

Champions 661

Chapter 661: The Mallorca Holiday

There had not been any further developments with the matter of Ribéry's new contract since Twain's brutal rejection of Heiderscheid's bid that day. Twain's suppressed his anger and anxiety in rushing back to Nottingham to deal with this mess, so that he could complete his commentary job for BBC 5. Feeling furious, his words became more vicious. As a result, the poor Germans were severely ridiculed by Twain in the commentator's box due to their poor performance in the final.

During this time, there had been more and more news in the media about Real Madrid's pursuit of Ribéry and Cristiano Ronaldo. Like Ronaldo, Real Madrid was very good at using all the factors available to pave the way for their transfer campaign, and public opinion was a very important tool.

Twain saw Heiderscheid again, but it was only in the newspapers and television news.

Wearing sunglasses under the bright sunshine of Madrid, Spain, he enigmatically told the reporters that he had only come to Spain for a holiday.

Only a fool would believe that he was really here on holiday.

Sure enough, a few days later, he came forward to voluntarily accept an interview from <Marca> and talked about Real Madrid's pursuit of Ribéry.

"... Yes, I know Real Madrid is interested in Franck. To be honest, although Franck and I both want to continue to stay at Nottingham Forest since he became famous in that team, there is no player in the world who can remain unmoved when faced with an invitation from Real Madrid... You know what I mean? That's what I mean. Real Madrid is the best club in the twentieth century. It is the dream of many professional players to play in a team like that..."

The meaning of his remarks could not be clearer. He admitted that he had been in contact with Real Madrid, and also implied that Ribéry wanted to join Real Madrid.

Seeing this news, Twain could not sit still any longer. Before flying back to the United Kingdom from Austria, he hastened to call Ribéry at the airport.

"Franck, I think we should talk alone."

Ribéry was on holiday to soothe his "injured heart" from the UEFA European Championship. His French team returned home during the group stage. The UEFA Champions League's Player of the Year and European Footballer of the Year ended his bid for the national team honor early, which was a blow to him.

"But, boss... I'm on vacation now..." Ribéry's voice wavered. Yes, it "wavered" like a signal lamp in the wind and rain. Sometimes it was clear and sometimes it was indistinct.

"I can go to you. Don't worry, I won't ask you money for the air ticket. Ha ha!" Twain tried his best to make his voice sound normal and even deliberately make a joke. He asked, "Where are you currently on vacation?"

The other end of the line was silent for a moment, and Ribéry's voice came again, "Mallorca."

This name stumped Twain a little. He was not keen on travel and someone who was familiar with all the tourist attractions in the world. But even he knew which country the name of this place belonged to. Mallorca, which translated to "Mǎ luò kǎ" in China, was also the name of a La Liga team.

So that means Ribéry is in Spain?

At this time, under such a context and this place ... Twain could not help thinking there was more to this.

"Then I'll go look for you." Twain made the decision that some things could only be made clear in person and face-to-face communication also helped Twain know what Ribéry really thought. If he wanted to convince someone, it was more effective to communicate in person than to talk over the phone.

This time, Ribéry was silent for a long while and then he said, "Boss, you have been busy for more than a month. It's better for you to take a break first ..."

Twain smiled, "I'm not busy at all. Admonishing people on TV is not considered busy. Besides, Mallorca is a well-known tourist spot. It's just nice that I can take a break where you are."

This time Ribéry no longer had any reason to refuse.

"Well, boss, since you're coming, I'll pick you up at the airport."

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When the UEFA European Championship came to an end, Twain did not go straight back to England with Motson and the others. Instead, he booked a direct flight from Austria to Mallorca, Spain. Then he bought a few brightly colored print short-sleeved shirts as well as shorts and a straw hat from a local shop. After he wore the ensemble head-to-toe, he looked like a tourist on vacation.

When he appeared at the airport in this outfit, the British reporters who had planned to follow BBC television back were surprised.

"Isn't the team going to re-group, Mr. Twain? Where are you heading off to?"

"Going on a holiday to rest and relax!" Twain said with a smile.

"Can I ask you where you're going?"

"Spain!" Twain winked at the reporter who asked the question.

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"Franck!" Heiderscheid's voice sounded a little flustered and exasperated on the phone. "How can you agree to meet with Twain?"

"Bruno, you're making this hard for me to do this. He insisted on coming. What can I do?" Ribéry was in a bad mood too. He had been hard pressed recently by the transfer matter. Though he was here on a holiday, he had a frown on every day. He had turned a blind eye to the beautiful scenery and people in front of him. How could he be in the mood? It was actually Bruno's idea to hide him here from Twain and leave everything to him to handle. All he had to do was wait.

“Simply refuse him!”

“Impossible!” The two men’s voices were raised, “I know the boss’s character well. The more you refuse, the more he wants to come. He will definitely do what he believes.”

“Then just shed all pretense of cordiality...”

“Haven’t you figured the situation out, Bruno? I’m his player, and I’m to go head to head against him? Don’t you know how he treats the people with whom he has fallen out with?”

“Franck, you’re the one who hasn’t figured out the situation. You must be a little tougher. You’re going to wear the white jersey next season, and you still care how he treats the traitors?”

The last remark roused Ribéry, who dazedly held the phone for a moment. “Bruno, I trust you to deal with Real Madrid. But I still think I have to the boss no matter what. I have no reason to turn him down, and I don’t want to fall out with him. After all, who gave me the chance to become the Franck Ribéry that I am now when I was in dire straits?”

Ribéry resolutely finished this sentence and hung up.

Over there, Heiderscheid looked at the phone in his hand and indignantly scolded, Idiot! All my efforts will be in vain when he meets him! Who do you think Tony Twain is, Franck?”

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In the bright sunshine of the Iberian Peninsula, Ribéry smiled and took the small suitcase from Twain.

“Spain is a really nice place, much better weather than the damn British weather.” Dunn looked up at the clear blue sky. He wore sunglasses and was not afraid of the bright sunshine piercing his eyes. “You’re really know how to pick a place, Franck.”

He made a seemingly innocent remark which sounded intentional to the listener. In fact, the remark was made intentionally, and he wanted the listener to catch his meaning too.

As expected, Ribéry just smiled and did not continue this subject.

Seeing his own trusted player, Twain’s previously agitated heart finally calmed down a little. He knew that if Ribéry was determined not to see him, then this matter would be dangerous. As long as Ribéry was willing to meet him, there was room to turn things around.

In the hired car to the hotel where he was staying, Twain and Ribéry sat side by side in the back. A Spanish pop song was playing on the radio in the car, but neither of them spoke first.

The atmosphere was really uncomfortable.

It was Twain who spoke up first. After all, he was here to solve the problem, and not really to roam free with Ribéry in Mallorca.

“Should I console you first, Franck?”

“Huh?”

“The France team at this UEFA European Championship...” In the final match of the group stage between France and Italy, Twain was the guest pundit. At that time, he berated the French team and only let go of two people. One is Benzema and the other was Ribéry.

Ribéry’s performance spoke for itself. When almost everyone gave up, only he still ran ceaselessly, broke through, passed the balls, and shot... for the chance to breach the goal. In his four years at Nottingham Forest, Twain’s style had long been etched in his bones. He would not give up right till the end of the game. The “Nottingham Forest style” of never conceding in the face of adversity had also become Ribéry style.

Unfortunately, however powerful a player was, he was still only one person. Football was played by a team. His efforts appeared to be even more striking and heart-wrenching against the contrast of ten other cowardly and incompetent players. In the end, Ribéry did not bring victory to the national team and the France national team, the highly anticipated favorite to win the title, return home from the group stage.

The game ended and the Italians caroused. They survive by the skin of their teeth and advanced from the group. The French players were dejected. But who had noticed the anger in Ribéry’s eyes?

Hearing Twain mention this incident, Ribéry smiled, “Hey, the game is over. I don’t want to think about it anymore. How can such a good thing happen in the world? I can’t win all the championship titles alone. I’m already very satisfied.... with this season. As a professional footballer, I have won all the club honors I can get.”

Twain glanced at Ribéry ahead.

After that, the two men did not speak again until the car arrived at the destination.

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In the room, Twain watched the attendant leave and close the door before he was finally able to speak the words bottled in his heart.

“Franck, you don’t really think I’m here for a holiday, do you?”

Ribéry smiled and said, “You’re very much dressed the part.”

“I just don’t want the following conversation to be too serious ... I know what you’re doing here, and I also know what your agent is doing.” Twain’s expression still unknowingly became serious. “I’d like to hear your thoughts.”

“My? I...” Silent for a while and as if he had made a big decision, Ribéry continued, “Boss, do you want to hear the truth or the lie?”

“Who wants to hear a lie?” Tell the truth.” Twain waved his hands.

“Honestly, I’ve always the pay package was a little low...”

“If it’s about a pay rise, you can just bring it up. The club is not unreasonable...”

“But, boss... um, let me be honest. I think with the current financial situation of the club; it may not meet my requirements.”

Twain did not speak and Ribéry did not continued at this point. The two men looked at each other in this way.

“Well, let’s put this mess aside and take me out to eat. I’m hungry.” Twain rubbed his stomach and smiled at Ribéry, “It’s your treat.”

Ribéry also smiled, “No problem.”

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Twain did not really intend to have a holiday in this picturesque tourist destination. Where was he going to find the luxury of time? He decided to fly back to England the next day. He still had a lot of matters waiting for him.

“It’s really a short vacation.” In the room with his packed bag—there was actually nothing much to pack. There was only a few sets of clothes in a small suitcase and nothing else. Twain did not even buy any travel souvenirs—Ribéry looked at the suitcase on the bed and commented.

Twain stood on the terrace outside the door, looking out over the clear blue sky.

“The sky is really blue here. Spain is really attractive as compared to Britain...”

“Boss, if you like it, you can buy a villa here and come here every summer.” Ribéry pretended not to catch Twain’s meaning in his remarks.

“It’s not going to work if I really live here long term, Franck.” Twain snapped out of his reverie and replied with a smile, “When it’s stormy, the currently calm sea will not be fun. Beautiful things are short-lived. I’m still going to advise you to stay in Nottingham.”

“I didn’t say I was going, boss...”

“But in the eyes of the media outside, you’re infinitely close to Real Madrid, aren’t you?” On this day, Twain paid attention to the local Spanish newspapers. Although he could not read Spanish, Ribéry’s picture and name were recognizable. After Cristiano Ronaldo’s transfer rapidly progressed in the direction of a “farce”, Franck Ribéry’s emergence rekindled the Real Madrid fans and Spaniards.

“As long as the club can meet my salary requirements, I will immediately renew my contract with the club.”

Twain smiled. The words sounded more like a blank check. “Can you tell me how much will be appropriate?”

This time, Ribéry hesitated and passed the buck to his agent, “You need to talk to Bruno about this, Boss. He’s fully in charge of this.”

Hearing this remark, Twain nodded hard.

“You should know what your agent had contacted me about, right? Then, you must already know how that went, don’t you?”

Ribéry nodded wordlessly.

“One hundred and fifty thousand.” Twain sighed, “I thought it was just an excuse and a cover created by Heiderscheid for your successful transfer to force us to accept the reality that you have to transfer. But...it seems to be true now.” He shrugged and continued, “You should know the current financial situation of the club. We really can’t offer such a high price to renew the contract. In order to build that... the new stadium, I have to tighten the purse strings to get by, pick up bargains on the transfer market, negotiate with the other parties several times for a euro... I really, really, hope you understand the club’s situation.

He said it very sincerely, and he could not doubt that he had his ulterior motives for saying so. Ribéry continued to remain silent.

“I hate to say this, but I hope you can think about it. A team like Real Madrid is not where you want to be. Only Nottingham Forest is your home. Do you hate your teammates, coaches, and the fans?”

“No, boss. I don’t hate anyone.” Ribéry shook his head and said, “I think my four seasons at Nottingham Forest have been the most enjoyable since I became a professional footballer. Until now, I still can’t believe sometimes that Franck Ribéry, who was on the verge of losing his job in Boulogne, would one day lift up the Champions League trophy. What’s more, twice in a row.”

“Then why do you have to leave?”

“Boss, I didn’t say I had to leave. But I hope to get paid in a way that is proportional to what I give.”

“We offered you a new contract, but your agent threw it in the trash without even looking at it. Then he pointed it back at me and told me: ‘The club is not sincere!’” Twain raised his voice, “I admit that it is simply not possible for the club to renew your contract at a rate of one hundred and fifty thousand a week. But can you consider the difficulties of the club and make a few concessions? Your agent is dead set on one hundred and fifty thousand. There’s no such negotiation in the world, and I even think he’s deliberately threatening me...”

Ribéry hurriedly waved his hands and said, “Boss, please believe me. Between Real Madrid and Nottingham Forest, I definitely choose the latter... Of course, as long as the conditions are right.”

Twain glanced at him and said, “You’re telling the truth. There are some things I’ve always wanted to say to you, but I don’t know if it’s appropriate to say that. The Nottingham Forest fans adore you; your teammates love you and you’re very popular in the team. We have just won the Champions League title for two seasons in a row and the Premier League title last season. In every aspect, the team and you are on the rise. We stay together and can win a lot more championship titles. You can get more out of this in the future by sacrificing a little financial benefit now. I really don’t understand what’s the use of a transfer to Real Madrid, or a weekly salary of one hundred and fifty thousand? There’s only a difference of thirty thousand between one hundred and twenty thousand and one hundred and fifty thousand. You’re not really short of thirty thousand... What’s the point of getting more for your weekly salary? Without honor, you will soon be forgotten. Unless you can keep winning and obtaining victories, it’s no use sitting on the bench for two hundred thousand a week. Do you get what I mean, Franck? Often times, honor is far more important than money.”

Ribéry was quiet.

Twain raised his wrist to look at his watch, "I've got to go, there's still a bunch of things waiting for me in Nottingham. You continue your vacation here..."

"No, boss. In fact, I can actually follow..."

He waved his hands and said, "I said I'd give an extra week off for the players who participated in the UEFA European Championship, so you should take the full week off. If you don't rest well and your body has any condition, then you're going to suffer when the season starts. The body is more important than anything else. You have a good time here and relax. The sea and sky in Spain are really blue!" He patted Ribéry on the shoulder and lifted the small suitcase from the bed. Then he put on his straw hat and left the vacation spot, Mallorca, Spain, under the blue sky.

Chapter 662: That's It

Twain had just stepped foot in Nottingham when Real Madrid's second offer came.

It was sixty-five million euros!

One must know that Real Madrid was also only willing to offer a maximum of seventy-five million euros for Cristiano Ronaldo. At first, there were media in Nottingham that ridiculed Real Madrid as completely using Ribéry to substitute for Ronaldo. Since they were so disrespectful to the Forest team's player, Ribéry was not expected to receive good treatment when he went there. Now that Real Madrid had shown with its actions that they were not looking for Cristiano Ronaldo's replacement, but another star player of the same class as Ronaldo.

If Twain nodded his assent, this would be a transfer with the highest monetary value he had ever made since he took office. But would he agree?

He would not.

Sixty-five million euros was very attractive. But Twain was more obstinate than Real Madrid thought. He thought Real Madrid was showing off its wealth and telling Twain at the same time that there was no one in the world that Real Madrid could not buy!

Consequently, Twain thought he was insulted and threatened, and determined not to yield!

You think there's no one you can't buy? Well, well, I'll show you the first person this time!

Allan flew to China to sign some letters of intent to cooperate with the relevant institutions, so now all matters regarding the club's transfers of players were all up to Twain. He could rightly reject Real Madrid's offer.

"I'll only let Ribéry go when you show me one hundred and fifty million euros. Also, we don't accept installments and only cash in on the player."

Twain's words were resounding and powerful. Accordingly, Ribéry had a new nickname "Mr. 150 million euros."

Real Madrid certainly would not pay that much unless the intelligence quotient of the top brass had collectively reversed to when they were just born.

However, Real Madrid had their own ways. They have contacted Ribéry's agent, Heiderscheid, in the hope that he would put pressure on Nottingham Forest internally.

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The team had already started to resume training and all the players who did not have any Olympic or UEFA European Championship assignments, had returned. Whether or not they would remain in the team in the coming month or so, they were still Tony Twain's men for now.

Because not everyone was here yet, the training plan Dunn had arranged for the team was focused on the recovery of stamina, and he did not carry out any tactical training. The club's focus was still on the transfer market during this time.

Ribéry had become one of Nottingham Forest's most high-profile transfers in the summer and everyone was watching the latest developments. Some people did not want Ribéry to go, and some people also thought if his departure could bring a large sum of money for the club, then he should be allowed to leave. There were also some people who angrily accused Ribéry of being too greedy—the news of the one hundred and fifty thousand weekly salary had long been exposed by the media. The other people also felt that a traitor like Ribéry should not stay at Nottingham Forest even if he begged to.

The rumors swirled around. At the heart of the vortex of rumors, Ribéry had remained silent and refused interviews this whole time. He did not make any statement and continued his vacation in Mallorca, waiting for his time to return to the team.

After the half-day training had ended, Twain received a phone call from Bruno Heiderscheid in his office. He smiled when he saw the name.

"Hello, Mr. Heiderscheid. To what do I owe this pleasure this time?" He deliberately made his voice sound happy.

"Mr. Tony Twain. I think we should sit down and have a proper discussion..." Heiderscheid's voice was less relaxed, and even lost the calm at their last meeting.

