he could find a quiet place to have a good cry. Then he would dry his tears and report back to school. He would write a deep self-review because he had skipped his classes. He would also reassure his parents that he would study hard and complete his studies. He would just treat the half-year period as if it had never happened.

He had a wonderful dream, and now he had woken from it.

While Song Hui father's said a few words to his son, the presenter kept shooting side glances at Chen Jian. He wanted to see him while no one paid any attention to him. He was disappointed. This teenager still had a taut face and did not shed a tear, but the sadness on his face could not be concealed in any way.

Silly boy, you don't even know how lucky you are. If the other two contestants knew about your results, I guarantee they will be crazy with jealousy.



Song Hui's father finally finished his speech. The presenter took over the command again. He congratulated Song Hui and Wang Yang once again and then looked at Chen Jian.

"For the first time, the smile has disappeared from our "Smiler's" face." He said, and everyone followed suit to look at the morose-looking Chen Jian.

"This is probably the time when I should comfort Chen Jian and tell him not to feel sad. But it's no use, because the results have been revealed, and they're impossible to change... All of us have seen Chen Jian's diligent efforts during this selection. He was one of the most hardworking out of the fourteen contestants!" The treatment that had not been given him before was returned to him. It was only then that the presenter gave him a grand introduction to the audience. "What everyone saw on TV was just a small part of his efforts, and there were a lot of things we did not see, when there were no cameras and outside the show... Just like what he said when he introduced himself, attitude determines everything, and his attitude... made the pickiest Kenny Sansom speechless!"

Sansom's image appeared on the large television screen and he said to the camera, "This kid is the hardest working player I've ever seen." Subtitles were not needed to indicate who "this kid" was, because everyone knew who he was talking about.

"He was aware of his shortcomings, so he stepped up his training in those areas and he's very smart. He made up for his weaknesses with diligence, and that's the truth. He did not make it to the end by luck."

Chen Jian turned his head to look at what the two coaches said about him on the big screen, a little surprised. He had never heard the words from the two men. He always thought that he was not well-liked by the coaches due to his poor football skills.

The reaction of the live audience also changed, and a buzzing chatter below the stage sounded in the auditorium.

The presenter smiled. The final ace had come out after all and the live atmosphere finally developed to where he wanted.

He cleared his throat to attract everyone's attention again. "In that case, let me announce the last result."

Everything quieted down.

One last result?

Chen Jian looked confused.

"But before I announce it, I'm going to show everyone a short clip!"

The big screen went dark. After the sound of a whistle, an excited voice rang out. It was the presenter's own voice.

"The game is over! Congratulations to the Nottingham Forest team from England, they've won the 2006-2007 season of UEFA Champions League!!"

The screen lit up again and it was the Nottingham Forest players in red jerseys who were running around the stadium to cheer and celebrate their victory. Through the big screen and sound equipment, the

hustle and bustle from Greece's Olympic Stadium battered on the eardrums and minds of all the people present.

Albertini ran at the front with the Champions League trophy, followed by faces the contestants could not be more familiar with — George Wood, Franck Ribéry, Rafael van der Vaart, Ruud van Nistelrooy, Edwin van der Sar, Pepe, and so on.

Naturally, Tony Twain, who was highly popular among the fans because of his character, was there.

He was lifted high up by the players and thrown into the sky.

Loud cheers and gasps of surprise rang out at the live show. This was the condition that Allan Adams accepted for the fact that his club could only pick the third-place winner. At the end, the organizers had to give Nottingham Forest a grand promotion. Such treatment was not enjoyed by the Everton and Bolton Wanderers football clubs or anyone.

Sitting in the audience, Allan Adams was very pleased.

Song Hui and Wang Yang looked at Chen Jian.

What's Bolton Wanderers? What the hell is Everton? How can they compare with the newly minted UEFA Champions League winner, Nottingham Forest?

As everyone was amazed, Dunn appeared on the stage. He stood beside Chen Jian. Chen Jian turned his head and looked at him, only to finally react: the person he had bumped into in the restroom and thought looked familiar was the Nottingham Forest assistant manager Dunn!

Dunn smiled kindly at the shocked Chen Jian but said nothing.

Chen Jian noticed what Dunn held in his hands: a bundle of a fire-red colored... jersey.

The former commentator turned presenter announced in an excited tone, "and now, let us congratulate Chen Jian. His reward is — a year of training at Nottingham Forest!!"

"Awesome!" Zhao Rui was the first to stand up among the contestants and held up his arms to cheer for Chen Jian. "Chen Jian, that's fantastic!!"

Dazed for a moment, the smile returned to Chen Jian's face. This is indeed... fantastic.

Although he was in the third place, the reward for third was better than the first and second places combined. It was so much better!

"Now, the Nottingham Forest's assistant manager, Dunn, will award the jersey to Chen Jian!"

Dunn handed over the Nottingham Forest jersey to Chen Jian amid the cheers. "Nottingham Forest welcomes you, Chen Jian." He spoke in Mandarin.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you" Chen Jian could only repeat his thanks.

The ups and downs between joy and sorrow caused him to be momentarily speechless. His mind was completely blank, and he had temporarily lost the ability to think. Ah, life is really full of ups and downs...

The presenter handed the microphone to Dunn to let him say a few words to Chen Jian, which was actually also for the television viewers.

“We’ve been watching this show. Manager Tony Twain had high expectations it.”

※※※

Twain glanced at Dunn. “Did they tell you to say that?”

Dunn smiled and shook his head. “No, it’s in the original script. I added it at the last minute.”

“Hey!” Twain rolled his eyes and turned back to press the play button to continue watching.

※※※

“We’re happy to see the kids’ performances.” Dunn turned around and spoke to Chen Jian. “You did an outstanding job. You have a very prominent trait in you that we have observed from the initial audition to the grand finale. You put your heart and soul into this. So we decided to join the show and give you a chance for a one-year trial training in the UK. Hopefully you can be a part of us in the future. Welcome to Nottingham Forest, Chen Jian,” he repeated.

Another burst of loud cheers and applause rang out at the live show. Everyone liked a happy ending.

※※※

Twain turned off the video and turned back to look at Dunn.

“It’s really a great story with Chen Jian as the protagonist. It’s inspirational enough with sufficient twists and turns.”

Dunn smiled.

Twain was reluctant to admit that the football talent show was produced better than he thought, so he used the roundabout approach.

Dunn made him keep up on the talent show. He discovered that the standards were higher than he thought. No one impressive-looking but useless was selected. The fourteen contestants were all capable of entering the general training camp and the three finalists each had prominent strengths. For example, Wang Yang had the ability to command the game on the field, and Song Hui’s speed and composure were good. As for Chen Jian, his physical fitness was enviable, and his tenacity bore sweet results for him.

It was a fair outcome.

Dunn’s smile made Twain feel a little embarrassed.

“All right, all right... I admit that there has been some deviation in my previous judgment on this event. But we don’t have to harp on this small matter. I’m asking you a professional question now.” His face became serious as he asked, “what do you think of that guy’s ability?”

“There’s value in training him for one year,” Dunn answered seriously.

“His ball skills are the worst among the three finalists...”

“But I think his foundation is better than Wood’s.”

“Now that you say that, I remember when I first saw his performance in auditions, I thought of a person...”

“George Wood, right?”

Twain nodded.

“Their personalities and characteristics are somewhat similar in some ways. That’s also why I’m interested in him.”

“But we already have a George Wood. And I don’t think he can reach Wood’s current height,” Twain interrupted.

“I agree that his talent may not be as good as George Wood’s, but no one knows what will happen in the future, so I’m just saying there’s value in training him for a year.” Dunn’s tone was cool and detached, as if he were not discussing the future of his fellow countryman.

Twain was silent for a moment before he said, “what you said is reasonable. Anyway, even if it’s just fulfilling the original agreement, we’re going to train him for a year, so we may as well make use of it. The other two clubs may deal with it as a commercial event. We’ll give this kid the most formal youth training. Isn’t he the best at perseverance? I’m going to see how long he can hold on at Wilford.” Twain spoke with a smirk, the a devil’s smile.

“‘The Smiler’? Don’t think your life will be perfect after experiencing such a thrilling grand finale. To achieve your dream, experiencing such a little difficulty doesn’t even come close...”

“Are you going to play the ultimate boss again?” Dunn asked.

“Who else but me?”

## **Chapter 616: Return to The Team**

While The Football Kid talent show’s grand finale was in full swing in China, Tony Twain had not been idle either.

In January, he went to the draw ceremony for the UEFA Champions League’s second knockout stage, which once again reaffirmed his thinking that the UEFA draw was manipulated — his team was drawn together in the round of 16 with AC Milan.

The Italian media excitedly clamored to make Nottingham Forest pay ten times over.

But what kind of payback did they want?