"What's there to talk about? A weekly salary of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds? Oh, I'm sorry, we are a small club and really could not offer you satisfactory conditions. However, we may be small, but we are always developing. Let's do it like this, when Ribéry's contract expires in six months, we'll talk again. Maybe the club can meet your one hundred and fifty weekly salary requirements at that time." Twain's tone was odd. He deliberately provoked Heiderscheid to pay back double the previous insult suffered.

Twain initially wanted to go home. But now, he sat in the chair, put his feet up on his desk, adopted an amusing stance, and was ready to waste this agent's precious time here.

"Mr. Twain, you do not have the mentality you should have in a negotiation..."

"Ha!" Twain could not help laugh, "These words sound familiar. You plagiarized my lines. Do I have to sue you for infringement?"

Heiderscheid did not know whether to laugh or cry when he heard this. He thoroughly experienced the level of cutting nature this man had. But he came to facilitate Ribéry's transfer and not to quarrel with Twain, so he suppressed his anger and tried to sound calm.

"Of course, I want Ribéry to stay at the Forest team. But shouldn't the Forest team show any indication? So far, I haven't seen any real action from Nottingham Forest to show my player and the outside world that you want to keep Franck Ribéry."

"How would you know about our business? Rest assured that a new contract will soon be faxed to you and Ribéry... Of course, it's definitely not a one hundred and fifty thousand weekly salary. We really can't offer this sum, Mr. Heiderscheid... Nottingham Forest is so poor that I, as a manager, almost buy someone out of my own pocket." Twain talked as if he was miserable himself but Heiderscheid was unmoved. Only a fool would believe his words.

"But your conditions will not satisfy my player..."

"It's more like we can't satisfy you, Mr. Greedy?" Twain smirked, "To be honest, Franck told me he doesn't want to leave Nottingham Forest, and I think he sincerely thought so. But you tell me you also don't want Franck to leave Nottingham Forest and that's a lie. I'm very clear about what an agent does. And I'm even more f**king aware of what you, as his agent, does!"

Next, without waiting for Heiderscheid to refute, Twain had an outburst and vented, "You have to draw ten percent commission from Ribéry's weekly salary and also draw commission every time he signed those advertising endorsement deals and the signing fee with each renewal of a new contract. If he doesn't get a high salary at Nottingham Forest, your income will be reduced, and you won't be able to get the signing fee if there's no transfer. Only a transfer to a big club like Real Madrid can give Ribéry a higher profile, fame and better commercial contracts. A higher weekly salary means more commission for you. You think of Ribéry as a cash cow, but don't think about the lifespan of his playing! I'm afraid one day when you realize that Ribéry can't bring you a higher income, you'll leave to find the next fool, right? Mr. Bruno Heiderscheid aka Mr. Ten Percent?"

"I..."

"Shut up! I don't want him to leave, and I can't meet the higher salary requirements. But I know this better than you fool, what is the most important and fundamental thing for a professional footballer! Without honor, a moron will give you a weekly salary of one hundred and fifty thousand. Once he leaves Nottingham Forest, Ribéry would never receive a higher honor more than here. In this circle, those who quickly become famous and then transfer to the powerhouse teams, quickly lose themselves. Then their prices eventually fall instead of rising. There are plenty of examples whereby the players' form decline, and no team will ask for a price any longer. If you're really looking out for Franck as you say, you keep him away from Real Madrid! There's no paradise for him there at all. It's just a hotbed of a parasite like you!"

"Mr. Twain, I think..."

"What do you think? I'll tell you; my stance is that of the Nottingham Forest Football Club. Ribéry is not for sale in the team. Even if Real Madrid offered one hundred and fifty million euros like a fool, I won't

sell! His contract is still three years away. If you want to him to leave, you can directly refuse to negotiate a new contract with us two and a half years later!”

“Then you won’t get a single euro at that time...”

“I’m fine with that!” Twain’s rough tone rendered Heiderscheid speechless.

“Mr. Twain, I understand that you are personally biased against me. But business is business and we are now negotiating for Ribéry’s future. Your attitude is not what a businessman should have...”

“I’m the f**king manager of the team. Which idiot told you I was a businessman?” Twain had never seen such a shameless and despicable person like Heiderscheid. Billy Woot was a model citizen as compared to him.

“Besides, I know why you were thick skinned enough to call me. It must be Real Madrid’s idiot president who asked you to put pressure on us, right? I know more about Real Madrid’s moves than you do. Just tell them, I, Tony Twain is not to be trifled with. You want to buy my man? No way! In addition, I will tell you, Ribéry’s contract expires only in three years. There is no more discussion before it expires!”

Twain laughed after he hung up. He had vented the resentment bottled up in his chest at last. He believed that Heiderscheid must be shaking on the other end.

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In fact, the crux of Ribéry’s transfer incident was whether Ribéry was willing to come out in person, as a player to put pressure on the club, so that Real Madrid’s next steps could be carried out.

Just as Ronaldo had recently publicly declared that he wanted to go to Real Madrid and said he felt like a slave. Although these words would cause him a lot of trouble, it would also help him with his transfer. After a showdown between the player and the club, it proved that his heart was no longer with the team. Then Real Madrid could aim at this point to begin attack. The opposing club would most likely be under pressure from the many parties and agree to the player’s transfer.

There would always be the exceptions. Real Madrid’s “universal formula” did not mean that it would work with any opponent at any time. This time they hit a wall with the steely Ferguson. The old man was furious after he heard Ronaldo’s remarks. He claimed that he would rather put Ronaldo on the bench first than to sell him to the shameless Real Madrid.

This remark caused Ferguson a lot of trouble, but he sent a very clear message to Real Madrid in this way—my attitude is unyielding, Manchester United’s attitude is tough, and we are determined not to sell Ronaldo to you!

In this way, Real Madrid was out of moves. Unless they accepted Manchester United’s offer and raise their bid to the point where Manchester United is satisfied, only then it would be possible to negotiate a personal contract with Ronaldo. Otherwise, no matter how Ronaldo stirred things up, they must first get past the Manchester United Football Club, which was also Ferguson.

Real Madrid fared even worse with Ribéry’s case. They did not even manage to get Ribéry to come forward and make a stance.

Real Madrid wanted Heiderscheid to put pressure on Ribéry and then for Ribéry to put pressure on Twain. For example, he should have a direct showdown—"I want to go to Real Madrid, and I don't want to stay with Nottingham Forest."

But...

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"Franck!" Heiderscheid's voice sounded a little pathetic on the phone. It was not accurate to say he was flustered and exasperated. "I need you to come out and make a stance."

"What stance?" Ribéry sat on a white beach chair and wore his sunglasses while he sunbathed. The picturesque seaside did really relax him, and sometimes he did forget the swirling rumors of a tumultuous transfer outside and enjoy his time with ease.

His wife, Wahiba Belhami took his children back to her hometown in Algeria. The reason he did not take his whole family on vacation was because Ribéry thought it was not a real vacation at all, but to avoid the limelight. He did not want to involve his beautiful wife and lovely children. But this rare opportunity had allowed him to openly admire the sexy and open Spanish beauties.

"What do you think? The whole world is now waiting for you to come forward and make a statement so that all the noise will be gone. Then you and I can have a nice summer!"

"I saw the new contract that boss had faxed, Bruno." Ribéry changed the subject.

"Oh?"

"I don't think a one hundred and twenty thousand weekly salary is too low." Ribéry continued to admire the naked bodies wandering back and forth before his eyes.

"Hey..."

"Bruno, I don't think it's a good time to transfer to Real Madrid..."

"Franck, when do you think it's a good time? After three seasons? I don't know if Real Madrid wants you or not at that time! You've got enough honors now, so the current transfer is when you're at your highest value, and I can get the best of anything for you. I know what that guy, Twain, said to you, but he's lying to you! You can't be a professional player your entire life, Franck. Can honors not let you worry about your living for a lifetime and give your children the best life possible? Those are just the false words that the managers use to stir up your sentiments and excuses to make you sacrifice for them! Only money is real. But there aren't many clubs in the world willing to recompense the players commensurate with their contributions. Instead they're always making excuses to squeeze your income. Businessmen are all the same in the pursuit of interests. Even if he's your chief, he's still a manager. Don't forget which side he's on. He represents the club! He talks of loyalty, honor and so on. Those are all lies for you to listen to! When he says that to you, you just ask him this, 'Can honor make you live a good life?' I'd bet you he will be speechless!" Sensing that Ribéry was wavering, Heiderscheid became anxious. The plan he had made all summer would not absolutely fail at this time... "Franck, you should know more about this than I do. You had experienced poverty. You know how important money is, right?"

"I... Bruno, I think you have a good point. Honor and loyalty really can't make me any more money, and it doesn't let me live a better life. A professional player has to go after the money... But."

Bruno's chest tightened.

"But now I'm pretty happy with the level of one hundred and twenty thousand weekly salary."

"Only a fool would be unhappy with more money!"

"Of course, I'm not a fool, but I know my team's current situation. If the price is too high, the boss really can't get the money..."

"Then transfer."

"Do you want me to be a traitor, Bruno?" Ribéry gave a laugh, "But I'm not ready for betrayal yet. That's it, I'm going to sign that contract. Tomorrow I'll end this... hiding on vacation and fly back to Nottingham."

"Hey, Franck!"

"What's the matter?"

"As for Real Madrid..."

"Nottingham Forest's attitude is so tough and they're still fantasizing about me going to Bernabéu with a transfer deal? So, what if I make a public statement? I'm telling you, Bruno, I understand my boss. I know what it would be like if I really did this. You think the boss will let me go because I want to go? Don't be naive, Bruno! Real Madrid's approach is to put themselves out of the way and use the players as guns. For me to step out as a target while they trade behind the scenes. What if the deal doesn't go through? How am I going to stay at Nottingham Forest after falling out with my boss? Remember Anelka? Do you want me to sit on the bench for a season and then my value slowly slips? You can tell Real Madrid clearly that I don't want to gamble with myself. Either they make an offer until the Nottingham Forest Football Club is satisfied, or I will renew my contract with the Forest team and stay in Nottingham. The move that they are used to do, it won't work in my case!"

Hanging up the phone, Ribéry stared at the distant horizon in the sea and was lost in contemplation. He completely lost the mood to continue to his appreciation of the beautiful women.

To be able to play for a world-famous powerhouse club like Real Madrid was exactly what he wanted. Spain had beautiful sunshine and a variety of delicious cuisines, thousand times better than the United Kingdom. There would also be more attention at the Bernabéu, and the salary would certainly be more than Nottingham Forest's. The star-studded teammates, weekly events, glitzy lifestyle...

However, he also knew from his heart that it was almost impossible for Real Madrid to buy him with the boss around. To let him come forward for himself? That would be disastrous. He did not want to be the gun in someone else's hand. Cristiano Ronaldo was so stupid. What if Real Madrid failed to deliver on their promise to bring him to Bernabéu, then who would the real victim? The players themselves!

I can't do such a risky thing. As long as I don't leave Nottingham Forest, the boss is our king.

Those who contradict the king all end up with terrible deaths...

Chapter 663: Twain's Many Troubles

Real Madrid's finance director, Sanchez, was still waiting for Ribéry to come forward and switch sides to give his battle for him a crucial turning point. However, the result he had gotten instead was for Heiderscheid's request for them to continue to raise their bid until they satisfied Nottingham Forest.

This news shocked him and made him a little angry.

"Sixty-five million is still not enough? Does Nottingham Forest really want us to make an offer of one hundred and fifty million euros?"

"I'm afraid so, Mr. Sanchez..." said Mr. Heiderscheid weakly.

"That's not possible!" Sanchez raised his voice and almost slammed the table. He had never met such a shameless, despicable, avaricious and insatiable team. "Ribéry is not worth one hundred and fifty million euros at all. We won't even offer seventy million, not to mention one hundred and fifty million. Sixty-five million is our final offer!"

Tony Twain's shamelessness angered Sanchez. He was the finance director of the world's best club of the twentieth century. In terms of status, Tony Twain would not be caught up even if he tried. How could he act so arrogant in front of him?

"Mr. Sanchez, Nottingham Forest had already offered Frank a new contract. If Real Madrid does not give any indication, he will have to accept this offer to renew the contract."

"We don't plan to buy Ribéry with our entire transfer fund. The board won't agree with me to do so. If he really wants to renew his contract with Nottingham Forest, I can only express my regrets."

Sanchez's words were cold, which sank Heiderscheid's heart to the bottom of the ocean. He worked hard on this plan for half a year, and now it was wasted efforts...

"Wait, Mr. Sanchez. Maybe there's still a way to turn things around..."

"Turn things around? If you have a way to convince Tony Twain, then this matter can be redeemed. But Mr. Heiderscheid, do you have a way to convince him?"

This was in fact a denial of Heiderscheid's ability. Heiderscheid wanted to retort, but he immediately realized sadly that he really had no retort...

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Ribéry flew back to England and then signed a new contract with the Nottingham Forest Football Club. This contract is for 2008 to 2013, with a weekly salary of up to one hundred and twenty thousand pounds. This contract made Ribéry the player with the highest-paid weekly salary.

This news was immediately posted on Nottingham Forest's official website that day. Real Madrid knew their plans for Ribéry had completely failed... Sanchez lost to Mijatović, who could now have enough energy to pursue the indecisive Cristiano Ronaldo. To that end, Real Madrid even offered to use Robinho to make good as part of the signing fee for the transfer, which provoked strong opposition and

resistance from Robinho. It led to the breakdown of his relationship with Real Madrid and he claimed that he wanted to transfer to Chelsea. But these were Real Madrid's team matters, which Twain did not care. He had no interest in Robinho and did not want to profit from another team's misfortune.

"I know there's been a lot of talk about me this summer, but I'd say they were all rumors. I've never admitted to any of them. I became famous at Nottingham Forest and my heart belongs to Nottingham Forest. I love the fans here and I want to continue to win honors for you." He told local media with a smile on his face at the press conference.

Twain also smiled and said, "I'm delighted that Ribéry has renewed his contract with us. Nottingham Forest's brilliance is definitely more than just these two seasons."

Ribéry's agent did not attend the press conference for the signing of the contract. At this time, he cursed Tony Twain, berated Ribéry for failing to live up to expectations...

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Having solved the matter with Ribéry, the biggest worry in Twain's mind finally landed. The good news this busy summer was being able to hold on to the team's main frame. Many Nottingham Forest fans were happy about it too. They believed that loyalty had made Ribéry overcome the lure of money. But was it true?

The average fan would never know the story behind every transfer deal. How many secrets were unknown to people behind those confusing transfers? Who was really right and who was really wrong among those who left or stayed?

Dunn and Kerslake were in charge of the team's training. Twain's current main focus was still on the transfer market.

Several clubs, such as Tottenham Hotspur and Keane's Sunderland, had expressed interest in Chimbonda. However, they were both mid-to-lower level teams. Twain did not mind selling to sell Chimbonda there, but none of these clubs' offers would satisfy his demands.

He put Chimbonda's price tag at a minimum of eight million pounds, while Tottenham Hotspur only offered six million dollars, and not a penny more. Sunderland could only make a bid of up to five million.

Moreover, Chimbonda himself did not want to leave Nottingham Forest, where he still had a year left on his contract. He wanted to stay with the team and leave after completing the year's contract. Twain certainly did not want to do so. If he waited a year before Chimbonda could leave on a free transfer, Nottingham Forest would not get a dime.

After much contemplation, Twain decided to renege on his words and accept Tottenham Hotspur's six million-pound offer.

Chimbonda simply turned down Tottenham Hotspur's contract. With a lower weekly salary than at the Forest team, this team had no ability to compete for the championship titles. He would not achieve anything there. He still wanted to win a few more championship trophies for himself— he believed it was possible to do so if he followed Tony Twain—and then leave.

The negotiations were at an impasse.

Twain did not have time to watch Chimbonda. There were the other players whom he needed to worry about.

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Sidwell's situation was quite the opposite of Chimbonda's. There were a number of teams who wanted to bring him in, and he insisted that he must leave the Forest team. But Twain did not want him to go. Twain did not strong-armed Sidwell this time.

On the face of it, it sounded nice to say "I will never forget my year at Nottingham Forest" —of course it was unforgettable. As the midfield core of the Reading team and England's star of hope, he ended up sitting on the bench for a year at Nottingham Forest till his buttocks were almost covered with sores. He could not forget even if he wanted to. "I'm grateful for my time at Nottingham Forest, where I've learned a lot of things" —He learnt how cruel professional football was. He learnt how to be patient and that being the core of a small team counted for nothing in a big team. "I have no complaints against Nottingham Forest" —This was for certain. Who would dare to go against Tony Twain?

In short, Sidwell was determined to leave no matter what and no one could pull him back.

In the end, Twain sold his substitute for the defensive midfielder position whom he brought in on a free transfer year ago to Aston Villa for a price of five million pound. Both Tony Twain and the Aston Villa manager, Martin O'Neill admitted they were optimistic about his ability. But the biggest obstacle to his rise to become a good midfielder at Nottingham Forest was not his ability, but George Wood, this steady monster.

After he sent off Sidwell, the task of finding a replacement for Wood was imminent. But Twain did not fully put his hopes in the transfer market. Kompany was a good candidate. He could play both as the center back and as the defensive midfielder on occasion. Twain intended to focus on his development in both positions.

After all, for the current rear defensive line, Kompany must be able to play multiple positions if he wanted more opportunities to play.

He had no problems in terms of his physical quality. He just needed to re-distinguish the difference between the defensive midfielder and the center back.

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Twain did not stop when it came to the pursuit of players. Bosingwa was his biggest target this season. However, he encountered Chelsea and Manchester United. He could still manage Manchester United, but Chelsea was almost a rival that Tony Twain could not defeat.

It had a wealthy owner, a growing number of Portuguese players in the atmosphere, as well as one of the most important factors—Scolari had officially become the Chelsea manager after The UEFA European Football Championship.

Bosingwa was the Portugal national team's main right back and Scolari was very familiar with him. He was also very familiar with this manager. It was obviously better to join Chelsea than to go to Nottingham Forest. Because of going to Nottingham Forest, Bosingwa did not know the team's tactical

style and if the manager's personal style was suitable for him. But there was no such trouble if he joined Chelsea.

Nottingham Forest could still afford to offer the transfer fee of twenty million pounds. But the player's personal will played an important role at this time. He wanted to join a team where he knew the manager well. Chelsea eventually took Bosingwa for just sixteen and a half million pounds, causing Twain to do a month of useless work.

Twain did not even dare to consider a right back like Dani Alves who was too expensive...

The failure in Bosingwa's transfer was certainly bad news to Twain, but perhaps it was good news for the other guy.

Twain had to suspend talks with Tottenham Hotspur about Chimbonda's transfer due to the difficulty in the current transfer market to find a right back candidate that would meet his requirements. He must now consider the possibility that he might not have a way to bring in a high-level right back this summer. If he let go of Chimbonda at that time, then the right-hand side would be empty at the start of the league tournament.

For Chimbonda, this change was a good thing. As long as Twain had no intention of selling him this summer, he would certainly be getting a new contract. Because Twain definitely would not allow his players to be sent away for free after a year, even if he did not like the player himself anymore...

Sure enough, two days later, his agent received a call from the Forest Club inviting him to discuss a new contract for Chimbonda.

The new contract was signed for a three-year period and the weekly pay was the same as it was now.

Breaking his original plan to renew the contract with Chimbonda did not mean that Twain had changed his mind about Chimbonda. He planned to use this cushion of time to continue to look for a trusted right back. Once he found the right person, Chimbonda still could not escape the fate of being sold.

Did Chimbonda know this? He must be aware, but he hoped to regain the boss's trust and acknowledgement during this period.

In fact, he had no other way. He liked his life in Nottingham and was completely used everything here. He really did not want to leave Nottingham. He bought a house here and his family lived in Nottingham. His children also went to school here. Being selected for the France national team was not something he could consider anymore. He wanted to play in a stable environment till he retired and earned enough money to support his family.

In the end, Chimbonda stayed at Nottingham Forest as he wished. While Twain felt very unhappy for having wasted a month, only to come back around in the end without achieving anything.

However, there was a news which was of comfort to him.

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Grosso's transfer talks had a breakthrough development.

Before this, the France Ligue 1 champion, Lyon and the Serie A team, ACF Fiorentina both hope to bring in Grosso. Grosso himself wanted to return to Italy because he realized that he was not suited to play abroad. But the prices offered by Fiorentina and Lyon had a big difference.

Lyon offered Grosso nine million euros, while Fiorentina only offered seven million. When Nottingham Forest brought Grosso to England, it cost seven million euros. After the UEFA European Championship where Grosso's outstanding performance spoke for itself, there was no reason to sell at the same price.

As a result, Twain did not have to think about it. He agreed to Lyon's offer and turned down Fiorentina.

But Grosso himself wanted to return to Italy, so the negotiations stalled.

Fortunately, Lyon's sincerity impressed Grosso. Another important reason was that Grosso realized that he was absolutely unable to defy Tony Twain's will at Nottingham Forest. If Fiorentina did not raise prices, Twain would not agree to his return to Italy. Then he only had one option—to negotiate a contract with Lyon.

In the end, Lyon signed Grosso for nine million euros. It was two million euros more than the price that they wanted to bring in the left back from Inter Milan a year ago. But they felt it was worth it because Lyon was already in a tight spot with the left back position. Abidal went to Barcelona last season and Jérémy Berthod was also on his way to Monaco, so it was imperative to bring in a high-quality left back.

Grosso could not adapt to the English Premier League, but it did not imply that he could not adapt to the France Ligue 1. Lyon was still confident of this player for a world champion.

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The renewal of Ribéry's contract was good news while Sidwell's departure was considered tolerable news. The failure to bring in Bosingwa was bad news, and Grosso's transfer success had brought good news to Twain at this time. The recurring theme of Tony Twain's summer was the constant stream of alternating good and bad news in front of him, tormenting him from side to side till he felt overwrought.

Now Arshavin had brought a swarm of flies to Nottingham Forest thanks to his stunning performance at the UEFA European Championship. In addition, Barcelona's newly appointed manager, Guardiola had also made the announcement that the team was going to focus on defense, causing the Catalan media to make eyes at Piqué which troubled Twain.

There was also the constant bad news with regards to replenishing the midfield. Javi García and Rubén de la Red, whom Twain was keen on before the UEFA European Championship, were already taken by Real Madrid which used the buyback clause to recall Javi García and Rubén de la Red. Now they appeared at the Austrian training camp, dressed in Real Madrid's white jerseys.

Twain had no choice but to turn his attention to the Spain national team's other outstanding defensive midfielder at the European Championship— Marcos Senna.

In the European Championship, it was Senna's tireless running and shoveling defense in the midfield that led Spain all the way to the final and eventually picked up the Henri Delaunay Trophy. In the quarter-final against Italy, it was due to his presence that Italy was almost out of play. He threatened Buffon's goal with a long shot again and again—in this respect, his attack was better than Wood's, so much so that Spain's manager, Aragonés thought about whether it was better to place Fàbregas or Xavi

next to Senna. Whereas Xabi Alonso, who had excelled in the English Premier League, was glued to the bench because of Senna's presence.

This was a guy who was good enough to replace Wood on most games. But... the problem was still very big.

In terms of the player's personal will, Senna was rather vague and did not say he wanted to leave or mention his loyalty. But it was his ambiguous attitude that made it difficult for Nottingham Forest—because they did not know how much effort should be put into this player and whether it would be worth it after putting in the effort. If he continued to stay in Villarreal, he had little hope of winning any honor and it was believed that Senna was well aware of this point. But Villarreal had given him everything he had now. It was not something that he could quickly make up his mind to throw everything away and transfer.

The biggest obstacle came from the Villarreal club. The Yellow Submarine made it clear that Senna was not for sale when Twain first asked for the price, asking Nottingham Forest not to get any ideas on this captain.

This tough attitude was exactly the same as Twain's rejection of Real Madrid's pursuit of Ribéry. After he had the same pleasure of doing this to the others, Twain now experienced the taste of being rejected by the others... It was really the reversal of fortunes.

In short, as long as the transfer window did not end, Twain would still have all sorts of troubles like these. And now he had to pack up these troubles and take them with him.

It was already time to go to China and Asia to make money.

Chapter 664: The China Trip

Twain was not from Ningbo or Zhejiang. Before his transmigration, he had only been to three places in a big country like China—his hometown in a small town in the south of Sichuan; the capital of China, Beijing where he went to university; and Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, where he worked after he graduated from college.

Although Shanghai-Nanjing-Hangzhou belonged to China, it was like another world for him, where he completely could not understand the spoken language there and the cuisine was not to his taste. The social customs and culture were a world of difference. Nor did he think that he would one day work up to the idea of traveling there.

But now, thanks to his soul attaching to this body, he got the opportunity to use "public money for the tour" and came to the place which was previously only a name symbol for him—the city of Ningbo in Zhejiang Province.

He certainly did not come here on vacation. In fact, during this trip to China, the quirky and charming Shania was not here to accompany him. Instead, he was accompanied by a large group of men.

Indeed, they were all the members of the Nottingham Forest Football Club.

A year ago, the Nottingham Forest Football Club secured a large piece of land in Clifton, south-west of Nottingham, to build a new stadium. The city government strongly supported it and allowed them to buy the land at a lower price. Needless to say, there was no such thing as a free lunch. In return, they had to do something for the city of Nottingham.

Now was the time to give back to the government.

Essentially, Nottingham Forest's trip was purely a gold rush, the actions of businessmen seeking profit. But the publicity aspect of it was loftier.

In fact, this was the first cultural exchange between England's city of Nottingham and China's city of Ningbo. With full fanfare, the Nottingham Cultural Promotion Week would be held here in full swing along with the visit of the UEFA Champions League winner, Nottingham Forest. The Chinese people in Ningbo did not have to travel to the other side of the mainland to England and they could enjoy the most authentic English culture and atmosphere.

The relationship between Nottingham and Ningbo dated back to 2005, when the two cities signed a contract to formally cement as friendly sister cities. As a gift, the prestigious University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom collaborated with the Ningbo Municipal Government to replicate the university in its entirety and brought it to Ningbo. A completely independent University of Nottingham was established in Ningbo and used the University of Nottingham configuration from the qualified teachers to the teaching materials. The students who successfully graduated could receive the University of Nottingham diploma issued by the University of Nottingham.

With these relationships, it was not surprising that Nottingham Forest's visit to China was set in Ningbo.

This was the result of the partnership between the club and the city government. Without this relationship, Allan Adams would not care about any relationship of the sister cities. He would prefer to visit and set the competition venue at Beijing or Shanghai in China. But since they bought the land cheaply, they naturally would have to pay the price. The good news was the loss here could be made up elsewhere—the Japanese's feverish enthusiasm for Beckham was enough to make Allan dream and wake up laughing while Southeast Asia and Hong Kong had long been the English Premier League's biggest audience in Asia. The Premier League's status was simply unmatched by any other leagues.

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Nottingham Forest's opponent had already been announced before coming to Ningbo. On the day of the announcement, the name of the opponent surprised Twain. It was China Olympic team.

This was also Allan's stroke of genius.

Considering that the impact of this game held in Ningbo was too small, he decided to find a sufficiently influential opponent for Nottingham Forest. Now that the whole of China was crazy about the Beijing Olympic Games to be held in August, what was more convenient than to use the currently trending Olympic Games to promote themselves?

Accordingly, he got in touch with China's Aide Group and the Chinese Football Association, hoping to arrange a friendly match—to the industry insiders, this was called a "friendly." To the average fans, this was a "commercial game." The opponent was the China Olympic football team.

Since the national Olympic team was intensely preparing for the Olympics, they needed a high-level opponent to do their warm-up. What team could be more suitable other than the Champions League champion?

This was an attractive plan for the Chinese Football Association. Firstly, they did not have to pay for the high-level teams from abroad to come play the friendlies; secondly, Nottingham Forest's was indeed high and the whole world knew of this team now. It was beneficial for the China Olympic team to play against them; thirdly, it was also helpful for the UEFA Champions League winner, Nottingham Forest and the Olympic host's Olympic team to have a friendly to promote the Olympic Games around the world. Since the torch relay, the opposition of some western countries to the Olympic Games had not stopped and was increasingly critical. This friendly should be able to convey another completely opposite voice, as long as it was in the premise of the Olympic Games, everything could be done.

The Chinese Football Association agreed in principle to the proposal, but they also had their own requirements...

The Chinese Football Association wanted to partake in the sharing of the revenue from the competition.

Allan and the head of Aide Group looked at each other when they heard this proposal. Allan did not quite understand this approach, but Adidas was a professional company that often operated foreign teams to play commercial games in China. They told Allan that if they wanted to deal with the Chinese Football Association, they would often come across this kind of incidents which would make the foreigners feel outrageous. And to be honest, this request was not really too demanding...

It was only then that Allan recalled what Twain said about "China's national conditions." He had been traveling back and forth from England to China for half a year and thought he should have similar understanding of China as Twain. He realized now that he was still far behind that guy Tony Twain....

Allan Adams agreed to the Chinese Football Association's proposal. After agreeing on the specific splits, the Chinese Football Association, Aide Group and Nottingham Forest jointly announced that Nottingham Forest's opponent in the friendly match in China was the China Olympic team.

As soon as the news came out, it immediately garnered the attention of the Chinese media and fans. The press covered the upcoming game extensively. They introduced, promoted and covered Nottingham Forest. The fans also showed a lot of interest in this game. There were also Chinese state-level television stations that had bought the rights to broadcast the game live.

These were what Allan wanted to see most. The China Olympic team's competition plan had been very successful.

Twain had no objection to this opponent. Not only that, he felt that playing against China Olympic team might be the best choice. If they played against a local team in Zhejiang, Twain would find it boring. Playing those temporarily cobbled together league team would not be able to train the team. Whereas there was some competitive value to compete against a national Olympic team which had trained together for a long time.

Yes, Allan only thought about the economic effects, while Twain cared about the competitive value. These two words were spelled the same in Chinese Pinyin, but they were completely unrelated. In professional football clubs, it was almost the opposite.

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The Nottingham Forest star players received a very warm welcome when they disembarked. The drizzle also did not prevent the fans from coming to the airport. The beautiful young ladies lined up below the airport escalators to offer flowers. The warm and bright Ningbo girls delighted the Nottingham Forest players. Other than a few big star players who were a little reserved and had to maintain their personal images, the younger players were stopped short of hugging the girls for a group photo.

Twain did not mind them as it showed that his team was in good shape in his view.

Picking up the floral wreaths from the young ladies, the team walked to the airport bus parked outside the terminal. There was no shortage of warm welcome along the way from the fans who had hurried here after they saw the news., it could be directly observed from the posters which the fans had held up and see who the most popular player on the team was.

Before coming to China, the Nottingham Forest players were bored and decided to make a bet—who was the most popular player in China? Of course, this bet excluded Beckham from the start...

Now the answer was revealed. Besides Beckham, the most popular person was George Wood. Van der Vaart was the runner-up by a narrow margin.

“Wood! Wood!” The enthusiastic Chinese fans held up George Wood’s posters and caricature , shouting his Chinese nickname.

In front of a crowd that welcomed him so warmly, George Wood remained calm and barely smiled. But what he did only prompted a higher decibel of cries and more people’s pursuit.

“Look! That’s a star player! So suave!”

“Wood is so cool!”

“I think he’s cute – ah, Wood! I love you!”

...

“Incredible, the zombie face can be so popular...” Ribéry said with gritted teeth as he took in the scene.

Fortunately, some people soon comforted by his “injured heart.””Ribéry! Ribéry! Look this way, look this way!” Someone shouted in English.

He happily turned his head in a hurry and only to see an awkward scene:

A Chinese fan held up a sign and next to him, two fans pointed their fingers at the sign, which read in French: “How much money for you to stay in Nottingham?!”

It was clearly meant to mock the news that he had delayed signing the renewal contract with the club for a reported price of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds and wanted go to Real Madrid.

He could only pretend that he had not seen and gazed at the grey sky.

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“This is China!” On the way from the airport to CITIC Ningbo International Hotel where they were staying, the Nottingham Forest teammates looked out of the bus window with great wonder.

“Sun! Sun!” The teammates warmly beckoned Sun Jihai and wanted him to be their tour guide, introducing the scenery along the way which full of China’s Jiangnan flair. “What’s that? And that... Ah, this is beautiful!”

This put Sun Jihai in a very difficult spot. Because although he was Chinese, he was not from Ningbo and not even Jiangnan. He knew nothing about Ningbo and Jiangnan.

If he really wanted to explain to his teammates, he would have to start with China was a very big country. It was so big that it was beyond the imagination of these foreign teammates. In this way, the topic would expand and could not be clarified with two or three sentences.

“Ha... In fact, I do not know anything about Ningbo, I rarely come here...” He could only smile and state his predicament.

His teammates were very disappointed. Since they had a Chinese teammate, they thought they could pull him along to go out and have fun after they reached the hotel. A free local guide would be great!

Dunn looked at Twain, who hurriedly widened his eyes and said, “Don’t look at me. Although I am ... I don’t know anything about Ningbo.” He almost let slipped, but luckily Kerslake, sitting in front, was busy taking the digital video to film the scenery along the way.

No one was quiet in the bus compartment. Everyone was holding digital cameras or digital video camera and facing the window. Twain did not do so. He was not interested in what was going on outside, and he was not here for a holiday anyway.

However, he turned his head and a tall billboard erected on the side along the airport road. The background was red and the dark words were Nottingham Forest and the national Olympic team players. The languages on the advertisement were a bit interesting, written in both English and Chinese—A warm welcome to the UEFA Champions League and the English Premier League champions, Nottingham Forest Football Club visiting our city!

He smiled. There was really some “Chinese characteristics” which gave off a cordial feeling to people when they saw this...

There were several billboards on the side of the road. In addition to those which directly promoted the Forest team, there was the Nottingham Forest-related brand sponsors, as well as Aide Group’s advertising. It looked like Allan did a lot of work. Although the game had not yet started to play, the publicity campaign was executed beautifully. Seeing such billboards, he also felt a sense of accomplishment as the Forest team’s manager. He was very proud of his achievements.

It was drizzling in the world outside the window, but this did not affect Ningbo’s image in the hearts of these foreign guests. Because this dynamic Jiangnan-style painting in the hazy rain appeared to be more poetic, adding to the foreigner’s impression of a mysterious country like China. It was surreal like a dream.

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After they arrived at the CITIC Ningbo International Hotel, a press conference was held in the hotel, where all the members of the team changed their clothes in the room and attended. This was considered a formal introduction of the team to the Chinese community.

Tony Twain became the main character at the press conference because his love of the Chinese culture was not new, even the football fans in China knew.

Throughout the press conference, he communicated with the media and fan representatives in fluent Mandarin, earning the applause of everyone present each time. Everyone applauded his fluency in Mandarin and his familiarity with China.