The media eagerly imitated Twain when he led his team to defeat Barcelona last season, saying, “In May last year, we lost but we’re going to win it back this time from Nottingham Forest!”

Indeed, Nottingham Forest crushed their previous opponent in the Champions League final and were unstoppable throughout the competition to win last season’s title. It was also possible for AC Milan to

repeat the scene and beat their opponent in the final to charge all the way to the final and pick up the UEFA Champions League trophy.

After the draw, Twain was surrounded by reporters who insisted on asking him to discuss his views on the opponent.

Everyone wanted to see Twain give an arrogant speech to stir up a war of words, which the media liked. However, Twain was naturally a disagreeable person, and he would not let people get what they wanted.

“There’s nothing to talk about. AC Milan is a strong team. It’s normal for teams to win and lose. Of course, I don’t want my team to lose, and I’m sure Mr. Ancelotti thinks the same. So that’s it... a defending champion? The label is meaningless. What benefit can a defending champion get besides making us a target?” Twain shrugged, “From the looks of the draw, apparently it does not.”

In the end, he did not hold back and aired his grievances against at the UEFA.

Yes, to encounter such a strong opponent in the round of 16 would make games in the future more difficult. And the matches were held at home first and then away. The last two years were away games first and then home games. The advantage of away game first and then home game was that he did not have to use all his aces at once and could leave a hand to beat the opponent at home. For a manager who liked to play defense, it was the most appropriate game schedule: achieve the results he wanted in the first leg in away games by relying on defensive counterattack. It did not matter if it was a draw. If he could win, it was even better. Even if he lost, it would not be a major loss. He could wait until the second leg and make use of the home-field advantage and determine specific countermeasures based on the results of the first leg.

When it was first a home game and then an away game, it was tantamount to giving power to the opponent. If something unexpected happened in the first leg, they might not have the strength to reverse the situation in the second leg.

Twain did not like the feeling of losing control.

Furthermore, AC Milan was indeed a powerful team. Despite Twain’s apparent arrogance, he never underestimated an opponent.

His coaching unit was going to take a hard look at AC Milan’s current strengths and weaknesses and come up with countermeasures.

Fortunately, Dunn was back.

※※※

Twain was relieved that Dunn came back on time. The Champions League was about to start, and several teams in the league tournament were close on their heels. If something unexpected happened, their efforts over more than half a season might be wiped out.

People placed high hopes on the current Nottingham Forest, and victories and championships seemed to be a matter of course for them. Twain had a heavy responsibility on his shoulders.

With Dunn by his side, the pressure was shared. The coaching staff shared the load, but Dunn took on more because he and Twain were the closest.

Everyone knew that Tony liked the young Chinese man, and he did not offer any explanation. He just let Dunn go work for the youth team, and everyone slowly saw his capabilities. After that, no one questioned why Twain had so much trust in the Chinese man and if he was capable or not.

Dunn showed a level of capability that did not match the country he was from. He was very young, but also very talented — he had the talent to be a coach.

Twain hung out with Dunn all the time, and made some people wonder if they were gay — they had not openly acknowledged a girlfriend or lover yet — but the people on the Forest team understood that Twain and Dunn were together just for work reasons, and that Twain was an Englishman who loved Chinese culture, and Dunn happened to be Chinese.

How many of the strategies used by the Forest team were devised by Dunn? No one knew, but it did not matter. They knew Dunn's place in this club: he was the person that Tony Twain trusted the most.

Dunn and Twain went back to their usual work after Twain finished watching the story about Chen Jian.

The young players selected from the talent show would not come until March. Before then, there was nothing Twain had to worry about. In fact, even when the kids arrived, he still had nothing to be busy with. At most, he would go and meet the lucky contestants to say a few nice words of encouragement. He might not have to see their faces more than once every few months. According to the agreement, the young Chinese players would be sent to Nottingham Forest's youth team and be assigned to the different age groups for their training.

※※※

In addition to Dunn's return, the return of another person put Twain in a good mood.

Pepe was given permission to play by the medical team. He could proudly return to Twain and rightfully ask to play in the next league game.

As he did last season, when he returned to the field after his injury, he was like a football being kicked back and forth by the manager, Tony Twain, and the team doctor, Fleming.

Twain insisted that he would only consider putting Pepe back in the squad list if the team doctor issued a written certificate. Fleming told Pepe that his written approval depended on Twain.

Finally, Twain and Fleming studied Pepe's physical examination report together. After they ran various tests on him, they thought Pepe's physical condition had returned to his previous level. Only then did Fleming write a written certificate for Pepe.

Looking at Pepe's smiling face, Twain was happy, too. For more than three seasons, Pepe had been the Forest team's well-deserved core defender. He was the mainstay of the rear defensive line. His talent and skills were maximized to the fullest under a manager like Twain, who placed great emphasis on defense.

His excellent physical fitness, striker-like speed and explosive power, ability to make judgement calls in advance, steady self-confidence in one-on-one face-offs, the surety in his kicks, and the various honors the Forest team earned had made him one of the best center-backs in the world.

At the moment, Nottingham Forest's rear defensive line was in need of Pepe's return. Therefore, as he watched Pepe return triumphantly, Twain did not hold back the smile on his face. The fierce and stern expression he previously wore vanished.

"All right." When he saw Pepe run over, he pointed to the training ground.

"Do you see over there, Pepe?"

Although he did not know why Twain wanted him to look at the training ground, Pepe turned his head to look and nodde., "I see it, boss."

"The weeds over there are growing to be taller than a man."

The smile on Pepe's face widened when he heard Twain's words. He understood the boss's answer and did not need to ask any more.

After he arrived in England from Portugal, the media was skeptical of the unknown kid for using the club's "exceptional talent clause" spot, which was only used once a season. They thought Twain made a poor judgement call and it was a waste to use it for such a boy.

But Pepe soon convinced the picky English media with his performance.

No one criticized him as a subpar foreign import any more. The Sun even gave him a nickname: the "Grass Mower."

Twain had heard the nickname before his transmigration, but the meaning was not quite the same as this one. In the world before his transmigration, Pepe got the nickname when he played in Portugal because the team was used to playing with three center-backs, he needed to take on more and faster "mowing" jobs.

Now the place where he became famous was changed to England, the nickname that the Sun gave him was a metaphor. Pepe's performance on the field was like an unfaltering grass mower, cleaning up the Forest team's rear defensive area, completely free of weeds.

Therefore, when Twain said it, Pepe knew he had agreed to let him return to the tournament.

"Don't you have something else to add, boss?"

"What else do I want to say?" Twain chuckled. "Just go to your training. Be careful not to hurt your feet because you are excited. Other than that, I'm glad you're back."

Pepe made a sound in response and turned to run onto the training ground.

For Twain, Pepe's return was the best news he had heard lately. The Forest team needed Pepe. The reason Twain was so obsessive about making sure that Pepe was healed before letting him back in the game was because Twain was terrified by Pepe's injury during the winter of the last two seasons. He did not want to let the defensive genius that he had discovered become "injury-prone" because of frequent

injuries. A defensive player with technical awareness was the world's best, but if his body could not keep up, then having the world's top skills and awareness would be of little use.

Twain was afraid of Pepe becoming a second Nesta, so he acted cautiously.

During the period when Pepe was frequently injured, Twain would worry for Pepe's knees whenever he saw Pepe ran and made sudden stops at the training ground. The good thing was that those days of fear and being on the edge were over.

The center-backs with the best physical fitness in FM 2007 were not fabricated by Sports Interactive's game development unit. As the Forest team's collaborative partner, they had the advantage of benefitting from intimacy with the team. The Nottingham Forest player data was the closest to the truth.

In the English Premier League, with intense physical contact, Pepe was rarely at a disadvantage in a number of direct matchups with his opponents.

With such a good defender like Pepe and a defensive monster like George Wood, the Forest team was able to achieve such brilliant results in three years. Twain proved to the world that in today's football, defense was really the primary factor to win championships. No matter how sharp the offense was or how strong the midfield was, they were nothing if there was no solid defense. Defense was the foundation of a team and the basis of the offense and midfield. Without the foundation, it did not matter how beautiful or artistic the attack was, it would be building like trying castles in midair.

Barcelona was a good example. During the mid-season of the league tournament, the more pragmatic Real Madrid team was in front of them by seven points and they also lost their most critical national derby at home. The artistic and offensive football that Rijkaard was most proud of was yesterday's news.

As a fan, Twain liked to watch beautiful football, but as a manager, he would never sacrifice results to pursue the illusory "art of football." He was well aware of the difference between work and personal interest.

※※※

With Dunn and Pepe's impending return, Nottingham Forest went away to challenge Sunderland on February 9th in the 26th round of the league tournament.

With the same opponent in another away game but otherwise completely different from January's FA Cup, Twain would no longer use the Second Team to make up the numbers. He also would not be playing against Sunderland with the idea to use the game to train the team. Similarly, the Sunderland manager, Roy Keane, would not assume that the current Nottingham Forest team would allow his players to "find confidence."