Twain was a little sorry about this. If he had gone to Chengdu, Sichuan, he could also use fluent Sichuanese to say hello to everyone...

"... I love China. I love its culture and the friendly people here. I am honored and proud to bring the team to Ningbo. I also hope to show the best of China to my players. I believe this trip to Ningbo must be a wonderful experience for my players!"

His last remarks won him a lot of applause.

Sitting behind, Evan Doughty smiled and clapped while he turned to Allan Adams sitting next to him and said, "And you were worried that he could get you in trouble. Look at his performance. He acted perfectly!"

Allan nodded too, "Yes, I must admit that he did better than I thought. He's a natural public speaker..."

After the press conference ended, the players returned to their rooms for a rest, and then would gather as a group to ride to the banquet—the Ningbo municipal government held a welcoming dinner for them.

While some reporters and hardcore fans were still staying outside of the hotel lobby and not wanting to leave, Allan had found Twain, "Tony, are you free now?"

Twain knew that Allan had something to discuss with him. But he did not know what it was about. Could it be the matter about Ribéry that happened a while ago?

He nodded and said, "I have some time. What's the matter, Allan?"

"Come to my room. I have something I want to talk to you about."

Twain looked at Evan Doughty standing behind Allan and nodded in agreement.

Chapter 665: So Tired

In the room on the twentieth floor of the hotel, Twain and Allan were looking at each other. There was no one else in the standard room except them. They could talk in private. Indeed, Allan Adams did not look for Tony Twain to talk about old times, but to discuss business—there was almost no possibility of them discussing any private matters.

"Are you telling the truth?" Twain's voice was full of doubts.

“You know I never kid, Tony.” Allan shook his head and looked serious. He did not look like he was joking.

Hearing him say so, Twain raised his eyebrows.

He had never heard of such a thing, but the truth was really in front of him.

Allan told Twain that the Chinese Football Association wanted to re-establish its image with this game due to the recent football environment in China. When Twain heard this point just now, he almost blurted out, “They have an image?!” Hence, he did not take Allan’s words seriously. As a matter of fact, everything about the Chinese Football Association was basically a joke. There was slapstick style, black humor, and of course, corny jokes as well.

However, what Allan said next stopped Twain from laughing, “... They hope we can tie with the national team in this game.”

This remark immediately caused Twain to knit his brows.

To pre-determine the outcome of the match?

But it was not difficult technically. “A large-scale rotation will do. I can deploy every player on the reserve team. Surely the China Olympic team can manage to tie, right? I can also train the team as well...”

“No, Tony. If you deploy the reserve team our plan for the commercial games will be met with heavy losses. Aide Group hoped that we can deploy the main force as much as possible.”

“Huh?” Twain stood up from the couch and said, “Deploy the entire main force to draw with the China Olympic team? Are you insulting our team’s ability?”

Allan waved for him to sit down and said, “That’s why I wanted to talk to you. I know your character, but I hope you can cooperate this once. This is very important for us to open up the Chinese market. You know, in China, no matter who you work with, you always can’t bypass the government...”

Twain sat down again and looked at The Ellen opposite. Adams: “You know China a lot better than before. . . I understand you. “I’s going

Seeing that Twain was not angry, Allan continued, “You can do this with a little flair and make the game thrilling with a lot of goals. And then... in the second half, you can start to change players, replace the main players, try a new lineup and observe the new players. Didn’t you bring in a few players from the youth team? You can take this opportunity to observe their abilities... With regards to these matters, you’re more of an expert than I am as the manager. You should know what to do. In other words, ... there was actually no adverse impact on our image. After all, it is the reserve team which was forced to a draw ...”

Twain interrupted his words, “Does the China Olympic team know this?”

Allan shook his head in reply, “They won’t know. The Chinese Football Association’s request to them is to strive hard and play to the best...”

“Play to the best of their abilities, fully display their style, study hard, accumulate experience...” Twain helped him finish. He could recite these entreaties.

At this point, he suddenly recalled a long-forgotten memory that had been from at least a decade ago.

In the early days of the professionalization of Chinese football, in addition to the emerging professional leagues which awakened the enthusiasm of Chinese fans for football, there was one thing that was an important evidence to that era... It could even be said to be a sign of the times.

That was the commercialization of the football games all over China.

From Sampdoria’s visit to China in 1994 until 1997, when Maradona led Boca Juniors to China on a “Heroes’ Tour of the Great Wall.” The Chinese football had experienced a dream-like era. “The Undefeated Workers’ Stadium” was the famous catchphrase of that era. Sampdoria, AC Milan, Arsenal, Club Atlético Peñarol and Grêmio all lost to the Chinese team at the Workers’ Stadium. The success against the foreign teams greatly boosted the confidence and enthusiasm of the Chinese fans, thus directly triggering the 1994 and 1995 red-hot Chinese Jia-A League.

Many people were immersed in the joy of beating the world-class strong teams, and even believed that the level of Chinese football had reached such a high level. But when Grêmio lost to China’s Guoan in 1996, the competitive Scolari made an angry attack at a press conference due to the many controversial penalties which were favorable to Guoan during the game and shattered the Chinese fans’ beautiful vision of the commercial games. He said, “I finally understand why so many strong teams lost here. If you only rely on the referee to win, then I believe you will never have a chance to reach the World Cup finals, never!”

Immediately following which, in order to prove that Scolari was definitely not recklessly venting due to the loss, the England national team came to China with its entire main lineup and defeated the Chinese national team with a three-goal victory in the Workers’ Stadium. It thoroughly informed the Chinese fans to take a look at the nature of the commercial game.

When all was said and done, the world’s top teams visited China to make money. Who would really fight it out for real and compete with a country’s team which was backward in football? Furthermore, the players playing on the field were worried that they might be injured by their opponent’s intense actions, so their strength was naturally diminished.

As to whether the Chinese Football Association had any private deals with the teams that came to China, a poor citizen like Twain would not know. But now he had a firsthand experience.

Twain was not surprised by the kind of things that happened under the guise of the Olympics. After all, there had been scandals erupting from the national Olympic team and the national team in succession some time ago. The image of the Chinese football plummeted. Just as the Olympic Games were about to start, if they could tie with the world’s strong team, it would spur the fans, and also gather some confidence for the upcoming national Olympic team.

In this respect, it was entirely understandable that the Chinese Football Association wanted the game to be a draw. After all, these people had never regarded football as football. The laws of the football world were naturally nonsensical in their eyes. The football game in their mind should be subjected to their

arrangements. Whether it was the outcome or the process, whether it was the environment or the players, coaches and referees... All had to obey them.

See Twain's sudden silence, Allan did not continue. He waited for Twain to answer.

Twain came out of his thoughts. He lifted his eyes to look at Allan sitting opposite.

"Okay, Allan. I'll be sure to extend this courtesy to them." Twain winked at Allan and said with a smile.

Allan relaxed his shoulders and finally had a smile on his face.

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Nottingham Forest would only stay in China for five days, but there was a lot of things lined up for them and time was very tight. Aide Group and Allan arranged a very intensive trip for the Forest team. If an ordinary person were to see them, he would unconsciously think that these people would split their bodies into two.

On the evening of their arrival in Ningbo, the team would attend a welcome dinner reception hosted by the city government and then returned to the hotel to rest.

The next morning, the team would go to Ningbo Fubang Stadium for raining to adapt to the venue. This training session was open to the public, but bought tickets were required to go in and watch. The fares ranged from fifty to three hundred yuan, and the scalpers might sell them for even higher. Because there were Beckham, van Nistelrooy, van der Vaart, George Wood, Franck Ribéry... and so many other star players. Their appeal to the fans was a tool for the businessmen to make money.

After the team got changed when the morning's training ended, the team would attend a luncheon hosted by a Chinese sponsor for this event. During the luncheon, Twain and Allan would sign a three-year brand endorsement deal on behalf of Nottingham Forest. Over the next three years, this company would be allowed to use the image of the Nottingham Forest team to do publicity in China.

After an afternoon of basic training, some people could go back to the hotel to rest, while the others were busy. Beckham was going to attend a promotional event for one of the brands he endorsed. Dunn was invited by China's state television to record a program about his working life at the English Premier League champion, Nottingham Forest. Both George Wood and Tony Twain would attend together the signing ceremony for the construction of the Armani store on Heyi Avenue in Haishu District, Ningbo, because both men were Armani's brand ambassadors. Today was only to sign the agreement. This store would only be completed for the consumers next April.

The players did not have to attend any events that night, and they could have a night of free activities. It was believed that by then most people would choose to go out and do some shopping together. But even so, they could not relax too much. It was also because many media would tag along the way and reports on how they spent their time and shopping would appear the next day on television, newspapers, on the Internet and other media platforms.

On the other hand, Twain would follow the club's top two executives, Evan and Allan to attend a celebrity gathering. Twain was the worst at this kind of activity, but he was unable to decline.

With no training on the third morning, all the players would have to dress up to visit the University of Nottingham's Ningbo campus in Ningbo High Education Park. In the school's stadium, the players played a little game with the local college students. For example, Beckham would teach the free kick and choose five players to have a simple one on one duel with the college students...

After a simple lunch at noon, the team would return to Fubang Stadium in the afternoon to continue the training open to public. The fans who bought tickets for the previous day's training could enter directly with the tickets, and those who had lost or not bought them would have to purchase tickets again.

After the training, the players must immediately rush to Ningbo City Enmei Orphanage and to interact, give presents and care to the orphans there.

In the evening, after a quick dinner on the bus, the team would then rush to the television station and record a program with the lucky fans who had been selected, for about three and a half hours to four hours. By that time, it would already be late at night when these people headed back to the hotel exhausted.

They continued training on the fourth morning at Fubang Stadium, but this training was not open to the public. Because Twain would arrange detailed tactics for the evening's game during this training session. By convention, such trainings were never public. Therefore, Aide Group did not sell tickets to this training session.

After lunch in the afternoon, the players would take a lunch break in the hotel to prepare for the evening game while Tony Twain had to attend a press conference. This was to launch the announcement of a partnership between Nottingham Forest and Zhejiang Greentown F.C., a local professional football club in Zhejiang Province.

In fact, to be frank, Greentown was the Forest team's satellite club in China.

This was a big event involving football in Zhejiang Province, and Twain must attend.

After a simple dinner in the evening, the team would ride to Fubang Stadium, where the grand finale for their China trip was here—playing a friendly match with China's National Olympic team, which had been training together for months, at Fubang Stadium in Ningbo City.

With Nottingham Forest winning the Champions League for the second year in a row as well as their Premier League title this year, they were The Double Winner and was unrivaled for a time. Their popularity in China also soared. Coupled with the game's other team was the high-profile and highly anticipated by the locals, the China Olympic team, the tickets to the game sold like hot cakes. Originally, the Fubang Stadium could only accommodate thirty thousand spectators, so the organizers erected a special stand on the tracks. Thirty-five thousand out of forty thousand tickets sold, a result that should be considered good at a time when commercial football was getting less popular.

Aide Group suffered great losses on Real Madrid's second visit to China a few years ago. This time at least they made it back with Nottingham Forest.

Early in the morning of the fifth day, Nottingham Forest would pack up and fly directly from Ningbo Lishe International Airport to Tokyo, Japan. They would start their four days and four nights of frenetic money-making in Japan.

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Based on the schedule seen above, these few days would be a tough test for the players— wrong, Beckham had such an experience, so he could cope easily—it was miserable for the others who were tired as a dog.

In front of people, under the limelight, under the glare of the camera lens, in front of the media's pervasive attention, they smiled as they faced the various occasions and tirelessly signed autographs for the fans, satisfied their requests for a photo. They carefully protected their public image.

When they were doing charity at the orphanage, everyone was very serious, and no one was too tired to shirk their jobs. This was what made Twain the proudest. Beckham, in particular, was simply the best example to the other teammates. No matter how many people surrounded him and what kind of requests the fans had, he always smiled and tried his best to fulfill. He never showed the slightest sign of impatience while being observed by others due to fatigue.

In the orphanage, being the most famous, he was also the most popular with the children. In front of the children with mental challenges and physical disabilities, he treated them like he would with his own children.

George Wood was a little awkward, but he tried hard.

The players only had time to eat on their way to the television station. But many people simply did not have the appetite to eat. After getting on the bus, they waved to the children, fans and reporters outside the window. Till the bus was finally out of sight, these dedicated "actors" only then leaned back on their seats and slept one by one.

If these star players were to replay their trip to China in their minds in the summer of 2008, what would be the only thing that stayed in their minds?

Tired?

So tired...

Chapter 666: Enough Face Has Been Given

A few days of commercial activities exhausted the players, but soon they would be free. They just needed to finish today's game.

The China Olympic team's challenge against Nottingham Forest had long been publicized to the point of being known to the world. Although Chinese football continued to be at a low ebb, the Chinese fans highly looked forward to this game.

Some people might just come to watch the Nottingham Forest star players perform, while some people came to watch the China Olympic team play. China would never lack these people. No matter how many people cursed, sneered and showed contempt towards Chinese football, there would always be a group of people who would consistently pay attention to Chinese football. The standards of the Chinese Super League was low, and the attendance rate was low but there was still attendance in the seats, which

meant that people did watch. Went without saying, the national team's games were almost full—there was certainly a patriotic element involved. It was not entirely due to football.

As the world's number one sport, football had an extensive base of masses in China, but no organization could integrate and effectively manage these masses. Then the base would always only be the foundation, and there would never be a superstructure built on this basis.

The Chinese Football Association hoped to use this game to rekindle the people's enthusiasm for football and ride on the wave of the Olympics to take Chinese football up a level. Twain understood the idea of such a covert operation, because the Chinese Football Association leaders were such single-celled organisms with such wishful thinking. But he himself was very dismissive of such a practice.

This put the cart before the horse. The fans' enthusiasm for football would never ignite because of a commercial game. The level of Chinese football would never change because of what the China Olympic team could achieve in the Olympic Games. These should have been the logical and natural results of continuous developments in football, but the heads of the Chinese Football Association treated them as part of the process.

When Twain was younger, he had the dream that many fans dreamt of—a group of talented players who rose up and a talented manager who led them to the World Cup. Later, as he grew older and had experience, he thought that this would always remain only as a dream. The system would not reform, and Chinese football would never be the first.

FIFA's regulation clearly stipulated that all the countries' national football federations could not be government bodies and must be private organizations. The various countries' governments could not interfere in the affairs of the Football Association, or they would be severely punished. But look at China, the Chinese Football Association came out to state that "We are a private organization." Would anyone buy that? The General Administration of Sport of China above them was the first to say no. Every Chinese was clear about the nature of the General Administration of Sport as an institution. How could FIFA not know? But they could not help it either.

the only consolation for the Chinese fans was that occasionally one or two good players would play abroad and represent China on another stadium. If they did well at the clubs, it would also excite the Chinese fans.

The Chinese fans' demands were that simple.

But even with such simple requirements, it was difficult to implement in reality.

So now most of the Chinese fans could only vent their frustrations through ridicule and admonishment. Now Twain was luckier than them because he had the opportunity to express his emotions in person and show enormous face to the Chinese Football Association leaders who specially came to watch the "command of the war" ...

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It rained every day for the four days in Ningbo. Yesterday's weather forecast stated that there would be light rain today, and as expected, it rained continuously from last night until this afternoon.

“Fortunately, we are a team from England.” Twain looked at the drenched world outside the window and said to the coaches next to him. “This is a normal weather for us. How’s the turf?”

“A little slippery.” Dunn replied.

Twain slightly frowned. When the field was slippery, it was not easy to control the technical movements and some unexpected circumstances might arise when the bodies collided, greatly increasing the possibility of an injury.

Even though when he was a fan, Twain was displeased with those European powerhouse clubs who came to China to play and did not put in much effort on top of their players acting lethargically due to the fear of injury, this time he would arrange it as such. Even if Allan did not come to him, he would also keep his team’s strength. He would be the world’s biggest fool if he let his main players be injured in a commercial game in the faraway China.

The bus that the Forest team was on slowly drove on the road. The section of the road near the stadium was somewhat blocked due to the game. Ningbo mobilized a large number of traffic police to maintain order and the speed of vehicles was limited.

Fortunately, the CITIC Ningbo International Hotel where they stayed was very close to Fubang Stadium. They did not have to worry about being late even if the drive was slow as long as there was no traffic jam.

The experience of personally bringing the players to a game on the subway while they were still in League One was considered rare for Twain.

The fans could be seen either taking the taxis, the cars, or on foot to the stadium along the way. When they saw the Nottingham Forest bus, the fans inside the cars would excitedly lean out to wave and shout. China’s five-star red flag and the posters of the Nottingham Forest star players crisscrossed together, which complemented well—all the colors were red.

“If I hadn’t... I would probably be one of them now.” Twain said to Dunn in Mandarin.

“Specially travel from Sichuan to Ningbo?”

“That’s not impossible... I had quit my job once before just to stay up late to watch the UEFA European Championship.” Twain said this with a very proud expression. He was not afraid of Dunn finding out about when he transmigrated from. He only said that it was the “UEFA European Championship.” There was the UEFA European Championship in 2000. As for his true age, he was still in school in 2002, but he never told Dunn, who also never asked about these very personal things. “Never underestimate the enthusiasm of the fans ... Of course, never underestimate their anger.”

At the time of the game, the Forest players regained their professional player status and acted like they were going to play in an away league game. Only a handful of the young ones who were brought from the youth team curiously took out their digital video cameras to capture the spectacular “yellow tide” outside the window.

In fact, the team’s coaching unit for this game did not make any arrangements at all. These days the training was mainly based on physical recovery and simple tactical exercises. There was no special training held to deal with the China Olympic team. The team’s overall training plan was to prepare for

the new season of the league tournament and European competition. Twain did not even gather the players for a tactical meeting before the game. There was enough to speak in the locker room.

Due to the proximity, Nottingham Forest set out right on time. By the time they arrived at Fubang Stadium, the players of the China Olympic team had already left the locker room one by one to warm up on the field.

“They’re in high fighting spirits.” Twain looked at those men and whistled.

“Because we are the strongest out of all their friendlies’ opponents.” Dunn said, “For them, this game is more valuable than their previous friendlies.”

“It will be even more valuable to them if they defeat us by accident.” Twain winked at Dunn.

“Impossible.” Dunn, the Chinese man, poured cold water on Twain in all seriousness.

“Allan will be very angry if he hears you say that... Ha ha!” Twain laughed. It looked like he was in a good mood. “But you’re right. Even if we don’t work hard, it’s not hard to win them. Fourteen years ago, Chinese football might have defeated those opponents which underestimated them. But now this team certainly won’t be able to. Everything develops, but it’s strange that this rule doesn’t apply at all in Chinese football.” He shook his head.

“Don’t let them dawdle. Better hurry and go warm up.” He turned his head and said to Kerlake, so the assistant manager’s loud voice rang out in the locker room.

“Don’t think you can relax just because it’s a friendly match! You will equally suffer from lack of warm-up! Does anyone want the new season to be over before it has started?”

His bark was effective. The players who took their own sweet time just now to while away the time, immediately dashed out.

Twain did not stay in the locker room to prepare as there was not much to prepare. There was no need to study the China Olympic team to play against their opponent. As long as they played according to their tackles and usual habits, this game would be in their hands.

He felt like he had “returned in glory.” Deep down, he wanted to go out and show off. Although no one would recognize him as a Chinese man and the Chinese people would not be envious of his achievements, this did not stop him from fantasizing in his mind for self-entertainment. To think that I was just an ordinary young fan at that time. Now I have brought a two-time Champions League Double Winner team back to China!

As it rained for several days, the organizers were worried for a while that the fans who had bought tickets would not come to the game. But what Twain saw should give the organizers a sigh of relief. Half of the forty thousand seats had occupied by now, and it was forty minutes away from the start of the game.

The drizzle did not dampen the enthusiasm of the fans at all. Even when the players from both sides came out to warm up, they were happily shouting in the stands.

Looking at them, he thought about the all kinds of fans he had met in England. Suddenly, Twain lost the interest to “show off” outside. He turned back to the locker room.

Just as he walked into the tunnel entrance, he was stopped by a group of Chinese reporters. They wanted to interview this legendary manager, who was full of personality. The person who came out to ask the question was Tang Jing, an old acquaintance of Twain.

"I really can meet you anywhere, Miss Tang." Twain greeted her in Mandarin.

"I'm the reporter, specially put in charge to cover you and your team. It would be strange if you don't see me." Tang Jing shook her head and then threw out her question. "Before the game, the fans were worried that such a commercial game would greatly discount the value of the competition. In terms of the viewing pleasure or the competitive nature, it is not as good as the usual game. What do you think?"

"This game is definitely not the same as the league cups. But I don't agree with the remarks that it would be unexciting. Because excitement can be divided into several kinds. A massive victory of 7:0 against the opponent can also be wonderful to watch." Twain winked at Tang Jing.

"Oh? Are you saying your team will score a lot of goals in the game?"

"I didn't say that. It's just an analogy. Don't try to manipulate my meaning to that direction." Twain was well aware of the reporter's antics. "I don't know how the game is going to be played out. I can only promise that we will try our best to let the Chinese fans enjoy a wonderful game. We are different from those European teams which come here just to make money. Don't forget that we are also the cultural ambassador for Nottingham. This game is a great opportunity to showcase the English football culture. And, you know, Miss Tang, I never put my hands up in surrender before a game."

Hearing Twain said so, Tang Jing smiled. Having said so much useless officialese mumbo jumbo earlier, this last sentence held the real truth. It was really hard to get Twain to give up before the game even started.

"So, this means the Chinese fans and television viewers can enjoy a great game with confidence?"

"That's the way it looks."

Twain and Tang Jing had a happy exchange and the other Chinese reporters were not willing to be left out, so they stepped forward to ask their own questions. The biggest advantage of interviewing Twain was that both parties could communicate directly in Mandarin without any translation, which made it less troublesome.

"What do you think of the strength of the China Olympic team, Mr. Twain?"

"I don't know much about this team..." In fact, I know a lot, but I won't tell you!

"There are rumors that you guys are interested in Zheng Zhi. Can you please confirm if that's true?"

"If Zheng Zhi can accept to be George Wood's substitute, I don't mind." Twain grinned. They just needed to understand George Wood to know that this was equal to a denial of the rumor.

"Do you have any expectations for the Beijing Olympics?"

"I'm sorry I can't come to Beijing to watch the Olympics in person because the English Premier League will have already started at that time. But I believe the Beijing Olympic Games will be an unforgettable

Olympic Games.” Twain answered the question with a smile. He was polite, gracious, humorous and gave off a good impression. It was hard for the Chinese reporters who first came into contact with him to believe that this man had a bad reputation in Europe.

Only Tang Jing knew that the outer appearance of this man was completely untrustworthy.

The group of Chinese reporters soon saw Tony Twain’s other side.

An attractive television female reporter squeezed in and asked, “Beckham is in the starting lineup. I would like to know if he will be playing in the entire game?”

“It depends on the situation. Generally, we will make to make a large-scale adjustment.” As this was not a regular game, the substitutions was discussed and agreed between the two sides. Because the China Olympic team wanted to train its players, so everyone decided that they could replace eleven players.

“In other words, it mean Beckham will be replaced midway?”

Twain began to find this female reporter very annoying for asking questions that lacked standards and rudimentary. His warm tone quickly cooled. “I can’t answer you now.”

The female reporter did not sense any dissatisfaction in Twain’s tone and continued to throw out her prepared questions, “Do you think David Beckham’s role in the team is very important?”

Twain finally could not help himself. He asked the reporter in a stern tone, “Lady, I’m not happy with the way you give your interviewees presupposed questions and answers. I can only answer ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Or do you want me to give you answers that you want to hear? I’m sorry, but I refuse to answer this question. Besides, you’re an entertainment reporter, aren’t you?”

Twain’s sudden outburst left the reporters in the room stunned, including the female reporter. She had covered many events in China and always asked such questions. No one had ever said that she asked the wrong questions and badly.

For example: “Do you feel glorious and proud to win the gold medal? Do the coach and the team help you a lot? Are you so excited that you want to cry?”

“Do you feel sorry that you only won a silver medal? Do you feel you have let down the country for your training over the years?”

“Congratulations on running your best time for this year. Liu Xiang won the championship title. Do you feel very happy? What do you think of Liu Xiang’s performance today?”

...

But today, this man was actually merciless in refuting her. She could not wrap her head around this for a moment.

“I’m... I’m not an entertainment reporter.” It took her a long while to answer this inexplicable question.

“You should be an entertainment reporter. You are very talented in that area.” Having said that, Twain walked away and left behind an awkward silence for all the Chinese reporters present in his wake.

Tang Jing saw this scene in the back of the crowd and shrugged her shoulders. She knew things would develop this way ...

The displeased Twain quickly walked through the tunnel. When he passed by the home team, the China Olympic team's locker room door, this door just closed. The action caught his eye and he turned his head over. In that instant, he caught a glimpse of a familiar figure through the door—the Chinese Football Association President, Xie Guanlong.

It was said that Dujković was just an overall head coach by name only for a long time. The Chinese coaching team was just a puppet, only responsible for conveying the instructions and spirit from above. Now it seemed like the rumor was not false.

A glimpse of this scene made Twain laugh. Chinese football was full of jokes. With a track and field background, Xie Guanlong put on an act to arrange the tactics and command the team's game. Then a group of professional coaches bowed their heads and listened, while continuously nodded in agreement. On top of that, they would fawn on and flatter that "the president is really an expert", "President Xie's words are correct" ... He felt it was very funny just thinking about it.

Fortunately, he did not have to suffer in such an environment.

This interlude suddenly improved his mood.

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The players returned to the locker room after the warm-up. They dried their perspiration and changed into clean clothes.

Twain saw that they had all done this before he spoke up, "With regards to this game ... there's nothing much to say. We will play as we usually play."

Eastwood stood up and asked, "Chief, is it still defensive counterattack?"

"We don't just know how to play defensive counterattack!" Twain glared at him, "We are going to practice and train with the offense from the middle routine today. We're not going from the wings, only in the middle. If the Chinese team comes out punching, we will need to defend more fiercely. Take this opportunity to score a goal against them and start practicing the offense again."

The players nodded. The middle was an area where all the teams paid more attention to. Whether offensively or defensively there must be more players here. The Forest team had little chance to practice specifically during normal games because they had to win, and it was obviously more effective to play in the wings. Now in the face of such an opponent like the China Olympic team, it would be a waste of opportunity not to use it as a practice of the tactics, but to play the flank attack which they were best at.

"But I want to remind you." Twain held out his left index finger and said, "Everyone must be aware of the weather and the field conditions with the warm-up just now. The Chinese team will fight fiercely. You have to be careful not to let yourselves get hurt. Don't go and intercept the more difficult balls from the opponent. When they have bigger movements, just avoid them. Protect yourselves."

Everyone on the starting list bobbed their heads. Twain gave face to everyone with the starting list for today's game—almost all of the main force were in the lineup.

The goalkeeper was van der Sar. The center backs were the partners, Piqué and Ayala. The left back was Gareth Bale and the right back was Rafinha. The defensive midfielder was Sun Jihai and the attacking midfielder was van der Vaart. The left midfielder was Ribéry and the right midfielder was David Beckham. The strikers were van Nistelrooy and Eastwood.

The center back, Pepe has been sidelined due to a minor injury because Twain wanted to be careful. Even though George Wood did not have any injuries, Twain put him on the bench. In fact, Twain had his own plans for this arrangement ...

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At the same time, in the China Olympic team's locker room, Xie Guanlong had just guest performed as a manager and arranged the tactics for the China Olympic players. Truthfully, his tactics were very simple, nothing but some terms which a fake fan would know—"Must have a solid defense and quick counterattack. The front field will then begin to force an interception, attack from the both sides. The ball is heavier on a rainy day, so strengthen the long shots ..."

After he gave these seemingly professional instructions which in fact amounted to perfunctory nonsense, he began his favorite ideological mobilization which was the motivation of the players before a game.

"Players! It's a rare opportunity to be able to play against the UEFA Champions League champion. The Chinese Football Association has worked hard to obtain this opportunity for everyone, so I hope you all will cherish it." He put one hand on the hip and the other hand with his five fingers slightly spread as he brandished his hand, looking every inch like a leader. He said, "We're definitely not as good as our opponents in this game, but I hope you don't give up. You're going to play your own style! Firstly, we must have momentum! Our strength is weaker than the opponent, but if our momentum is worse than the opponent, then we cannot play this game! We have to scare them! We must show a tenacious fighting spirit, ferociously tackle and have bigger movements. As long as the opponent is afraid, the situation of the game will be to our advantage!"

He spoke energetically here while the manager, Dujković sat in the corner, looking indifferent. It was as if everything that happened here had nothing to do with him. In effect, it did not really matter. He was just a figurehead and could not do anything since he had no power. To put it nicely, he was just a spectator who was able to sit in the technical area.

"Secondly, we must not give up! Don't give up the game under any circumstances! The style of Chinese football is we never give up till the last second!" Xie Guanlong was high-spirited, as if his team had won the game. However, did he not blush when he said those words? ... "If the other side scores a goal, we will try our best to grab and mess up their rhythm! Then we strive to equalize the score sooner. You must be fierce during the defense. We use our fighting spirit and tenacity as well as proactivity to make up for our technical disadvantage!"

“Finally, I hope you can give the fans in the entire country a wonderful game and let the fans see the spirit shown in you! The Party and the people are watching you and hope you can deliver a satisfactory result!”

After he irresponsibly threw the heavy burden of 1.3 billion people’s expectations on the shoulders of these regular players, Xie Guanlong left the locker room accompanied by the other officials with ease and confidence. He felt extremely good just thinking about that result and the impassioned speech he gave before the game.

Back on the podium, after he shook hands with the Nottingham Forest’s chairman, Evan Doughty and Marketing Manager, Allan Adams, he sat next to the two men and got ready to watch the game.

In the stands opposite the podium, there were fans who displayed a banner “Xie * Long should be fired!” Give Dujković back!”. However, he swept his gaze across and pretended not to see it.

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The players from both sides came out in a file and the atmosphere at the stadium began to heat up. The live broadcast announced the players from both sides one by one. All the China Olympic team and the Nottingham Forest star players received the most enthusiastic applause and cheers from the spectators. Beckham was certainly the most popular.

Because George Wood was not here, it should have been the second captain, van der Sar who came up to pick for the coin toss. Since it was not an official game, but a commercial one, Twain gave Beckham the captain’s armband from a commercial point of view. This move proved to be welcomed. When Beckham with the captain’s armband was spotted in the center circle doing the coin toss with the China Olympic team captain, Li Weifeng, the fans in the stadium broke out with loud cheers.

Beckham lost to Li Weifeng during the coin toss and won the right to kick off.

After a group photo of the starting lineup, the players on both sides returned to their respective positions. The main referee from China whistled and the game officially began!

Once the game started, the fans in the stands really gave their energy to rally. The majority of them cheered on the China Olympic team. Because Twain heard clearly what they shouted, “China team, come on! China team, keep fighting!”

Any fan who often watched the Chinese team play live on the television would be familiar with this sound, and Twain was no exception. It looked like no matter how popular Nottingham Forest was in China, no matter how big Beckham’s appeal was, as long as the opponent was the China Olympic team, then it would be almost impossible for the fans to cheer for the Forest team.

It was Twain had stated when the game started. The morale of the China Olympic team was very strong. Although they did not control the ball, they were aggressive with the tackles. Any successful defense would gain cheers from the stands. However, in Twain’s view, this performance was bold but not very astute. The “head coach” who made such an arrangement was very incompetent.

The China Olympic team would inevitably consume a lot of physical strength with such fierce interception. Moreover, they could not take care of every corner of the field, especially in the rear

defensive line where a lot of gaps could be taken advantage of. The Nottingham Forest team was just waiting for a suitable opportunity to strike a fatal blow.

Nottingham Forest did not have to wait long for this opportunity. Nottingham Forest, with most of its main force deployed, easily controlled the pace of the game. The China Olympic team began to follow the pace of the Forest team. They ran vigorously but also energetically used up a lot of physical strength, which actively opened up gaps for the Forest team.

In the sixth minute, Beckham spotted the right timing to suddenly kick off a cross pass to the penalty area. Van Nistelrooy and Eastwood attracted the attention of all the China Olympic team defenders. Van der Vaart, who was left unmarked, plugged into the penalty area from the back and volleyed a shot in the air without stopping the ball!

If it was a more important game, he might steady and stop the ball before he made a move. But in such a game, the China Olympic team did not give him any pressure, so he had the mind to execute a move with a high degree of difficulty which was not commonly used. And it worked very well...

"The ball's in! Alas, a gap that shouldn't have been there appeared in the defense of the China Olympic team..." The commentator of China's national television station appeared frustrated. It was known that the strength of the two teams was not on the same level, but the China Olympic team represented China. It was really embarrassing for them to concede a goal so soon.

When they saw that the goal was in, the Forest players celebrated minimally. Twain and the others in the technical area did not even get up and clapped. For these people, it was normal to score a goal against the Chinese team. It was not worth celebrating at all.

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After taking the lead, Nottingham Forest deliberately slowed down the pace and began to follow the guidelines that Twain had set up before the game. When there were opportunities to attack, they would attack in the middle without exception, even if the China Olympic team put all the defensive forces in the middle. Even if this led to a sharp decline in the success rate of the offense, they did not intend to try the flanks.

While the trailing China Olympic team strengthened its tackles amid the fans' cheers. As they were over-excited, their movements got bigger and bigger, forcing the Nottingham Forest players to give up the ball several times to avoid the other side's ferocious shovels.

This made the Forest players a little disgruntled. The commercial game was increasingly becoming explosive.

Finally, in the twenty-first minute, the China Olympic team's striker, Gao Lin, received Zheng Zhi's pass in the penalty area when he suddenly fell to the ground. The referee decided to award a penalty! The Nottingham Forest players felt very wronged. Even though Piqué and Gao Lin had physical contact, it was an exaggeration to rule it as a foul. He could not always whistled for a penalty as long as the opposing striker had physical contact with the defender in the penalty area and fell to the ground, could he?

The referee ignored the protests of the Forest players and insisted on the verdict.

Twain smiled when he saw this scene off the field. Did the Chinese Football Association also double up on the insurance?

Unsurprisingly, Zheng Zhi scored with this penalty shot. The score became a tie at 1:1.

The gongs and drums thundered in the stands and the fans were extremely happy to be able to equalize the scores. The players of the China Olympic team were also affected by this, becoming more excited and aggressive with their actions.

The Forest players soon found a problem. The two teams fought hard and when the Chinese team players fell after any physical contact, the referee would penalize the Forest team for fouls most of the time. The China Olympic team led by a wide margin with the number of free kicks in the first half.