He laid out a tight defensive formation on his home ground and intended to hold fast to defense in exchange for at least one point.

If it had been a season earlier, his tactic might have been a real success, but not this time.



Nottingham Forest's offense no longer relied on counterattacking to quickly break through the two flanks and attack the opponent's back. Now that they were equipped with many positional play experts, they were not afraid that their opponents would cling to defense.

Sunderland lost 1:2.

Nottingham Forest scored three points, as expected. With the win, they overtook Manchester United, who lost the "Manchester Derby" that round. The game between Arsenal and Blackburn Rovers would be played on the 12th, so Nottingham Forest was at the top of the rankings with sixty points, for the time being.

Pepe took the stage as a substitute in the second half of the game, replacing Ayala. Sunderland's only goal happened after that. Having been away from the competition for long, he lacked some rapport with his teammates, which allowed the opponent to score a goal. The goal gave Sunderland a glimpse of hope. Luckily, Pepe quickly adapted to the pace and guarded the middle with Wood and Piqué. Together with Twain's adjustment, they managed to hold on to the three points.

Because of his performance, Twain believed Pepe's form was not yet stable and needed to be adjusted through further training.

The good news was they still had plenty of time. The next round of the league tournament would not be until February 23rd, and the first leg of the round of 16 games would not be until February 19th. That period was the international games for the national teams.

Pepe's injury was fine, and Twain did not feel that there was anything wrong with him playing for his country, not to mention Pepe did not need a break, but needed to play more games to find his competitive pace and his feel of the game as soon as possible. It was better to use the national team games as a "testing ground" than risk Nottingham Forest's results in the league tournament and the Champions League.

Defense remained crucial in the home game against AC Milan, while the comeback core player, Pepe, was the crux of the crucial point. His play had a direct impact on the results of the Forest team's game.

Twain hoped to be able to gain a good enough "Grass Mower" in the game against AC Milan.

He wanted to cut off AC Milan's legs with his well-fortified defense and fierce counterattacks.

### **Chapter 617: The Visiting Team: AC Milan**

The phrase "enemies and lovers are predestined to meet" could be apt to describe Twain's coaching career over the past few years.

[Nottingham Forest against Barcelona and Nottingham Forest against Chelsea] had been played in the Champions League. Whichever team that had become rivals with the Forest team could not avoid a crucial game with the Forest team.

Now, the "honor" had fallen to AC Milan.

Italian media outlets, especially the local Milanian media, were glad to see it happen. They finally found a chance for revenge. The Italians could not forget Twain's attitude toward them after Forest team won last year, which caused them to gnash their teeth.

Because the Forest team was the champion and Twain was the victor, they could only accept the insult no matter how furious they were. Twain was right about what he said. He was an Englishman and did not ask the Italian media to interview him. The Italian reporters who needed the news asked him.

Things were different now; it was reversal of the wheel of fortune. As long as AC Milan could eliminate Nottingham Forest, Twain would suffer the frenzied retaliation from the Italian media. The Italians would be delighted to see Twain being attacked at the press conference. No, no, we're not going to ask Mr. Twain any questions at all. Get ready to accept a cold shoulder from the Italian reporters!

※※※

The AC Milan manager, Ancelotti, frowned as he watched the players training. They were heading to England tomorrow and he was in a lousy mood. Nesta still had not recovered from his injury and AC Milan's rear defensive line was too old, which worried him.

Since Shevchenko's departure from the offensive line, AC Milan's forwards found it hard to score goals. The scoring of goals required more help from the midfielders.

Inzaghi was older and constantly injured, Gilardino had not shown a level according to expectations at all, Ronaldo was seriously injured and had to completely say goodbye to the season, and the Brazilian player was likely to have to bid farewell to his career. It was Pato, who had just joined the team, who gave them hope.

Since he was under 18, Pato was only able to train with the team and could not officially play on behalf of AC Milan, according to the Brazilian Football Association. His birthday was September 2nd, but because of the Serie A and Champions League registration date, he could only play some youth competitions. It was not until January, when he was promoted to the AC Milan first-team squad, that he entered the qualifying list for the Champions League.

After he officially became a member of AC Milan, Pato showed his amazing talent, and he had become the most trustworthy striker since his other teammates were weak and tired. He would also be entrusted with the heavy responsibility in this trip to Nottingham.

Kaka's performance was as good as ever. But at the thought of that George Wood... Ancelotti's heart sank again.

Tony Twain clearly did a thorough study of AC Milan and researched their core figures even more thoroughly...

The media out there, as annoying as flies, advocated a war of vengeance. They understood nothing! Was it that easy to get revenge in a game like this? With them fanning the flames between the two teams, he could not keep a low profile even if he wanted to.

Since they lost to Nottingham Forest in the Champions League final, Ancelotti had come to a realization — Twain's comments only had one purpose: to provoke him into losing his cool and judgment.

Therefore, the most important thing was to stay calm when playing against the Forest team. He had to treat whatever the big-mouthed manager said as bullshit.

Ancelotti shook his head gently. Now that the media had hyped up the situation between the two teams, how many people would be able to remain calm?

※※※

“I think AC Milan will choose a slightly conservative tactic in their away game. Obtaining an away point is the most practical thing to do.”

Dunn explained the tactics for the next day’s game in the tactical session before the game while Twain sat next to him and listened quietly.

“Italian teams are good at defense and if they really want to defend, we’re going to be in trouble. We will focus our offense in the flanks to rip their dense defense apart and then we’ll pass...”

The Forest team decided to use the flank offense they were best at to rip apart AC Milan’s defense. Ribéry and Beckham would be in the starting lineup; their breakouts and passes would help create lethal shots in the penalty area for the tall center forward, van Nistelrooy. Eastwood would cruise behind van Nistelrooy in search of opportunities.

George Wood was responsible for keeping a close eye on Kaka. He only had to deal with Kaka. He did not need to worry about other areas of defense. Pepe, Piqué, and other defenders would be there. The Forest team’s defense had always been covered by the entire team. George Wood only looked impressive because he was the team captain and always went head-to-head with world-class players. He was well aware that there was a group of defensive teammates who silently had his back.

Dunn took some time to finish the tactics. After everyone understood what they had to do, he handed the session over to Twain.

He stood up and cleared his throat. “I’ve been thinking about a problem. Before the season, I said that our goal this season is the league title. So I want to ask you guys, do you think we should give up the Champions League title, or... does it matter what results you achieve in the Champions League?”

“Of course. The more championship titles the better, chief!” someone responded.

Twain looked over and found that it was Eastwood.

“What about the rest of you?”

“We agree with him, boss!” everyone said in unison.

Twain nodded heavily. “Ah, then I’m relieved. I thought you lost your fighting spirit in the Champions League...”

There was a flurry of boos in the room.

“Should we stop training in protest for being underestimated?” Eastwood stood up and waved his arms with exaggeration.

“Are you doing this for your own benefit, Freddy?” Twain asked with a sneer. “I can promise you won’t need to train anymore in the future.”

Eastwood hurriedly sat down and ducked his head.

The boos turned into laughter.

As the laughter subsided, Twain said, “I’m sorry about the baseless assumption, so I apologize to you.”

It was not a baseless assumption. He was distracted when Dunn explained the tactics. He was distracted because he could recite what Dunn had said backwards. As he was also one of the tactical creators, Twain decided to take advantage of the time to think about other things. Later he unknowingly started worrying about the team’s competitiveness.

Before the season, he announced that the team’s goal this season was the league title because he had not yet won it. For countless professional football clubs, the Champions League title was important, but the league tournament was fundamental. He hoped he could pick up the trophy.

However, that was not to say that he was going to give up the Champions League game — the media did think so. Therefore, he was worried that the team would think that, too. There was no knowing what was in a man’s heart. No matter how familiar a person might be, he could still change his mind.

So he was worried that the players would have psychological problems when they needed to compete in two tournaments in the future and when their bodies were severely challenged. He had to nip it in the bud.

He was relieved to hear the players’ responses. Tony Twain’s Nottingham Forest’s instinct for survival was still there. There was nothing to worry about as the source of power to continue winning still existed.

As a result, his apology to the players was a sincere and joyous apology.

“In that case, we show AC Milan what we’ve got in tomorrow’s game.”

The crowd laughed again.

※※※

AC Milan had arrived in Nottingham. The “War of Vengeance” hyped by the Italian media had reached a climax. If more fuel was added to the fire, the Italians would probably collapse on the ground.

But Twain did not respond to the attack. No matter how the “special significance” of the game was hyped up, Twain was not going to fight back.

He wanted to agitate the Italian reporters and leave them hanging.

To tell the truth, Twain did not want his team to be embroiled in the opponent’s psychological warfare. It might not have been initiated by AC Milan, but it was a result they would be happy to see — if he and his team both lost their cool.