When Ayala skirted around from the back to defend and took the ball off the feet of Zheng Zhi who was glancing around, Zheng Zhi fell to the ground and the referee whistled that he fouled again. The Argentine veteran shook his head helplessly as he stood on the spot with his hands on his hips.

As a result, the Nottingham Forest players played more and more passively. When they attacked in the face of the Chinese team's defense which bordered on fouling, they played nervously. During their defense, they dared not to make a move lightly because they were afraid of being penalized for a foul. In this way, the Chinese team regained the initiative on the field.

When the Forest team controlled the ball, they preferred to pass the ball back and forth in the center and back field, rather than pass the ball forward. Such a move upset the fans who came to watch the game. They wanted to see both sides pit themselves against each other in the attacks and not a passive game. As a result, the boos against Nottingham Forest began to emerge in the stands. As soon as they started passing the ball to each other laterally, the hissing would immediately erupt.

And the China Olympic team, who strove to compete, naturally got the one-sided enthusiastic support.

Everyone's thinking was this—since Nottingham Forest is not willing to give their best and doesn't want to play seriously with a team like us, then we will defeat and embarrass you!

In the second part of the first half, the China Olympic team began to gain the upper hand. There was even a siege on the Forest goal, leading to a dangerous situation in the goal guarded by van der Sar. Seeing such a scene, the grandstand naturally broke out in thunderous cheers. In the podium, Xie Guanlong was also full of smiles.

In the technical area, Kerslake could not sit still. It was strange that Twain, who was a fussy person, stayed calm in the tense situation, crossed his legs, and did not seem worried about the team's plight.

Nottingham Forest paid the price for their passive play before the end of the first half. Zheng Zhi unexpectedly did a long shot. The football hit Sun Jihai on the thigh, which deflected the shot and caused it to fly into the net. Van der Sar could only sigh as he watched the ball.

In this instant, the decibel at the Fubang Stadium reached the highest level since it was built.

Xie Guanlong even stood up and clapped. The players of the China Olympic team hugged excitedly. They completely suppressed Nottingham Forest in the second part of the first half. And now they were ahead of the European champions! It would be hard to tell these young people not to get excited.

As for Twain? He just turned his head to the restless Kerslake next to him and said, "You should be happy. The first half is about to end, and we don't have anyone hurt."

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During the halftime interval, the China Olympic team players ran off the field with their heads held high and their chests puffed up as they received cheers from the fans along the way. While the Nottingham Forest players went off the field a little helplessly with their heads bowed. They would hear the boos from the stands occasionally.

It was no wonder the attitude of these fans who were still pursuing the Forest players before the game had turned one hundred and eighty degrees. People had high hopes for Nottingham Forest, which had the titles of the Champions League champion and Double Winner, in the first half, but did not play at the level which everyone wanted to see. How could this not be disappointing? Since they were disappointed, they naturally had to fully express for the English team to see.

The director of the television broadcast was clearly aware of Twain's position. When the players came off the field, the camera turned to Twain, but was surprised to find that Twain was not dissatisfied with this result and the team's performance at all, which was really puzzling. Was it not a rumor that he could accept a loss, but could not accept a loss that was cowardly and had no fighting spirit?

What about now...

How would these people know how Twain's mind worked?

On the podium, Xie Guanlong left his seat with a smile on his face as he went to the locker room to inspect the team again. He was delighted by the team's performance in the first half and the reaction of the fans in the stadium made him even happier.

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Everyone was already in the locker room when Twain came in and closed the door.

He did not criticize the players at all. Instead, he smiled and said, "You've done a good job, and no one was hurt. I'm relieved."

But his players disagreed with his view. Eastwood stood up in frustration, "Chief, I can't accept this result at all."

His comments were quickly echoed and concurred by most of his teammates.

"Oh? Why?" Twain pretended to be surprised, "Not getting hurt in a friendly match is the most important. I think there is no reason to fight for such a game."

"You're right, Chief. But I just can't accept this result and the awkward situation. Every time I heard the boos in the stands, I don't feel good." Eastwood, who was usually smiling, now looked serious. "We're the European champions, aren't we? We're the Double Winner, right? If we played a little more seriously, the first half would be 3-0. To be honest..."

Eastwood hesitated slightly and decided to speak his mind, "... I don't like this kind of competition. It's like being on a show and giving the results the spectators want to see. I prefer the real Champions League final to this kind of commercial game!"

Having said that, he looked up and waited for the chief's criticism. But Twain smiled and did not intend to scold him at all.

"But I think the outcome and situation of a commercial game is insignificant. As compared to that little bit of dignity, I value your health more. We can't choose whether to play in this kind of competition. As our reputation grows, there will be more of such similar games. But we can choose the way we play..."

Eastwood was set to vent his frustrations suffered from the first half today. He knew the chief liked him, so he was a little unchecked. "I remember, Chief, that you said to us before that the way to finish the game early was to completely wipe out the opponent at the start of the game. Why can't we be like that in this game? Anyway, I think this kind of game is an insult to my work ethic."

He was a little heavy handed with his remarks, but Twain was still not angry. He looked at the players with a smile.

"I think, chief... I can guess what these Chinese newspapers will say about us the next day, and it will not be good, that's for sure." A second man stood up and it was Pepe, who did not play because of his injury. He shrugged his shoulders and grimaced, "I don't want other people to look down on us."

"Boss, we know what a commercial game is. But there is no rule in the commercial game that we have to lose to the hosts."

"The referee of this game kept blowing the whistle and every situation was against us. I want to teach them a lesson!"

"It was hard to play in the first half. Football is not meant to be played like this!"

More and more people bravely stood up against their king, but the smile on Twain's face widened.

"So, you don't want to lose this game?"

"Who was the one who told us that Nottingham Forest's football is to never say die and admit defeat. Chief?" Eastwood looked directly at Twain and asked.

Twain finally laughed, "I knew you people won't take it lying down. Actually, I think... Of course, I don't want to lose, but I don't really want you to get hurt. You all saw the opponent's actions. I do not want to wait for someone to get hurt before I start regretting. You must also think about your own bodies."

"At the start of the second half, I'll make big adjustments in the players. I will replace all eleven players. But!" He raised his voice, "You're right, Nottingham Forest's football is to never say die and admit defeat. I will never accept failure, let alone this kind of failure! We are clearly able to beat them, so let's beat them!"

Among the crowd of excited people, Sun Jihai began to pray for his fellow countrymen.

Twain bared his lips and grinned happily as he looked at the confidence and fighting spirit that everyone had to win the game.

The only regret was that he could not see the change of expression on the faces of those Chinese Football Association heads in the second half. You must have had a good laugh in the first half, didn't you?

Allan, I have given you enough face. In the first half, they were one goal ahead of the main lineup. Such a good thing is not easy even for Manchester United, Real Madrid and other big teams to encounter.

Chapter 667: Stupid and Awesome

As the players from both teams stood near the center circle waiting for the second half to begin, Twain changed four players in one go. Four players clad in Nottingham Forest's yellow away jerseys stood on the sidelines, waiting in line to get on the field.

Kompany replaced the older Ayala, Akinfeev substituted van der Sar, Lennon swapped out David Beckham, and George Wood replaced Sun Jihai.

Beckham's exit made the fans unhappy with Twain and they booed him constantly.

"They're not booing at you, David." When Beckham walked off to shake Twain's hand, Twain laughed, "The boos are for me. They are complaining that I've brought you off too early."

"I understand, boss."

"Well, dry yourself." He personally handed over a towel himself.

Wood took over the captain's armband from Beckham. He tied it himself, and then ran onto the field. He did not give his opinion on how they should play in the first half during the halftime interval. But Twain knew this kid must have bottled up a lot of energy inside.

During the halftime interval, Twain instructed the team to step up their long shots and still play offense in the middle. Apart from the players' fear of injury and the referee's whistle, they were unable to break the goal in the first half partly due to Twain's instruction to the team to attack from the middle. But he did not change that in the second half. In addition to this being a hard-to-get opportunity to train the players, Twain did not think that they could not breach the goal by attacking from the middle with Nottingham Forest's ability.

In fact, even if the main players did not make noise during the halftime interval, Twain also had a way to reverse the situation in the second half. Hence, he specially kept the substitutes for the second half.

These players usually played less, and very eager to prove themselves, which in some cases were more powerful than the main players. Twain had planned from the start to let them play in the second half to teach the heads of the Chinese Football Association a lesson.

That was right. He did not plan to listen to Allan in the first place and to give face to the Chinese Football Association. The Chinese Football Association's reputation had nothing to do with him. At that time, he did not directly refuse Allan only because he did not want to quarrel with him. His hot-headedness and outspoken personality did not mean that he would not resort to petty tricks.

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While the China Olympic team's players and most of the fans were still oblivious from the dream of the first half, van der Vaart's long shot that struck the goal post had sounded the alarm.

In the fifth minute of the second half, less than a minute after van der Vaart's long shot hit the post, Ribéry suddenly cut inside after he dribbled the ball in the wing. He kicked the ball in a straight line just before the China Olympic team thought he was going to do a long shot. Plugging in from the side, Eastwood turned to shoot at the goal after he received the ball, which rolled past the goalkeeper who was unable to react in time and hit the net.

Nottingham Forest reversed the score.

So far, it was still in line with the result that Xie Yalong and Allan knew.

However, a bad feeling about this emerged in Allan's mind.

In the eleventh minute, Li Weifeng whose defensive action was still rough, pushed down Lennon who had intended to break through in front of the penalty area, the referee blew the whistle and ruled that it was his foul, which gave the Forest team a free kick twenty-seven meters from the goal.

Gareth Bale stepped forward to execute this free kick and the football drew a beautiful arc to fly straight toward a dead corner!

Nottingham Forest completed the reversal of the game in six minutes.

After this goal, Twain substituted the players again. Bale, who scored the goal was replaced by Baines, van der Vaart was replaced by Petrov and Ribéry moved to the middle to be the playmaker in the midfield.

Following which, Petrov who just came on the field, brutally broke through the wing. After he relied on his speed to break past the China Olympic team's defenders marking him, he sent out the ball. Van Nistelrooy suppressed Li Weifeng to head the football into the goal.

In the blink of an eye, the score had changed from 1:2 to 4:2.

While sitting on the podium, Xie Yalong's smile on his face was long gone. His face was now infinitely close to Ningbo's weather today.

Allan sat in next to Evan Doughty and was one person down from Xie Yalong. He could feel the emotional upheaval that took place in the Chinese Football Association President's mind at this moment. Because he was also a little annoyed.

Tony Twain made a fool out of him!

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Generally speaking, it was acceptable for the hosts for this score to be kept until the end of the game. After all, they had scored two goals against the European Champion and the other party only scored four goals. But Twain had no intention of giving up. He continued to bring on the driven players to attack the already battered and disheartened China Olympic team.

Bendtner came onto replace van Nistelrooy and Arshavin replaced Eastwood. Rafinha was replaced by Chimbonda and Wes Morgan replaced Piqué. The China Olympic team simply could not threaten Nottingham Forest's defense now. Most of their faltering attacks were stopped by George Wood, who defended against them with ease.

Nottingham Forest scored two more goals in the final minutes of the game. Bendtner grabbed the ball in the penalty area to score a goal. Then he used his strong physique and followed up with a header shot to the goal.

By the time the Forest team scored their fifth goal, half of the fans had already started cheering and applauding the Forest players for each performance.

In contrast to this situation, Xie Yalong's face was gloomy with tightly pursed lips, looking as ugly as could be.

The players of the China Olympic team still strove at the beginning. But toward the end, they realized that the difference in the strength between the two sides was just too big, so they just gave up trying. Their attacks were completely disorganized, and they struggled with the defense.

Seeing this scene, Twain shook his head and said, "This is all they've got, and the FA actually gave them the goal to reach the final four of the Olympic men's soccer..."

"Are they crazy?" Dunn asked.

"Not crazy, this is their usual stance. If you were to hear the FA say we have to keep our feet on the ground and do something practical for Chinese football one day, you can call the mental hospital and ask them to send a car to the FA to get those people."

Dunn was amused by Twain's words.

But Twain glanced at him and said, "Is that funny? Don't you think it's sad and indignant to have encountered such a thing? But the Chinese fans have lost their energy for anger and swearing. They can only express their emotions in a sarcastic manner. You see..." He pointed to the stands and muttered, "how almost all of them are starting to boo the China Olympic team now. That's how they express their emotions. They are forced to the extent that they see no hope at all. Who would want to use this extreme way to vent? To boo the team that wears their own country flag on the chest... It's sad and pathetic."

Dunn stopped laughing and was silent. His understanding and feelings about Chinese football were lagged behind this "British man" next to him. But he could imagine what Twain's former attitude towards Chinese football was. Perhaps he cried, laughed, cursed and hoped too. But now, he coolly recounted other people's own affairs here.

It was so sad and pathetic.

And so lamentable!

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The commercial match ended with Nottingham Forest's 6:2 victory over the China Olympic team. After the game, all the Forest players walked hand in hand toward the stands to thank the fans, which was their tradition and what Twain asked them to do.

Initially, these players thought that since they had slaughtered the home team without giving any face, those who booed them in the first half would boo at them even louder. But to their surprise and what touched them was the Chinese fans stood up in the stands to applaud the Nottingham Forest players who had played to their best during the match.

"To be honest, they understand the game very well..." Sun Jihai muttered when he thanked the fans with his teammates.

The people on the other team felt bad. Xie Yalong stood on the podium and clapped out of courtesy. Some eager fans already rushed out a new placard and raised it up in the stands below the podium to show to the officials on the podium.

"Xie Yalong is a stupid c**t! The FA is a stupid c**t!"

This slogan captured what all the fans in the stadium wanted to say.

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The post-match press conference was lively. Because Nottingham Forest was the first team to beat the host team to a pulp since China had commercial football matches, this game set the records for the highest score for a single game and net goal difference for a foreign team over a Chinese team.

In accordance with the traditional thinking of the Chinese people, guests who came to visit the host, must pay mind to the host's face. It was okay to win but it looked better for everyone to score less goals...

But Tony Twain and his Nottingham Forest team did not believe in this.

Twain's first remark astonished the Chinese reporters present, "I was not satisfied with the team's performance in the first half. We should have scored a few more goals. But I'm fairly satisfied with the current overall score. We showed the strength of a European champion in the second half."

Twain knew some of the Chinese media would feel displeased, but he had his own way to shut them up.

"Before the game, there were some media which were concerned that the Forest team would not give its best to play in the commercial game, making the game less thrilling to watch. But now I think everyone can put their minds at ease. We're a professional team and we upheld our work ethic. I'm very happy to give the Chinese fans such a wonderful game!" He smiled and opened his arms, looking very proud. "After the game, the Chinese fans gave my team a standing ovation and I was deeply moved by that. It also showed that we have won the recognition and appreciation of the fans with practical actions! The Chinese fans are..." He gave a thumbs-up and spoke in authentic Mandarin, "Awesome!"

His words and conduct rendered the media which were ready to make trouble, completely speechless.

Only Tang Jing was laughing below. That's Tony Twain for you. You don't know if you should love him or hate him... But whether you like him or not, he's true to himself in front of you. Those whose hearts can't take it; he may just be the death of you.

I would have fought him before when I was younger. But now when I see him, I can only smile when I see him. I really don't get worked up by him anymore because he's not directing it at me at all... Maybe he's directing it at the world?

The puppet, Mr. Dujković had nothing to say as this match had nothing to do with him. But he had to stepped out after the game to accept everyone's rebuke. The salary given by the Chinese Football Association was really not easy to earn. "They played very well, and we tried our best. But the difference in the strength is too wide and we are powerless..." He rubbed his temples as he feebly answered the reporters' questions, as if he was muttering to himself.

Twain glanced at him and did not think that this old man was pathetic.

If I were him, how could I endure such humiliation? I would have yelled at the Football Association long ago, and then got up to walk away. You can go find whoever is willing to play along. I'm not going to do as you say!

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At the end of their last assignment in China, the players were given a break that night. They were free to go out and do what they like before 11:30 P.M..

While Tony Twain was invited by Allan to his room once again. There were some things that they had to make clear.

Unlike the last time, the club chairman, Evan Doughty was present in the room this time.

"The atmosphere doesn't feel quite right." He did not rush in. Instead, he clung to the door frame, looked inside at the two men and asked tentatively.

"Ah, Tony, Tony. What should I say about you?" Allan shook his head and sighed. There were times when he really could not get angry with this manager. During the game, he was so angry that he could not wait to look for Twain to question him in person what he was doing. But seeing him like this now, all the yelling he was prepared to do had vanished.

Twain quickly laughed, "It's ok. I know why you're looking for me. Actually, Allan, don't blame me for lying to you. If I had refused in the first place, then the itinerary and various activities you had arranged these days would be affected. Isn't that the case when you calmly think about it?"

Allan did not need to think calmly to know for sure that it would be like this. When the team's most important two departments had a conflict face-to-face, it was inevitable that it would affect things. If everyone was fighting, perhaps many of the scheduled activities would have to be cancelled.

In order to come to China, he studied the many examples of European teams which came to China to make money these last few years. For example, in the summer of 2005, Real Madrid visited China for the second time. Originally, all the players were scheduled to go on China's national television to record a program with the Real Madrid fans selected from all over the country. But due to a direct clash between Real Madrid's commercial and athletics departments, this trip was forced to be canceled because the athletics department strongly objected to the exhausted team participating in the television show. The end result was Real Madrid missed the live recording of the show, leaving a very bad image in the minds of the fans across China.

With Real Madrid's deep-rooted position in football and vast wealth, they did not take this little effect to heart. But Nottingham Forest, which had just stepped into the Chinese market, could not be careless.