He liked to start a psychological war with his opponent, so how could he allow himself to fall into the same trap?

He did not respond to the fight because he just did not want the players to feel like it was some kind of great game. It was actually just a normal round of 16 match that had kicked up a fuss just because the opponent was AC Milan, who was their final opponent in last season's Champions League.

Was it not normal to meet with an opponent of that rank in the Champions League?

In last season's game against Barcelona, he valued the significance of the war of vengeance so much because the "revenge" stunt could help him inspire the players to defeat their powerful opponent. As the victor this season, he had no reason to use the same stunt. The best way to deal with it was calmly and not let himself be led by the nose by the media.

At the press conference before the game, some Italian media finally could not help but ask, "there has been talk about AC Milan's war of vengeance. Manager Twain, what are your views on this problem?"

"No comment." Twain kept a straight face off and replied diplomatically to evade the question.

The Italian reporters were reluctant to let Twain go like that. It was the last chance. By the time the game was finished, no one would know the outcome. If Nottingham Forest achieved a home win, there was really no excuse for them to hype up the war for revenge.

"Manager Ancelotti said that they want to win this game, so..."

"Don't tell me you wish to hear Manager Ancelotti say they want to lose this game? Well, that would be a good story, it's shocking enough..." Twain said seriously as he rubbed his chin.

There was a burst of laughter, and most of the people laughing were from the English media.

Unfortunately, the two managers did not appear at the press conference together. Ancelotti's expression would probably be quite interesting.

The expressions of the Italian reporters sitting together started to look awkward.

Twain glanced at the reluctant reporters and yawned. "If there's nothing else, I'm going to leave. Thank you all for attending this press conference, we'll see each other the next time." He mimicked the tone of a television presenter, waved, stood up, and patted his butt before he left leisurely.

He had already answered the questions from the English media, so the English reporters had not spoken out to stop him from leaving, but the Italian reporters were very upset.

How many managers would dare to embarrass the "uncrowned kings" of Italy, where the managers' personalities were not as prominent as their English counterparts?

In May last year, Twain taunted the Italian media just by the virtue of being the new champion. What reason could he have today?

The Italians were furious.

Someone muttered curses that Twain should immediately go to hell. He used Italian. If he had spoken in English, his well-meaning British counterparts would have reminded him that:

Hell is Tony Twain's home ground.

※※※

The evening wind from the Sherwood Forest brought a bitter chill with it. It was still February, but in the City Ground stadium on the banks of River Trent, the heat could melt the snow and ice.

The hustle and bustle near the City Ground stadium was distinct a mile away. It was not a weekend, but the stadium was crowded, as it was a Champions League game.

AC Milan was the visiting team in Nottingham Forest's home ground, the City Ground stadium. Not everyone could stay calm with the intense hype for the "War of Vengeance," so many Forest fans wanted to give their guests the warmest welcome.

The police force on duty around the stadium increased by two and a half times. Historically, Italian and English fans were troublesome, and Nottingham's chief of police had to not want another brawl and fatality during his tenure.

AC Milan's bus was tightly protected and the AC Milan players sitting in the bus were not interested in the outside world. They had seen many feverish atmospheres in away games. England was not the only place to have a devil's home ground.

Only Kaka looked outside at the sinister face and was lost in thought. He was not afraid of the seemingly vicious fans. He was recalling the game last May.

Last season, AC Milan had a bad year. Due to the "Calciopoli" scandal, they almost had to go to the Serie B to start from scratch. The team's performance in the league had its ups and downs. They were very unstable. Andriy's departure to London seemed to take away the strikers' ability to score. The strikers would have soon forgotten the feeling of shooting for goals. He came forward and saved the team, especially in the Champions League. How many times had he saved the team? He could not remember it himself, but the fans always discussed their all-powerful Kaka enthusiastically.

He thought so, too, and was proud of his performance. He believed he just had to stay in his current form, and the Champions League title would belong to AC Milan. Since he joined AC Milan in 2004, he had only ever rubbed shoulders with the honor.

In the end...

Everyone knew what happened — he passed the Champions League title by once again. At one point in the final, he had a chance to save the team again and become the all-powerful hero. But that number 13...

The bus stopped and Kaka came back to reality. He saw the player's entrance to the stadium not far ahead.

The door automatically opened and thunderous noise instantly poured in. Kaka got up from his seat and walked towards the bus door along with his teammates. He was completely unaffected by this feverish atmosphere.

This time, he must not brush by the opportunity again!

**Chapter 618: Helpless**

No matter where George Wood was on the field, his eyes were fixed on his opponent, Kaka.

The day before the game, as well as the last preparation before the game, Twain stressed that Kaka was his target for this game. In fact, there was no need to stress repeatedly. He was well aware in his own mind who the most threatening player was in a team. He was a defensive midfielder and it was one of his jobs to study the opponents' ace players. He had no special hobbies. So, outside his training and competition and unless there was a commercial job, he would always quietly watch the video during other times at home.

He studied all the Forest team's opponents in the league and in the European arena. Albertini had told him a long time ago that it was not sustaining to defend by physical instinct alone, because as he grew older, the body he was now so proud of would always decline. What would he do then when that happened? Would he slowly be forgotten on the bench?

There was currently a readily available example — Chelsea's Makelele.

The thing preventing Wood from becoming the world's top defensive midfielder was not the well-known star players nor his physical fitness. It was his awareness. He still had a wide room for improvement in that area.

Playing more games was a good idea, but the game had a time limit. A good player could only play around seventy games a year, at most. As for the rest of his development and experience? He had to depend on watching videos.

Wood knew he was different from the people who had received professional football training when they were young. He had less than ten years of experience and accumulated awareness. Although he had a gratifying innate gift that allowed him to catch up, Wood's goal was not just to catch up.

He wanted to become the best player in England.

※※※

In addition to following his teammates' positions closely, Kaka often threw glances at his opponent, Nottingham Forest's number 13, George Wood, who eyed him not far away.

AC Milan adopted a defensive stance in the game. Ancelotti did not want to take any risks and he would be content as long as he obtained an away point. Therefore, Kaka's position was also further back. He hung around the front of his own penalty area, waiting for the chance to fight back. Because of his speed, if AC Milan wanted to fight back, it would be initiated by him and Pirlo. Pirlo relied on passes, while Kaka relied on his invincible dribble and acceleration.

Nottingham Forest's defense was to press up and attack, so George Wood's position was moved forward. The two players were not far from each other. Consciously or not, they always appeared within each other's line of sight.

As Kaka expected, he was still one-on-one with George Wood.

It was time for AC Milan to defend and for Nottingham Forest to attack.

George Wood was involved in the offense, but did not have a major role to play. It was van der Vaart's job to organize the offense.

Wood was responsible for protecting and restricting the opponent. That was why he had time to observe Kaka.

Kaka ignored Wood and ran back to defend.

AC Milan's defensive formation remained fairly intact. No matter how the Forest team maneuvered and interrupted, they never messed up. It was a headache for the Forest players. Just as Ancelotti had shown, they were an Italian team and he was an Italian manager. Defense was deep within their bones. If they decided to defend, Nottingham Forest was hard-pressed to have a good chance.

The game was deadlocked, but Twain knew AC Milan was hiding great danger.

What kind of opponents was AC Milan most afraid of?

A team like Nottingham Forest, but not the current Nottingham Forest team, because now, Nottingham Forest was attacking at full capacity.

AC Milan's headache was the type of opponent that clung fast to defense and refused to be lured out. Like Nottingham Forest in the past, no matter how the opponent sieged, they would refuse to come out and give the opponent the space to attack, which AC Milan found tricky.

But now? Even though the scene on the field looked a little ugly, perhaps the advantage was shifting a little to AC Milan.

Twain came out of the technical area and stood on the sidelines. He gestured to instruct the team to press on and shouted at George Wood to go up a little further.

How could Ancelotti turn a blind eye with his loud voice and exaggerated body language?

A smile emerged on the face of the former AC Milan player when he saw Twain's anxious signal to the team to press on the attack, but the smile quickly hid in the wrinkles of his face.

After he yelled from the sidelines, Twain tooted in a low voice as he walked back. It looked like he was very unhappy with the situation on the field.

This made sense, since it was his home ground, and the team had not been able to break through. If they did not get three points, it would be a failure for the home team. A draw or loss meant that they were dragged halfway out of the Champions League.

Even if they had scored a goal, they still had to try to not let the opponent score. A one goal lead to win was very dangerous. Playing first on his home ground made things difficult for Twain.

Twain had 100 reasons to show his anger here. Even the commentator thought it was reasonable for him to be angry. "Tony Twain can't sit still. The game is in its twenty-seventh minute and the score is still 0:0. This is not something he wants to see, especially when his own offense does not make any headway on the field."

※※※



Ancelotti looked at his watch. There was not much time before the end of the first half. He believed that it was time for AC Milan to fight back. Who wanted to tie? Our goal is to win!

Tony Twain was a hot-tempered manager. Would his team be as prone to impatience as their manager? Would they would become impatient and use a simpler, more direct attack, increasing their mistakes, the entire team pressing ahead and leaving the rear defense empty?

These were areas AC Milan could use.

Nottingham Forest still wants to press on? All right, go right ahead and keep pressing on. I was worried that you wouldn't come up, Tony Twain...

※※※

Ribéry lost the ball when he forced a breakthrough. Pirlo received it from a teammate and transferred it to Kaka. Kaka glimpsed Wood's possible approach in corner of his eye and hurriedly sent the football back. He was not afraid of Wood without a ball.

Kaka or Pirlo? Wood hesitated for a moment when he saw the two players appear in front of him.

Pirlo had the ball. Should he break Pirlo's ball or turn around and run with Kaka? He was in a dilemma. The distance between Kaka and Pirlo was so small that George Wood had the impulse to intercept, but it was a little far away. Wood could not guarantee that he would be in time.

Pirlo passed the ball again.

An overhead pass! The football crossed over Wood's head and fell behind him. Kaka was there to turn around and catch the ball.

"AC Milan's counterattack!" The Italian television commentator roared until he was hoarse. After being crushed for almost half the game, they finally got a good opportunity.

Because Twain had motioned to the team to press on, the rear defense was empty. As long as Kaka caught the ball, with the speed of his dribbling, he could shake off the Forest players who were desperately returning to defend. He would have wide open space. The first person he needed to shake off was George Wood.

Wood turned faster than people thought he would be able to. Before Kaka received the football, he turned around and pounced on the Brazilian.

Kaka stretched his foot to kick the football forward and used his body to block Wood behind him. The guarding of the football was beautiful, but...

Kaka sighed inwardly. He did not manage to immediately get rid of this trouble.

The brief play between him and Pirlo caused Wood to hesitate, but it was a pity that his physical fitness was just out of this world.

He took control of the football and began to dribble forward. Things were not so bad that he could not progress. He just needed to defend his position and dribble the ball so that George Wood could not easily make a move. Shovel the ball? That would be at least a yellow card. It could even be a red card if

he encountered a tough referee. Use his speed to suppress him? It was hard to even take a step, let alone to sprint full speed ahead. If he had to do that, he would stumble on Kaka's leg, and when Kaka suffered a little and fell to the ground, it would at least be a yellow card.

Kaka leaned back and bumped Wood to rush forward. Wood was startled by his bump, and Kaka had run off by the time he reacted.

Pato and Seedorf helped him rip apart the Forest team's defenses so that he had a chance to plug straight into the opponent's heart. AC Milan's two flanks quickly followed up. They sent in many players in hope of being able to get a hit.

Twain got up from the technical area, seemingly nervous.

Kaka felt Wood chasing him. He looked around for his teammates to see if they had kept up, wanting to get the football out as soon as he had the right chance. He did not want to entangle with Wood even though he did want to beat George Wood one-on-one. The team's victory was more important.

Pirlo plugged in and he decided to pass the ball. But when his leg swung out, he found himself kicking air.

Kaka was fast, but George Wood was faster. He took advantage of the moment to shovel the football from Kaka's feet!

The football landed at the feet of Nottingham Forest.

Kaka stumbled and fell. The visiting fans booed, but the referee just waved his hands to signal Kaka to stand up. Wood did not foul.

Nottingham Forest launched a quick counterattack after taking the ball. They did not seek for a hole in AC Milan. As they were good at playing defensive counterattack, finding a defensive hole in the opponent was something done every minute.

Pepe ran up to receive the ball. The AC Milan players thought he was going to pass it to van der Vaart, so they stepped up the guarding of van der Vaart.

They did not expect that after Pepe feinted, he would decide to dribble the ball forward.

AC Milan's midfield defense was immediately in disarray. Up against the young Pepe, Gattuso, only thirty years old, could not keep up with his pace. He used a foul to stop Pepe, but he only slightly slowed the Brazilian's dribbling.

The Nottingham Forest players, who had just "hastily retreated," went into an attack mode in an instant. Van Nistelrooy, Eastwood, Ribéry and Beckham, who were too late to defend before, became nails fastened to AC Milan's defensive line.

It took Ancelotti almost a second to react, and when he finally realized, he had already fallen into the trap.

If the opponent clung fast to defense and seize the opportunity to sneak attack, what would he do?

He would find a way to lure them out.

Fortunately, not his entire line of defense had moved. Only the offensive players were up there.

It was not good news for Nottingham Forest.

Although Pepe escaped from Gattuso, he was surrounded. Since the situation ahead was not ideal, he could only pass the ball, and van der Vaart was keen to hit it straight from behind and make a straight line. He looked up, only to find that the opponent's defensive formation did not disperse at all. Although Maldini was old, his experience let him block in the direction van der Vaart wanted to pass the ball.

If he forced the pass, it would either be intercepted, as Maldini had seen through his intentions, or the force of the pass would be too great for his teammates to receive the ball.

The Dutchman sighed and poked the football sideways.

Twain jumped up and turned around to slap his palm on the awning of the technical area.

The chance that they had waited so long for was gone.

"AC Milan is really an old hand." He said angrily. He did not blame van der Vaart because the opponent was cunning.

Before the game, he told his players that they had to lure the opponent out to get a chance to score. He did not realize that AC Milan was much more experienced than he thought. Even if they seized the opportunity to hit the Forest team's counterattack, their rear defense line did not move. If the defensive line did not move, the Forest team couldn't play offense. He had wanted to rip apart the opponent's defense.

He turned to glance at Ancelotti. The man looked harmless, but he was full of tricks.

※※※

Ancelotti thought the same about Twain. At first, he did not think that Nottingham Forest's mistake was a trap. He still had some lingering fear, now that he thought about it. Tony Twain was crazy.

While he worked out his opponent, his opponent also analyzed him.

To be able to get a point in the game was the biggest victory.

※※※

AC Milan did not dare to put in more players for a counterattack. Nottingham Forest ran out of ideas up against the Italian-style defense. Sometimes, in the face of such an opponent, they had to count on some luck. Unfortunately, that evening, luck was not on Nottingham Forest's side.

The Italians clenched their fists and cheered when the whistle finally rang out at the end of the game. They got the results they wanted — 0:0.

Ancelotti's taut face finally burst into a smile when he shook Twain's hand.

Twain looked grim and was silent. He shook hands as a formality and turned around to leave the field. He did not want to see the Italians cheer and celebrate on his turf.

The Italian reporters, who waited for the post-match press conference with anticipation, planned to embarrass Twain. However, their wishful thinking came to nothing.

Twain did not go at all. The only person who came to the press conference was the assistant manager, Kerslake. His excuse made the Italians not know whether to laugh or cry. He said, "Tony is sorry that he is not able to join the post-match press conference. He did not mean to be absent. He suddenly felt ill. He entrusted me to attend and apologize to everyone."

"May I ask what's wrong with Manager Twain's health?" an Italian reporter asked with fake concern.

Kerslake spread his hands. "If I knew, I would not be here to answer your questions. I would have become a doctor."

The Italians had every reason to believe that the words were relayed by Tony Twain. The tone sounded like Tony Twain.

※※※

The Italian media was wrong about Twain this time. Although the words that came out of Kerslake's mouth were relayed to him by Twain, Twain did feel a little unwell.

His chest felt tight, but it disappeared shortly.

He was already in a bad mood, so he used the excuse to not attend the press conference. He did not care what the world made of his actions. If the matter was blown up, he could go to Dr. Constantine to get an examination and issue a hospital certificate to prove that he was unwell. As to whether the physical problem was big enough for him not to attend the press conference, it did not matter.

Twain faced the dejected players in the locker room. "Hey, have you forgotten what I said? Nottingham Forest's style of football is the kind of play that never concedes. It's just a draw. Is there a need to be so dejected? If you are unhappy, wouldn't it be better to eliminate them on their home turf the next round?"

He spread his hands and shrugged.

"Don't think about it. Shower and get changed. Go home and rest. Tomorrow is a new day!"

Twain clenched his teeth as he spoke. He was even less accepting of the result than any of the people present.

## **Chapter 619: Guests from The Far East**

Tony Twain did not attend the post-match press conference, but it did not prevent the Italian reporters from mocking him. From the way they gloated, it was as if Nottingham Forest had been knocked out. But the attacks did not work on Twain because he never cared about what was said every day in the Italian media, and he could not read Italian either.

Still, he was not in a good mood. If there were a swarm of flies always clamoring in his ears, he would be irritated. Although he never understood what the flies were buzzing about, they had an away challenge

against AC Milan in the second round. Twain already imagined once he set foot on the Italian soil, he would face bombardment from the Italian media.