"I'm not an impulsive person. I had thought about it. So, I promised you at that time because I did not want to influence your other plans. But I really couldn't promise this matter. It offended my bottom line. I don't know what your thoughts are, Allan. But for someone like me who cares about honor, a matter like this is like asking me to sell out the team. I couldn't do that, and my players could not agree. You weren't in the locker room at halftime. Everyone thought we played badly in the first half and they did not want to end the game like that..." He gave a shrug and did not continue to speak.

Allan stood there and did not know what to say.

When he saw that he did not speak, Twain continued, "Allan, you know this team. The whole world probably knows what kind of team Nottingham Forest is. I don't blame you at all and I did not mean to deliberately go against you. But the Chinese Football Association's request was too much. I could not accept. It's their fault. None of us did anything wrong. They didn't follow the rules of football. So, they had to pay the price and lie in the bed they made. I know better than you do about an organization like the Chinese Football Association. They have become accustomed to manipulating the games and leagues domestically. And now they think they can manipulate us?"

"But Tony. We are going to open a football school in China. This definitely can't get around the Chinese Football Association. You're now..." Allan finally had the ability to think, and he spoke harshly.

Twain smiled very happily, "Are you worried that by doing this, I have angered the FA? No, it won't. Allan. You don't know enough about this organization. The only person who was enraged by me was the president. Rest assured, his term is ending soon. By the end of this year... it's not yet known what will happen when the next one comes along. It's too early to say what's going to happen." He winked and added, "The presidents of the Chinese Football Association are transferred from the other institutions to dredge up enough achievements for a few years before they are promoted. They don't care about how Chinese football is."

Evan clicked his tongue in astonishment at the side. This kind of thing was really new to him.

Hearing Twain say so, Allan slightly softened his tone. "This is unbelievable."

"Ha, if you dig deeper into this organization, you'll find more incredible things. Some things will make you feel like it shouldn't happen on Earth at all."

But Allan soon discovered a new problem, "Wait a minute. If they change another leader, does it mean that all my previous efforts have gone to waste?"

"The bigger picture of the agreement negotiated with the organization should not be affected. As long as the relationship is not at an impasse, it will not block the other minor areas for us." Twain thought about it before saying.

Evan, who had been watching, put his hands together and smiled, "Okay, Allan, this matter has been settled. I did say that Tony must have his thoughts. To tell you the truth, I think the suggestion put forth by the Chinese Football Association is silly, but fortunately Tony did not follow suit."

Allan feigned anger, "So after all this and it's my own issue?"

“Ahem...” Evan hurriedly coughed to cover, “This trip to China was perfect, Allan. There were some people who thought the Chinese commercial football games were over, but we have hyped it up this time. I’ve heard that Chelsea is already considering a formal visit to China... These are the best affirmations for you.”

Twain chimed in next to him, “Yes, that’s right. You’re the best I’ve ever seen with this area.”

“You only deal with the managers, Tony.” Allan was not angry. He said to Twain, “Anyway, what you did today made me lose ‘mianzi.’ Yes, ‘mianzi.’”

After spending some time in China, he could understand what “face” meant.

Twain pretended not to understand even though he could, “What’s that?” Noodles?”

“Don’t act silly, Tony.”

“Well, ok, to make up for your ‘mianzi’, I’ve decided to treat you to noodles.” Twain raised his hands in surrender.

“Spaghetti? I’m so sick of it...”

“No, Japanese ramen!”

The second stop of the Nottingham Forest’s East Asia gold rush project was Tokyo, Japan.

Chapter 668: Money Versus No Money

In fact, after the Nottingham Forest team had Beckham, the best money-making place to go was not China, a vast country with a large number of people and seemingly limitless market, but rather a small and narrow country like Japan.

The Japanese’s love and worship of Beckham had already reached the point of no reason. They would crazily pursued anything related to Beckham, and their pursuits were measured by real money. Although China’s market was vast, not many people would really pay for authentic goods due to the impact from the developed piracy industry. There was no such problem in Japan. If they liked Beckham, they would go to a regular store to buy authentic goods. In this way, the economic benefits that Nottingham Forest wanted to see were generated.

Saying this might the Chinese people uncomfortable, but it was indeed like this—Japan was an important money-making destination that many European clubs valued. There was so much money to be made that many people rushed to get there.

Nottingham Forest’s trip to Japan was no different from that in China, with the players as tired as ever. They were only a little more relaxed when they went shopping in Ginza, Tokyo, at night. But to Twain’s delight, there was no such silly organization like the Chinese Football Association here. He did not have to worry about how to play the game.

From their arrival in Tokyo till their departure from Tokyo, Nottingham Forest set off a red Forest craze in Japan for four days. The fans could be seen wearing the red Nottingham Forest jerseys on the streets everywhere.

Evan saw this scene and had to exclaim, "I'm afraid even if Chelsea were here, it would not be able to have that effect."

"It's all to David Beckham's credit." Allan was aware who the key figure was. He said, "His influence in Japan can only be described as 'frightening.'"

Allan was right. In Tokyo, Japan, wherever Beckham appeared, the traffic would be jammed. Giant billboards with his head shots were erected at the top of tall buildings, and the goods associated with him were certain to be popular. Businesses did not need to advertise at all. The name "Beckham" was the best publicity.

In China, George Wood's popularity could still match Beckham's. However, even if the entire Nottingham Forest team combined, they were still not as popular as Beckham in Japan. Allan was well aware of this, so it was Beckham's one-man show most of the time in Japan, while Nottingham Forest served as his background.

Here, Tony Twain had become a completely unknown staff member.

Twain would take this situation and joked with George Wood, "Go back and complain to your agent. He has made too little effort in Japan. Look at David!"

George Wood declined to comment on Twain's joke.

On the last night, Nottingham Forest played against the local J1 League team, FC Tokyo at the Tokyo National Stadium. With two sets of lineups deployed, Nottingham Forest scored two goals in the first and second halves respectively to win 4:1 against FC Tokyo, which was currently ranked eighth in the J1 League.

After the game, the players did not get a good night's sleep back at the hotel. They had to rush to Narita International Airport to fly directly to Hong Kong that night. Time was so tight that even an extra night of rest could not be squeezed out. They could only nap on the flight to make up for it.

Nottingham Forest was also warmly welcomed upon arrival in Hong Kong. As it was once a British colony, the English Premier League had a very solid base of masses in Hong Kong. Influenced by Hong Kong, the whole of Guangdong was also a loyal fan base of the Premier League. So, when Nottingham Forest was in Ningbo, the Guangdong fans who could not get there due to the distance, flocked to Hong Kong this time to catch a glimpse of the Double Winner.

For three days, not only did they play, Nottingham Forest also had a party with the stars of Hong Kong's entertainment industry. The stars whom Twain could only previously see on the television were now Beckham's or Forest fans. This sense of accomplishment made him feel very good.

At that party, he even played a prank on Andy Lau as he held his hand and said, "I like to listen to your songs. I can even sing Forget Love Potion!"

Then he laughed happily inside as he looked at Andy Lau's intermingled stunned look and happy expression.

At the end of the party, the Hong Kong stars wore Nottingham Forest's red jerseys and posed for photos with the players. This event not only appeared in the sports media but was also widely watched by the entertainment media. Allan Adams' global outreach program was perfectly executed here in Hong Kong.

The Nottingham Forest team was known to anyone who loved football or did not care about it at all overnight in Hong Kong.

A game was certainly not forgotten. Nottingham Forest and Hong Kong Football Club played a friendly match in Hong Kong. Two sets of lineups were deployed to satisfy the audience and also to allow as many players as possible to get the opportunity to exercise. The only regret was that the Forest team's performance in this game was clearly not as good as the first two games. The main lineup looked a little tired and out of form. The two sides ended up with a 3:3 draw, which the media promoted as a happy result.

But was that true?

On the flight to Thailand, Twain's eyebrows were knitted. The adverse effects of commercial competitions and frequent commercial activities finally emerged. The fitness of the players had reached its limits. Whatever the parties on the Thailand and Malaysia sides had in mind, he had made up his mind to play the next two games with the reserves team and substitutes. His own players must be fully rested. Originally this year, the team's training time was reduced due to UEFA European Championship. However, they had to travel to East Asia to make money now and the whole team together did not have a systematic physical training. Their performance simply maintained from last season, which was just a continued state. At the end of the day, the Nottingham Forest team's condition continued from last season and were not in the new season yet.

This worried him a little.

The history and lessons of the predecessors told himself that such commercial games would inevitably affect the team's performance in the new season. How could he minimize this effect? Twain had a severe headache.

Nottingham Forest was still warmly sought after in Southeast Asia, but there was less commercial activity here and the team could finally train systematically. But the whole summer had been disrupted by the European Championship, commercial games and Olympic Games. What was the use of this small amount of systematic training?

After their narrow victories against the local teams in Thailand and Malaysia, the team finally got on a flight back to the United Kingdom, ending a busy and arduous trip to Asia.

It was busy and hard for the team. But for Allan Adams, it was a very productive summer. Just from five games alone, the Forest team's income was five million euros, an average of one million euros per game. One must know that when Real Madrid started a new wave of commercial competition spree in Asia since 2003, the appearance fee per game was two million euros. In addition to the "hidden income" from those direct income plus the free accommodation and food transportation provided by the organizers, Nottingham Forest made thirteen million euros in one summer. These thirteen million euros

did not include a package of commercial partnerships that, if successful, were expected to generate at least thirty million euros for the Nottingham Forest Football Club over the next six years.

There were also some very long-term investments, such as the proposed construction of a Nottingham Forest football training base in Ningbo, dedicated to recruiting young players from China and nearby countries. The school would use the training materials, standards and programs of the English Professional Football Club to discover and nurture Asian talent. Like the University of Nottingham in Ningbo, the school was completely independent of the Chinese football environment and was closely linked to Nottingham Forest, sharing all the resources of Nottingham Forest. The outstanding young players would have the opportunity to go straight to England for more advanced training and were likely to sign with the Forest team. Then they would be on loan to train in the Forest team's satellite clubs which certainly included the Chinese clubs.

Ningbo was chosen because of the strong support from the Ningbo municipal government. The city government's leadership wanted to get rid of the long-standing image of Ningbo as an "economically strong but a weak football city", so they hit it off with Allan Adams. Building a school here, Nottingham Forest could enjoy a number of preferential policies.

In addition to the new football school, Nottingham Forest planned to try to enter the property sector through building a new stadium in Nottingham. Allan saw China's vast real estate market and decided to invest in China by starting a real estate company which was sole responsible for investing in the real estate business here.

Nottingham Forest's licensing rights was also signed after a consultation with Nike. The Wenzhou-based factory had started producing a variety of souvenirs, jerseys, backpacks, scarves, water glasses, lighters, key chains, cup holders, cutlery, tents... Covering almost every aspect of life. The first specialty store would open for business in Shanghai and the second branch would open in Beijing after April. The goods sold here would be much cheaper than the other teams' souvenir franchises. The Chinese fans did not need to spend half a month's salary to buy an authentic jersey. Those small items were cheaper and well-made. Even those people who were not Forest fans, could also purchase and used them at home as they were also very practical and looked good. They could also be used as gifts for friends who were fans.

Not only that, Allan Adams was ambitious. The plan he gave Evan Doughty was not as simple as selling a few commemorative items. He wanted to sell more than just the Nottingham Forest brand. He wanted to sell a way of life and culture. From the most authentic English pub, the most quintessential English style, the most laid-back English country atmosphere, to the noble and elegant authentic English afternoon tea, he wanted the name of Nottingham Forest to appear in the lives of any ordinary Chinese.

This was all that he planned, and it sounded incredible. But maybe this was one of the factors of Allan Adams's success. He always dared to come up with things that ordinary people dared not think of. No European professional football club had ever wanted to develop the Chinese and Asian markets like this...

"The Nottingham Forest team is not the sum of my business plan. It's just a knock on the door and a key. After opening the door to this market, we can develop in whichever way we want. The team will not

need to play in such an important role. In my view, this market is simply a virgin land without any trace of development. There are countless possibilities. It's simply fantastic..."

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If anyone thought that in two and a half weeks in Asia, besides training the team, Twain's days were spent participating in commercial activities everywhere and allowing people to take photos with him like a lifelike wax figurine, he would be wrong.

Even in as far afield as Asia, Twain was still keeping an eye on every move in the transfer market. Two players had left the Forest team so far in the new season, but no one had been signed yet. This was clearly not in line with Twain's plans at the end of last season.

Although Kompany was training to a part-time defensive midfielder, Twain could not guarantee the result since he switched to a position he was not trained for. Therefore, there was still a need to keep looking for George Wood's replacement—not as a substitute, but the replacement. After he met with several rebuffs in a row, he was interested in Tiago Mendes who was unhappy at Juventus.

Tiago moved to Chelsea from the Portuguese team, Benfica in 2004 and became part of Mourinho's "Portuguese gang." He won the Premier League title as a Chelsea player in the 04-05 season. But after only one season, he had to clear his position for Essien's arrival. He transferred to Lyon in the summer of 2005 for a fee of 6.5 million pounds and helped Lyon win two France Ligue 1 titles in the following two seasons. He then transferred to Serie A's Juventus.

Judging from this achievement, his career had been brilliant. But his experience at Juventus was a failure. Juventus spent and brought in Tiago for thirteen million euros, making him the chief transfer target for Juventus that summer. But just four months later, the Italian media gave him the title of "the top failed transfer of the season." Ranieri who was originally bullish on him, also gave him a death sentence.

It was not that Tiago's strength was not good. It was that he could not adapt to the pace of the Serie A competition and Ranieri's tactics.

Tiago was an excellent defensive midfielder, but he was better suited to play his part in the triangular pass in the 4-3-3 formation, which meant he should play as a defensive midfielder alone rather than as a center forward parallel in the 4-4-2 formation, as Ranieri did. This could only make him lose his way and lose his position.

Tiago himself said that he always tried to intercept the ball during the games and then handed the football to his teammates. A defensive midfielder's position leaning to the back was more suitable for him.

Ranieri certainly would not change his overall tactics and formation for Tiago alone. But Tiago's characteristic was well suited to Twain's requirements.

In January, there was news of Tiago's desire for a transfer, but it never came to fruition. Tiago was reluctant to move to a second-tier league. The only option before him now seemed to be to return to Portugal, to Benfica or Porto, so he would be at the heart of European football...and Nottingham Forest came forward in time to save his career.

While Tony Twain's team was still having a good time in Hong Kong, the people from the Forest team was already in contact with Tiago's agent. Would Tiago have any objections to joining the UEFA Champions League and Premier League champions? The only problem was that Tiago knew George Wood. He was afraid that he would only sit on the bench with George Wood around. Twain immediately called to personally assure him that in the new season, the Forest team would carry out a large-scale rotation. George Wood was definitely not the immovable main force in this position. As the Forest team would play more games and the summer preparations were not finished yet, the players' fitness would certainly not be as vigorous as they were in the previous two seasons.

The manager's personal assurance dispelled the one last doubt in Tiago's mind, and he agreed to join Nottingham Forest.

Juventus could not wait to get rid of this useless baggage. With this link, Nottingham Forest could beat down the transfer price. After several rounds of negotiations, Tiago, whom Juventus had originally spent thirteen million euros on, eventually joined Nottingham Forest for six million euros and became the first player to join the Forest team this summer.

In this regard, the player who could jointly serve as the defensive midfielder as George Wood, had been finalized. Kompany certainly would not suspend his training as a defensive midfielder. Every player must know that it was ideal to be able to adapt to multiple positions at the same time to have enough opportunities to play at Nottingham Forest.

This season, Evan had given Twain a transfer budget of thirty million euros and asked him to save as much as possible, with the best result being there would be money left from the twenty-five million euros. A portion of the revenue from the sale of the players would be added to the transfer budget, while the other portion would go directly into the club's accounts.

Nottingham Forest had now sold Grosso and Sidwell for 15.2 million euros. Adding five million to the transfer budget, six million had been used out of the thirty-five million, and twenty-nine million euros were left. Twain also needed to go after at least one attacking midfielder and two defenders in the transfer market. This amount of money would not accomplish much, so he had to give up the talented players who had been snapped up by the powerhouse teams or the long-time star players and instead poached those "low-profile players" who appeared unknown but had good abilities.

It was tough to be poor. When could Tony Twain realize his dream of snapping up players all over the world by brandishing a checkbook?

When we have the money, we will buy four Kakas! One for the game, one on the bench, one in the stands, one in the stands, and one on loan to a Premier League team to exercise!

Chapter 669: A Former Genius's New Life

For a mid to lower level team or a team that simply aimed to make it to the European arena next season, the transfer budget of twenty-nine million euros was not considered low. But for a team that aspired to defend multiple titles and aimed to make a historic breakthrough in the English FA Cup, twenty-nine million might just be enough to buy one player.

Twain must plan meticulously and calculate carefully. The day when he could sign a check as long as he liked it was destined to be a dream.

Perhaps this had to do with Twain being a Chinese man. He was not particularly extravagant when it came to the transfer fees. It was evidenced by the fact that the transfer budget given by the team last summer had not run out and the club made money from the sale of Anelka and Ashley Young.

As long as he carefully planned and determined his targets, with some good luck, it was not impossible to buy good and cheap players with twenty-nine million.

In fact, most positions in the Forest team had at least one dedicated substitute player. Only one position had always been one player supporting it. This position was not the defensive midfielder which people thought, but the defensive midfielder's partner, the attacking midfielder.