Some things could not be avoided. He had used physical discomfort as an excuse to dodge them. What about next time?

There was only one way to stop this tragedy from happening: beat AC Milan and dump the tragedy on the Italians.

Although they did not achieve the desired result in the Champions League, Nottingham Forest had a winning streak in the domestic league. On February 23rd, they won against Derby County at home with a score of 3:0. They also had a small victory of 1:0 over Manchester City in the away game on March 1st and put Eriksson's team back to where it belonged.

Manchester City's boss, the former Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin, was currently tied up in a domestic lawsuit. He could not focus on his team's competition record.

※※※

It was under such circumstances that the Nottingham Forest Football Club welcomed several visitors from the Far East.

The winners of the Football Kid talent show had arrived in Nottingham Forest to begin their year-long training career.

The younger age group had two kids and the older age group had one. Allan Adams brought all three with him.

They were accompanied by several staff members from Hunan Television. They wanted to do a series of reports on the daily lives and training of the teenagers in the UK, which would be shown in China as a way to continue interest in the talent show.

Twain had no objection to it. Anyway, the three would train on the youth team, so the youth team would be the one harassed by the media. It was too quiet over there; some popularity was a good thing as long as they did not come to the First Team and get in the way of his work. The only displeasure was that Dunn would be pulled in to do several interviews.

"They'll be at Wilford at about two forty-five P.M., and then you'll meet with them and say a few words." With a notebook in hand, Dunn gave Twain a rundown of the list of work arrangements Twain had.

It was not usually what happened, but today was special. The club was afraid that Twain would have a hiccup, so they specifically set a timetable for him. Dunn was familiar with it because it was how he used to live.

"What am I supposed to say?" Twain turned his gaze away from the computer screen and looked up at Dunn, who sat on the couch across from him. He was playing Minesweeper as a way to pass the time. The latest Football Manager game was also downloaded on the computer, but he would be engrossed in the game if he started playing and would not hear what other people said.

The training ground outside the window behind him was empty. It was not time to train yet.

“Up to you,” Dunn replied.

“It’s not written down?” Twain replied sarcastically. He disliked this type of scheduling, which made him feel like a prisoner.

“No, you’re free to say what you want, even if you want to badmouth the club, or scare the kids. But...” Dunn looked at him. “You’ll have to bear the consequences.”

“I’m not that stupid,” Twain mumbled to himself. “I know I’m supposed to say something nice like ‘welcome to the glorious Nottingham Forest.’”

Dunn nodded and continued to read.

“The Chinese media will film the meeting, and then there will be a short interview for about five minutes... with you,” He added.

Twain found it strange. “Isn’t it an interview with you?”

“You are the person in charge here.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“That’s it.” Dunn closed the notebook and handed it to Twain. “Do you want to read it again?”

Twain took it and put it on the table. “There’s no need. I’m only meeting a few talent show winners. It’s not like I’m meeting the Queen. Everything is so formal.”

Dunn smiled. “So have you thought of what you want to say when you see them?”

“There’s no need. I’ll just say a few casual things like... It’s a nice day today, great weather...” Twain spread his arms.

“Aren’t you looking forward to meet Chen Jian? He’s thrilled to meet you. He’s a fan of yours.”

“Ah, he’s...” Twain leaned against the back of the chair and looked up at the ceiling. “I don’t want him to have any unrealistic fantasies.”

While the two men chatted, Miss Barbara Lucy knocked on the door and came in.

“Mr. Dunn.” She greeted Dunn first, and Dunn returned her greeting.

Then she looked at Twain. “Mr. Twain, they’re here.”

Twain cocked his head. He did vaguely hear some noise coming from the direction of the gate. He frowned and asked, “are there many people?”

“Fifteen reporters from China, four local Nottingham reporters, as well as a BBC television interview team, and the three contestants.” Barbara Lucy reported.

“Thank you, Miss Lucy.” Twain nodded his thanks and stood up. “Let’s go, Dunn.”

※※※

When the three kids came to the gate of the Wilford training base, there were already many people milling around. Other than several reporters, most of the people came to watch the team train and look for star players to ask for autographs. It was rare to encounter such a occasion, so they wanted to come and take a look.

“They have not achieved anything, and they have become stars.” Twain shrugged, slightly displeased.

Dunn laughed but did not comment.

Miss Barbara Lucy commented from her own perspective. “Isn’t that exactly what Mr. Adams would like to see? Do you want to go up there?” she asked.

Twain shook his head and stood still. “No, we’ll just watch from here. No one has discovered us yet.”

The three of them observed quietly from an inconspicuous corner.

Allan Adams was being interviewed by the BBC television station and the person interviewing him was a young female reporter. With a gentle smile on his baby face, he looked affable, his usual expression. Any rivals who dealt with him for the first time would underestimate him due to his appearance and expression and only realized that they lost at the end.

Allan said that he liked to smile, not so that he could make himself happy, but because when he smiled, he could squint to hide the shrewdness that was incongruent with his baby face. It was cunning.

Other people scrambled to show their shrewdness and display great anger at others for belittling them, but Allan Adams had already comprehended the idea that “great intelligence may appear to be stupidity.”

Twain removed his gaze from Allan. The man’s mind was filled with various currency symbols was nothing to look at. He noticed the three young Chinese teenagers standing beside Allan. They stood side by side at the Nottingham Forest Football Club’s engraved team emblem outside the gate of the training base and made a peace sign, letting the excited reporters take pictures.

Seeing the scene, he pursed his lips. They were not here for a vacation. Did they need to take a group photo? Were they going to turn around and write “a certain someone was here”?

“Mr. Twain, are you ready?” Miss Barbara Lucy urged.

Twain nodded. “Well, let’s go up.” He shook his head a little and walked out himself first.

The appearance of Tony Twain and the assistant manager, Dunn, led to a minor commotion at the scene — not from the media, but from the three young players. Their excited faces showed that they were all thrilled to be able to see the legendary manager.

The smile, which Allan Adams liked to see, appeared on Twain’s face. He greeted the three kids with enthusiasm and kindness. “Hello. How do you do? Our guests from the Far East.” He spoke in Mandarin.

Although everyone knew that Twain could speak fluent Mandarin, it was enough to make the three kids happy for a while to hear him personally speak to them.

Seeing the looks on the kids’ faces, how could Twain not know what they were happy about?

Do you think that since there is a manager who can speak Mandarin, the communication should be easier, and you can take advantage of it? If you really think so, it would be a big mistake, boys! This is the UK, where the official language is not Mandarin.

If there were not so many reporters around, Twain would surely blurt out his thoughts. But if he really did say it, the brightening expression on Allan Adams' face would definitely darken in an instant...

He did not want to put Allan in a spot in front of so many people.

Therefore, the kind smile on his face deepened. He continued in English, with Dunn responsible for translating his words into Mandarin.

"I'm glad you're here, boys. Dunn and I have waited a long time." Indeed, he had waited until he was bored enough to play Minesweeper on the office computer. "It's a pleasure to meet you all." He opened his arms and made a welcoming gesture.

"There's no practice in China that entertains guests outside the door, so please come in." The line of people was allowed into the training base. The next step was to take them to the training ground. Here, Twain would convey his well wishes to the three kids and accept another interview. His task would be done. There would be someone in charge of taking the kids to visit the training facilities. The First Team manager did not need to do it himself.

With regards to the future prospects, the two contestants in the younger age group deserved everyone's attention. After all, they were young and had room for development. Moreover, their selection process was more professional. There was none of the stunts designed to satisfy television viewers. But since the younger age group did not engage in any live television broadcast, they were less popular than the older group. Consequently, the third runner up in the older age group, Chen Jian, was still the focus of media attention.

He stood in front of Twain and looked nervously at the manager with a reputation for bad temper.

"Don't be nervous, I won't do anything to you." Twain discerned the mood of the teenager, and he smiled. Yes, you are not my soldier, so I will not do anything to you. If you want me to be fierce with you, I have to see that you're qualified.

Without waiting for Dunn's translation, Chen Jian nodded. Apparently he understood.

Twain was a little interested in that. "Can you understand what I'm saying?"

"A little, just a little." Chen Jian was not very proficient and replied with a strong Chinese accent. For Chen Jian, it was considered good to understand a little. Because of his English education, his reading and writing abilities were strong, but listening and speaking abilities were weak. Chen Jian's English tutoring during the general training camp helped with Twain's Nottingham country accent.

Twain recalled that he was a college student and nodded with sudden realization. He glanced at the reporters. What are they expecting? Do you want to hear me say something nice to satisfy the audience? Ah, so sorry. I'm just going to talk about something practical.

"Well, listen, lad. I'm going to say a few nice words just for show. You didn't come all the way here to England just to listen to some white lies, right?"



Chen Jian nodded. “No... Sir.”

“Very well, then let’s talk about something practical. You’re going to be here... No, there,” he pointed to the north, “for a year-long training. It’s not a show-business training. It’s a real English football club youth team training, and there are millions of kids in England doing exactly the same training as you. If you can pass this training, that means you have the ability to play professional football. If you can’t get through, then...” Twain clapped, and Dunn’s translation was “that’s it, the end.”

Chen Jian nodded hard. He came with the dream of having a chance to play professional football. If the training was just for show, he might as well not go. Now that he was there, he wanted to receive the most formal training.

“I hope you are mentally prepared for this because the training will be very difficult. There’s still time to change your mind.”

Chen Jian shook his head. “I won’t give up, sir.”

“Good, once you decide to join in, you’re not allowed to give up voluntarily unless you’re eliminated by us. You have to stick to this path. Do you understand me, Chen Jian?” Twain said seriously.

“I understand, sir.” Chen Jian answered equally seriously.

Dunn thought it was a little strange when he translated the words. Why did Twain repeatedly stress that the training was tough? As far as he knew, the youth team training was not as tough as the First Team. Was he bluffing?

“Well, good luck to you.” You do need some good luck... Twain completed the remark in his mind. Then he turned to speak to the other two kids. The expression on his face softened a lot.

After completing his task, Twain was pulled by the reporters for an interview. Everyone’s concerns were consistent — would the Chinese teenagers really have a chance to become full members of the Forest team after a year. Because one of the publicity stunts for The Football Kid was that if the young players performed extremely well during the one-year training period, there was a chance to become a full member.

Twain began to shake his head before he finished hearing to the question. He immediately poured cold water on everyone. “If it were so simple to become a professional footballer, then the clubs across the UK should give up their youth training plans and change to organizing drafts with the media. I just hope they can learn something during this year and gain some experience. These lessons should help them in their future life path. Maybe...” Seeing the clear disappointment on these people’s faces, Twain thought about it and added, “I mean, maybe, after a year of training here, they can be professional footballers in other parts of the world. I know China has a professional league too. But here it is...”

He shook his head again.

“Well, thank you very much for your attention, but I have to head back and prepare for the team’s afternoon training now. I’m sorry.” He waved his hand at the reporters and refused to answer any more questions. He squeezed his way out and left everything here to Dunn.

Was there anyone here who was better suited to be a tour guide to this group of “curious babies” from China than Dunn, a Chinese assistant manager?

※※※

Accompanied by the media, Dunn took them on a tour of the Forest team’s various training facilities. And then Miss Barbara Lucy came forward to tell those reporters that it was the end of the filming because the First Team training was about to start. Manager Twain did not want so many media outlets roaming around the base while the team was in training — Barbara Lucy changed the story so as not to upset the media. She just wanted everyone to be supportive and cooperative. Today’s interview would end there.

After the reporters reluctantly dispersed, they also captured some images of the First Team star players who drove to the training base to get ready to start training along the way.

Dunn took the three kids to the youth team training base in the north side. There were no more noisy and annoying reporters around, and there was no Allan Adams or Barbara Lucy. It was just the four of them. Even the translator was not there because Dunn could translate.

When the boys went through the training base to head to the north side, they inevitably encountered some First Team players, whose names and faces they were familiar with. Whenever they saw one, they were surprised. Only Chen Jian’s behavior was a little more mature because he was the oldest among the three boys.

“Wow! It’s van Nistelrooy!”

“Ribéry! Ribéry!”

“Pepe! That’s awesome!”

Fortunately, they did not see Beckham, otherwise they would have rushed over to ask for his autograph.

Chen Jian did not speak this whole time and also did not look around. He just kept his head down and followed Dunn towards the youth training base.

As they walked out of the First Team training base, the two young boys were still hotly discussing the star players they had just seen. Chen Jian looked up at Dunn, who was walking in front of him.

“Dunn... Coach.”

“What’s the matter, Chen Jian?” Dunn turned his head around but did not stop his footsteps.

“May I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

“Well, does Manager Twain not... not like me?”

Dunn was momentarily stumped by the question. Apparently this kid was frightened by Twain’s serious attitude and straight face. He remembered what Twain thought of that talent show and his obstinate character, so he just smiled. “No, he’s just like that with everyone. He’s a strict manager.”

“But I’ve read some reports that he treats his players well...”

“Are you his player now?” Dunn asked.

This time it was Chen Jian’s turn to be stunned.

He was a clever person and figured it out. The smile came back to his face. “I see, Coach Dunn.”

Dunn patted him gently on the shoulder. “Train well and don’t think about anything else.”

## **Chapter 620: About Dreams**

As he brought the three kids through Wilford Lane, Dunn returned to the youth base where he had not been for some time. New buds sprouted on branches bare from winter, and the greenery flooded the deserted training base. He used to be familiar with everything after working there for ten years.

After he briefly introduced the training base, Dunn took them to the office of the youth-development manager, Ian Greenwood.

Greenwood had waited there for a while. He was really waiting, unlike Twain who had played Minesweeper.

“Aha, nice to meet you, boys!” Greenwood looked happy to see the three kids. The smile on his face was from the bottom of his heart, which felt much warmer than Twain’s pretense. “I’m Ian Greenwood, the head of youth training at Nottingham Forest.”

“Hello, Mr. Greenwood!” The three people politely replied.

“Thank you for your help, Dunn.” Greenwood nodded and turned to Dunn.

Dunn bobbed his head. “From now on, they’ll be with you, and you’re in charge of their training schedule, Ian.”

“Not a problem.”

“Tell them some things they need to be aware of.” Dunn referred to the three Chinese kids behind him.

The three kids stood in front of Greenwood. The two young ones became nervous, but Chen Jian was relaxed.

“Welcome, boys. You will receive the most systematic and formal training here. I don’t care if you can be a professional player in a year’s time, or in the future. Our training is to lead you toward that goal. You are not a talent show star here. You are just a regular member of the youth team.” Greenwood went straight into explaining the rules.

“First of all, the club does not provide dormitories. You are like the other ordinary kids, practicing in the training system. The club has picked three homes from the pool of club fans as your accommodation. In addition to training, you’ll live with them in their homes, just like an ordinary child.”

The three boys nodded. They knew about the rule. They all had a crash course in English before they came, but they couldn't really communicate with their landlords. They could take it slow, as no one would expect them to speak fluent English.

"In addition, Chen." Greenwood turned his head and looked at Chen Jian. "Your transfer application has also been approved. You will continue your studies at the University of Nottingham. Did they tell you?"

Chen Jian nodded. "Yes, they had notified me, sir."

"Good. In a moment, I'll take you to your teams so you can get to know your teammates. You're going to get along together in the future. I want you to have a good time here." Greenwood looked at Chen Jian again.

"As for you, Chen. Your training plan is a little different. In addition to the group training, you also have a specialized personal training program."

Chen Jian and Dunn, who was translating, were surprised.

"This plan came about since you had not received professional training. So it was specifically developed for you. You have to do more basic training after you complete the team's daily training."

Dunn suddenly thought of something and he whispered in English before he translated, "Tony gave it to you?"

Greenwood nodded, somewhat surprised. "What? Didn't you know, Dunn?"

Dunn shook his head at the confirmation.

"That's strange. I thought he told you everything first." murmured Greenwood.

Chen Jian looked strangely at the two coaches. Although he did not know what they were talking about, he guessed that it had to have something to do with him.

"That training program..."

"Oh, George Wood used it, and we made some minor changes." Greenwood explained briefly, but Dunn was stunned. He finally understood why Twain had said that the training was tough, and that he still had time to give up now.

If Twain had been in this position, he might have made a crude remark, but Dunn was not like that, so he was just speechless.

He looked at Chen Jian and could not believe that the tanned Sichuanese in front of him would be able to stick to that kind of training for a year. Was it too brutal? Would the talent show organizer protest?

"Coach Dunn?" Seeing that Dunn was lost in his thoughts, Chen Jian spoke up to remind him when the translation did not come after a long while.

"Ah... I'm sorry. Coach Greenwood said you have to do an extra training session on basic drills after you complete your team's daily training," Dunn translated.

Chen Jian did not object. He just nodded and smiled, feeling that it was par for course. “Ah, my foundation is not very good. It’s great for this kind of training to be arranged.” It looked like the Forest team was a really responsible and worthy European Championship team. They proved to be an English professional football club.

Dunn did not know what to say.

Greenwood spoke up again, “Well in that case, I wish you all the best, boys!”

You guys really do need some good luck... Dunn added in his heart.

※※※

Dunn acted as a translator as he followed the three kids to their locker room and to meet their teammates. Having done that, he returned to the southside of Wilford, where the First Team training had begun. He walked straight to Twain’s side.

“What’s the matter, Dunn?” Twain took off his sunglasses and looked at his assistant.

“What’s up with that training plan, Tony?”

Oh, I’m sorry I did not tell you in advance... We were busy studying AC Milan at the time and I was afraid to distract you...” Twain thought he was unhappy that he was kept in the dark.

Dunn interrupted him. “Not that. I mean, do you really think that training program is suitable for Chen Jian?”

“That was why I made some changes.” Twain looked at Dunn and understood, but he was still a little surprised because he thought Dunn would not mind. “Do you think it’s too harsh?”

“George Wood is a monster, but Chen Jian is not.” Dunn’s face was serious. “I think you should reconsider that training plan. I’m not against strengthening the basic training but...”

“Do you like Chen Jian very much, Dunn?” Twain stopped watching the training. He put his energy into his conversation with Dunn.

“This has nothing to do with personal feelings. This is a job. I think your training plan is too harsh for a kid who’s fast approaching nineteen years old and not in line with the purpose of training. Whether he can become a professional player in the future or not, training is for torture...” Dunn felt that he was being courageous. Could this be considered as going head-to-head against the manager? He rarely lost his temper with Twain — with the exception of an argument over strategies, but this clearly had nothing to do with strategies — he had always felt that Twain’s way of thinking was abnormal and that he could understand the disdain and contempt he felt for Chinese football and the talent show as a former Chinese fan who had been completely let down by Chinese football. But Chen Jian was innocent. He was not a professional player and secondly, he was not a Football Association official. He was not even a relative of a professional player or assistant coach. He was not the originator of China’s rampant talent shows. He was just an ordinary youth with a dream. No one was entitled to vent his resentment of the system on an ordinary youth.

“Do you have a dream, Dunn?”

He thought Twain would be furious, but Twain just calmly asked a question.

Dunn was taken aback from surprise for a moment and did not answer.

“Have you ever had the impulsive idea of wanting to do something?” Twain asked calmly again.

※※※

In the eyes of outsiders, Tony Twain circa January 1st, 2003 — which was Dunn now — had no interest in life.

His life was literally as boring as an iceberg.

He had never argued with people, had never gotten angry, did not talk nonsense, or do anything unrelated to work. He was not impulsive nor passionate. He might have even appeared a little cowardly and meek. Therefore, when the club announced that he had taken over from Paul Hart to become Forest’s First Team’s acting manager, a number of fans expressed disappointment at the decision and mercilessly abused and mocked him at the training ground and on the field. In the minds of the typical English person, football was a man’s sport. You could be a gentleman but not weak.

In their eyes, Dunn was a weak man.

He never thought about changing the way other people thought of him because he did not care. He lived in his own world, which was black and white. He only cared about things related to football.

He did not care if people scolded, ridiculed, or despised him. He did not care if they said his mother was a whore, that he was not a man but a clown. But when it came to football, he couldn’t not care. He cared more than anyone.

He could not contain his excitement at the thought of coaching the first official First Team game alone.

He wanted to win, and for that he made extremely detailed preparations before he was convinced that he had considered every area well. He firmly believed that he would be able to achieve the results he wanted in the game. But...

※※※

“I used to want to win a game,” he said.

Twain remembered the red note that had been on the refrigerator door. He could clearly picture the words on it and the three exclamation points.

“Sorry...” Twain said softly. “But since you’ve had that experience, I think maybe I can explain this to you...”

Dunn did not speak and waited for Twain’s explanation.

“Have you ever heard of this phrase, Dunn? ‘A man must have something he wants to accomplish in life.’”

Dunn froze for a moment. Twain did not see his expression; he was watching the players run on the field.

“It was a line in an show I watched as a child. I’ve forgotten its name and the content of the story. All I remember is that sentence. I was still young. When I thought about it later, I still felt a little fired up... As long as you’re alive, that sentence is bound to resonate with you. Because everyone has some things — maybe not one thing — that they have to complete on no matter what.”

Dunn listened silently, without approval or opposition.

“Maybe it is to protect your loved ones or to make money. Perhaps it’s about fulfilling a promise... Maybe it’s just to play football. Whether it is remarkable or insignificant to others, that thing is all they have. They must complete it. No matter how difficult or incomprehensible it is, whether they have the ability to do it or not. They have to do it and give it their all to finish it. Can you understand that feeling, Dunn?”

Twain turned his gaze back and looked at Dunn. He did not wait for Dunn to answer. “After Chen Jian learned about the extra training, did he express any dissatisfaction or hesitation?”

Dunn shook his head. “He was glad to say yes.”

Twain smiled briefly. “In China, there are thousands and thousands of people who like football. A lot of people have playing in a higher level of professional football their dream. Some people just think about it, and some people strive and aim for it. The difference between Chen Jian and them lies in the fact that he has the opportunity to make the dream come true. It is an opportunity whether he succeeds or not. After you saw Chen Jian’s performance over the course of the talent show, do you think he will easily give up this opportunity?”

Dunn shook his head. “No.”

“Yes, when I asked him if now is the time to give up, he said, ‘I can’t give up, sir.’ Of course, he can’t give up, because this is his dream, the thing he had to complete in his life regardless of what happens. The training plan is a bit harsh, but given his age and foundation, if he only uses the general approach, no matter how hard he works, he will not be able to make it happen within a year. So I asked him to follow George Wood’s original training plan. If he can make it, I’m sure his performance won’t be much worse anyway. He would have proven he did not give up. Then I’ll consider giving him another chance.” Twain made a hand gesture. “If he really can’t go on, for physical or psychological reasons, I absolutely will not force him. I will immediately stop the training and tell him that for him to walk all the way here to pursue his dream is enough...”

“If his body can’t persist, but his heart is willing?” Dunn asked. He believed that with a character like Chen Jian, the situation was likely to appear. His body could clearly be at its limits, but he would still insist, and the outcome was likely that he might injure himself from over-practice.

Twain waved his hand. “Then I’ll have to be the bad guy again, drag him off the training ground, and kick him back to China. I’ll tell him, ‘what professional football? It’s just a bullshit dream, you can still go to college and be down to earth.’ What do you think, Dunn?”

Dunn was silent for a moment. That was right. The training program might be a little harsh for Chen Jian. But before anything had happened, who was to say he “couldn’t”?

“All right, I’ll keep an eye on the training program. If I find something is wrong...”

Twain interrupted him. “Dunn, have you noticed that you are glowing more and more with maternal instinct?”

Dunn was forced to a stop mid-sentence, and he coughed.

Looking at his embarrassment, Twain did not bother with the ongoing training and roared with laughter.

The two men caught the attention of everyone present.

“The boss is so happy... Is there anything good going on?”

“Who knows, he’s been whispering with Coach Dunn.”

“Don’t tell me he has thought of more torturous ideas?”

“...”

※※※

Fat John, a hardcore Nottingham Forest fan, and his equally plump wife stood at the doorstep of their house, waiting for the young Chinese player that the club had informed them of.

“Hi, hello...” Without a translator, Chen Jian used English to greet his two landlords. He could not speak proficiently, and he stuttered a little. “My name is Chen Jian. I’m from Sichuan, China. From today onwards, I will live here and trouble you for a year. Please pardon...”

Fat John laughed and patted Chen Jian with force. “No need to say so much. Come inside the house!” With that, he went to pick up Chen Jian’s luggage, but Chen Jian was even faster in picking it up.

“I, I can do it, thank you, thank you!” Unused to speaking in English, he stuttered and became a nervous wreck.

“Very well, relax, kid.” John opened his arms. “Welcome to the home of Nottingham’s most... No, England’s most diehard Forest fan. I promise you’ll love it here!”

Chen Jian thought he said he liked Nottingham Forest, and he hurriedly said, “I like Nottingham Forest too. I’m even Manager Tony Twain’s supporter!”

“Ah, yes, yes, we all are. I have a good relationship with that damn guy. We often drink together. Speaking of which, it was his idea to put you up in my house...” Because he realized that he had just used a curse word, John was a little vague after.

Chen Jian did not understand the English that was skimmed over.

He did not bother to comprehend what the landlord meant. He looked curiously at his “home” in England.

He never thought he would win the talent show. To be able to qualify to come to Nottingham Forest for a year of training was already a dream fulfilled.

When Wang Yang realized that he was the unluckiest among the three finalists — because he was assigned to the weakest team, Bolton Wanderers — he was somewhat discouraged and said he did not



want to be a professional footballer in the United Kingdom. He just wanted to go and experience the atmosphere of the world's top professional football and that was all.

Chen Jian did not think there was anything wrong or bad with what Wang Yang said because it was Wang Yang's business. His goal had not changed since he decided to participate in the division auditions for this talent show — I just want to play professional football. Perhaps in the current Chinese football environment, to want to play in professional football is a very humiliating thing, but I just want to.

For me, Chen Jian, coming to the United Kingdom was not a dream come true, but a final sprint.

Just one year, I'll never give up!