Van der Vaart was the absolute playmaker of the team. He was better at organizing the offense than Ribéry, and he was also capable in long shots and positional play to score goals. But van der Vaart was not an iron man like George Wood after all. Although he did not suffer any major injuries after he transferred to Nottingham Forest, he still occasionally had minor injuries, which was a worry. Generally, if he could not play, Twain would let Ribéry guest played as the attacking midfielder. But this was not a long-term solution. In the previous world that Twain knew, van der Vaart frequently had injuries. It could be said that Twain was lucky that he did not have any major injuries here. The other reason as that George Wood helped share some of the pressure with him.

In any case, a dedicated midfielder in the middle was needed to rotate with van der Vaart. Even without injury, van der Vaart's fitness did not guarantee that he would be able to play a full season.

After George Wood's rotation partner was settled, Twain started to fret about van der Vaart's replacement.

There was no shortage of good and well-known attacking midfielders in the world, such as Brazil's Kaka, who was currently the world's number one attacking midfielder, and Ronaldinho, who was eliminated by Barcelona. Kaka was the type of player Twain longed for. However, Nottingham Forest was not likely to get the Brazilian crown jewel, either in terms of the team's appeal or financial ability. As for Ronaldinho... Twain did not like this kind of disorganized and undisciplined player. He did not want him even if he had the talent.

Basically, Twain could set his target on those players who were marginally famous, but not a world-class star player yet with a relatively simple life off-field and would not require high salaries... And there was another important point in that if the player's owner did not want this guy, it was even better.

But where could he find such a good deal?

During the UEFA European Championship, Twain became interested in the Croatian midfielder, Luka Modrić. But Dinamo Zagreb Lions demanded an exorbitant price and wanted at least twenty million euros to let him go. While Modrić himself was keen to join the UEFA Champions League winner, Nottingham Forest, Twain was not willing to come up with two-thirds of his transfer budget to rotate the attacking midfielder position. The Forest Team could only abandon plans to bring in Modrić and find a new target.

Modrić himself eventually achieved his goal of landing in the top league in Europe—he joined Tottenham Hotspur for a transfer fee of up to 16.6 million pounds, or 20.88 million euros.

The real billionaires in the Premier League this summer were not Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool or Chelsea, but the mid-stream team, Tottenham Hotspur.

While he could only envy the other people for having the money to spend, Twain continued to search for the targets he admired in the transfer market.

Deco, who had the strength and reputation, was cheap due to Barcelona's initiative to clean house. But he did not want to come to the Forest team. He chose Chelsea, coached by his national team manager. As a result of this relationship, Chelsea only spent eight million pounds.

Nasri was also a young attacking midfielder whom Twain was interested in. He was known in the French media as "the second Zidane." But his price was not cheap, and Nasri himself wanted to join Arsenal, coached by the French professor, Arsène Wenger. In the end, Arsenal paid twelve million pounds to bring him to the Emirates Stadium.

Dos Santos was also good, showing enough ability in the Barcelona First Team but he lacked the opportunity and experience. Nottingham Forest began an intense contest against Tottenham Hotspur for him. Eventually, dos Santos's personal will played a key role. He believed that life at Nottingham Forest would be no different from life at Barcelona, while Tottenham Hotspur promised him the main position. In this way, Tottenham Hotspur bought dos Santos, known as the "Mexican Ronaldinho" for seven million pounds.

Twain was left angry with the series of setbacks suffered in the transfer market. Time was running out every day. As August was drawing closer and closer, the new season was about to begin, and the team had not made any progress in the transfer market. Some media had already taunted that even though Nottingham Forest had won the UEFA Champions League and Premier League titles, its appeal had declined instead. Such a comical thing could only happen with Tony Twain's team.

Therefore, he prayed to God every day before going to bed at night, hoping to wake up the next day to find an attacking midfielder in an intoxicated state sleeping next to him.

Although such a nonsensical event was unlikely to happen, Twain finally found a candidate for the attacking midfielder position, who met the current constraints and had the ability and potential recognized by Twain.

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In the 04-05 season, a young talent with dual German and Turkish citizenship made his mark in the Bundesliga. It might be an exaggeration to use a bolt from the blue, but he was indeed a talented teenager from Turkish football.

He made his debut in Dortmund's game against VfL Wolfsburg at the time and played the entire time. This Turkish teenager who was not even seventeen at that time, became the youngest player to make an appearance in Bundesliga history. Following which, it did not take him long to become the youngest goalscorer in Bundesliga history and also became one of the world's top hundred hopeful stars.

But his fame at a young age left him prematurely burdened. On top of that, Dortmund was in deep financial trouble and there were chaos within the team. Consequently, he also sunk into obscurity.

Just last season, Dortmund, which had too many midfielders, loaned him out to the Eredivisie strong team, Feyenoord in the hope that he would get plenty of practice. Coincidentally, Feyenoord's manager was his mentor, van Marwijk at Dortmund in the first place.

Initially, he could have received a very good training in the Netherlands in this way, which was the only way for a rising midfield star. Van Marwijk was very bullish on the future of the disciple whom he was proud of originally.

His debut in the Netherlands was a great success. He scored a goal in his first game and had an assist.

But bad luck soon descended. In the third game which he played for Feyenoord; he was viciously attacked by his opponent. He fell to the ground and could not get up. He was taken away by an ambulance from the stadium at that time. His face was covered with tears when he left the field, because only he knew how serious the injury was. At the time, he felt he had completely lost the use of his left leg and had no sensation in it at all.

The results from the hospital check-up made everyone gasped.

His left knee cartilage was crushed and suffered a fracture. His meniscus was torn, and cruciate ligament was lacerated.

Any one of those injuries alone was a major enemy of a footballer's career. And now what did it mean to have all three concentrated on the player's left knee?

Feyenoord later announced that he would miss all the remaining games of the season, and the chief surgeon for the operation said in an interview after the surgery that he was not sure if this Turkish talent would be able to return to the field because...even normal walking might be affected.

At the time, in addition to condemning the culprits, the Dutch, Turkish and German media, bemoaned that "the premature fall of a very talented player!"

Did this statement sound sensational? But it was a true reflection of his situation.

Fortunately, this strong Turkish youngster did not give up his football dream and actively cooperated with the rehabilitation to successfully returned to the field at the end of the season. At the time, the Dutch media exclaimed that he had created a sports medicine miracle.

But when he returned to the field, his performance could not be compared to before his injury. The shadow of the serious injury lingered in his heart and he simply dared not do some movements. He appeared to be afraid of the slightest thing on the field. The media's assessment of him was that it was "as if he had lost his original spirit overnight."

It was a fitting metaphor. That player who had set a number of records, led Turkey to win the 2005 UEFA European Under-17 Championship title and was the youngest goalscorer in the history of the Turkey national team, had now become completely ordinary.

This was a fact that made Dortmund and Turkey extremely sad, but they had to accept the reality. Having been badly wounded, he was far from how he was in many ways.

Van Marwijk was also sorry. He had initially hoped to develop him into a world-famous star player, and now it was all over.

At the end of the season, he returned to Dortmund. If he had not been injured, his future would have been bright. He was only nineteen years old and had plenty of time to create a future that belonged to him. But now, Dortmund did not have a place for him. He had lost his talent and physique. He did not know where his future laid.

This once-talented teenager's family was poor. His father was a Turkish laborer in Germany and his mother was a housewife. The family of three lived in a small village in Dortmund with more than thirty relatives. If he had not been injured and become the core of Dortmund's squad as he wished, then the family's financial difficulties were nothing. He could get a lucrative contract, buy a house in Dortmund, have a car and live like a rich man.

But now, it was all over.

Dortmund intended to offer him a contract, but it was a far cry from the original one they had promised. After all, the treatment for a substitute player could not be the same as it was for the core of the main force and the hopeful star player.

Just as he was about to bow to his fate and sign this contract with Dortmund, someone knocked on his house door.

"We want Nuri Şahin. Let's give a price." The man from Nottingham Forest said to Dortmund.

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"You must be crazy, Tony. This Turkish boy is not worth buying at all. You can't just give vent like that just because you are unable to buy your targets in the transfer market, can you?" Kerslake was shocked to learn that Twain was going to bring in the Turkish kid, who had just been forced to retire. His mouth was opened so wide that a hard-boiled egg could be stuffed directly into it.

"You're like a woman who has lost her head from anger!"

"It hurts me so much that you would say that, David." Twain covered his heart and explained, "I know he was badly hurt. But I think the fact that he's not doing as well as he used to be, is not due to his body, but because of his psychological state. Unfortunately, neither Feyenoord nor Dortmund care about this. They habitually believe that the biggest cause of this situation and the most fundamental reason is the regression of his physical function."

"Psychological state?"

"In reality, his mental qualities are still very good. Otherwise he would have to announce his retirement right after the injury. Because that kind of serious injury was not something a nineteen-year-old kid can take on alone. It is only at such times that he needs others' guidance more. By saying so, it may not be fair to Şahin. But I do think his injury is a good opportunity for us. When Arsenal bought Rosický two years ago, they planned to bid three million euros to take Şahin away. But Dortmund was adamant not to let go. They wanted to develop Şahin as the new core of Westfalenstadion. If he had not been injured, we would not even have a chance to sit down with Dortmund and talk about the price. Now the other side has happily agree to our offer..."

“Of course, they can’t wait to get rid of a burden.”

“Actually, this matter with Şahin reminds me of another thing ... I think our club should hire a few psychologists to come on board.”

“Huh?” Kerslake seemed like he was listening to a fantasy story.

“Frequent injuries and sitting on the bench long-term can lead to depression, ups and downs in the form, the strikers missing goals, the goalkeepers dropping goals in succession, the minutiae in life affecting the performance on the field ... None of these can be solved by training. Our players need psychologists to comfort them, guide them and keep them happy and healthy mentally.” Twain stroked his chin and nodded, “I think it’s necessary and pressing. I’m going to talk to Mr. Chairman now.”

With that, he got up.

“Hey, Tony. About that Turkish kid...” Kerslake stopped him.

“Any other issues? Dortmund has agreed to our two million euro offer. All that’s left is to sign the individual contract with him.” Twain looked back at his assistant manager and said, “Ah, I forgot to say just now another reason why his injury was good for us. We can take the opportunity to lower his package... Of course, it will be more than what he would get at Dortmund, but it can only be ranked in the lower tier within the team. He himself can’t get a better deal than with us and now he’s been given a chance to play for the European champion. He should thank us. Buying someone like that is better than buying someone like Ronaldinho to balance our weekly salary budget.”

Having said that, Twain went out to talk to Evan in detail about his suggestion to hire a psychologist.

Kerslake and Dunn were left in the office. Kerslake turned to look at Dunn and said, “Dunn, you’re neighbors with him. What do you think?”

“In terms of the players and team, this is the best solution.” Dunn replied expressionlessly.

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Two days later, Nottingham Forest and Dortmund announced at the same time that the nineteen-year-old Turkish young player had moved from Westfalenstadion to the City Ground stadium for a fee of two million euros.

As soon as this news came out, the English media blew it up. The introduction of Şahin by the Forest team two years ago would have been widely praised, but now endless taunts and sneers were directed at Tony Twain.

Everyone knew what happened to this Turkish kid last season. To be honest, his once-bright future needed not be mentioned but now very few people in the world would believe that he could get back to his pre-injury level. Maybe the Turkish national coach Terim was one and Tony Twain was the second.

<Two million euros to buy a child who’s almost retired?>

<Tony Twain always amuses us>

<Only a fool believes that Şahin can recover>

“I don’t understand at all Tony Twain’s move in the transfer market ... First, Tiago, the sub-par import whom Juventus doesn’t want, then Şahin, who broke his leg in the Netherlands. A Double Winner of the Champions League and Premier League acts as if it’s picking up the scraps...”

“I can personally guarantee that Nuri Şahin will be the most disastrous acquisition in Tony Twain’s tenure!”

“Tony Twain had used his actions to tell us that this world is full of extraordinary things.”

For the English media, which liked to nitpick and make cutting remarks the most, it was delightful for them to be able to find an opportunity to mock Twain. Certainly, their suspicions about Şahin’s ability were not related to Twain. The sarcasm might have been motivated by a private grievance, but Şahin’s ability was indeed not recognized by these people at all.

“...He had suffered such a serious injury in the Eredivisie. Don’t tell me that the defenders in the English leagues would be nice gentlemen? I really don’t know what Tony Twain is thinking. Maybe his brain structure is different from us ordinary people?”

Words like these flew everywhere. Everyone criticized and questioned Twain’s transfer decision. Some people even questioned whether he received any kickbacks. Twain could not be bothered to quarrel with them, and he thought these flies actually gave him a big help.

When Şahin came to Nottingham, Twain welcomed the unhappy Turkish “former” genius with a pile of newspapers that admonished the two of them.

“Do you understand English?” Twain asked through the interpreter.

“Just a little...”Şahin spoke softly as he was first new to the environment and the confusion about the future made his mood very low.

Seeing him like this, Twain was more convinced that Şahin’s problem was psychological. He smiled and handed the newspapers to Şahin. Then he informed him through the interpreter, “All the newspapers are scolding me and saying that I spent two million dollars on someone who couldn’t play football at all. Ah, they also questioned your ability by the way.”

The interpreter stared at Twain, wondering why he made these remarks. Twain just glanced at him and let him translate as it was.

By this time, Şahin had already turned his attention to the brightly colored newspapers. His photographs appeared in the sports headlines. They were mostly photographs from during his injury in the Netherlands. Without knowing much English, he knew nothing good was written just by looking at these pictures. Consequently, he was even more depressed.

After hearing the translation, he looked up strangely at Twain.

This man laughed instead and completely ignored the media’s rebuke. “You may not understand now, but when you stay in this team a little longer and when your English level has improved, you’ll know—me.” He said, pointing to himself and then the newspapers. “My reputation here is not good. It’s better to use ‘infamous’ to describe. Now that I insist on bringing you to Nottingham Forest, this gives them a

reason to attack me. But I don't care. They can scold all they want. I'll just do my bit. And I'm not like those idiots. I believe you have a bright future ahead of you!"

Since his injury, all Şahin had heard had been laments and everyone bemoaned the injustice of fate, which led to the death of a genius who could have become a star but was now a shooting star. He no longer wanted to listen to such morale-busting words. He did not expect that the manager of this team would say to him "I believe you have a bright future ahead of you!" when he got to Nottingham.

Looking up at this man's smile, he suddenly felt that he might have been lucky to leave Dortmund.

"Now all of England is not optimistic about your new life. Do you want to give them a good show in the near future? Let them know how outrageously wrong they are?" Twain winked at Şahin. His hoarse voice seemed to contain a magical power, and Şahin could not help but nod after listening.

Twain laughed and patted him hard on the back, "Then drum up your fighting spirit! Don't look so sad. I promise you that when you give them a good slap, you'll feel damn good. Haha!"

The next day, at a press conference, Şahin showed off his skills in front of hundreds of Forest fans and dozens of media reporters. Twain watched him perform with a smile on his face, just as he did before he was injured. He showed his creative flair and skill as a midfield playmaker in the seldom seen bright sunshine.

Then he raised the red Nottingham Forest jersey with his name and number on it along with Twain.

Number 16 was his number in the new team.

A whole new life began just like the new number.

Chapter 670: Goodbye, Gerard

Şahin displayed his skills in a meeting with the fans and media, showing that his injuries did not really defeat his body. But the voices of doubt about him still lingered. Fortunately, he came to England and did not understand English. There were less worries since he could not read or hear how the media evaluate him. Furthermore, Twain told him that, as a professional player, the best way to counter doubts was not to argue with the other parties in the media, but to use his performance on the field to give them a slap on the face.

At the same time, Twain's suggestion to Evan about the psychiatrists was also in place. Four female physicians, from young to old, had a wealth of clinical experience in mental therapy at the football clubs. Their first "patient" was the former Turkish genius, Nuri Şahin.

Dunn teased Twain, "You don't really need to hire them. You are the best psychiatrist for these players."

Twain made a face and said, "I'm not the key to everything. I can't do every job."

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Barcelona's newly appointed manager, Guardiola, stood on the sidelines of the grassy training ground and was being interviewed on a television station. He talked a lot about the outlook for the new season

and was now talking about the transformation of the rear defensive line. He said, "Gabriel is adapting and doing a good job. I don't think it's a good idea for Carles (Puyol) to always play as the center back... I know where Barcelona's weakness in the rear is and we need a center back who is outstanding at headers, tall, strong, great at jumping to make up for this weak spot..."

"It is rumored that Barcelona has contacted with Nottingham Forest's Piqué. Is this true?"

"I don't want to deceive you. The truth is that our people have made an offer to Nottingham Forest. But so far we have not received a response." Guardiola shook his head.

They certainly had not received a response from Nottingham Forest because Nottingham Forest is struggling internally with this offer.

Barcelona had made a bid of ten million pounds for Piqué. This price was not low for a center back. The crux was Twain did not want to let Piqué go. For three seasons, his partnership with Pepe had long been the main stay at Nottingham Forest. Both of them were tall, excellent at aerial defense and physically strong. They played expertly in the Premier League which paid particular attention to physical strength. With his outstanding performance at the Forest team, Piqué was also selected for the Spain national team and also won the UEFA European Championship with the team this summer. As a player, he had already won the Premier League, the Champions League and the UEFA European Championship titles at the age of twenty-one.

What Twain was afraid of now was that he did not have any extravagant demands. Because that meant the reason he was best at using to appeal to people now lacked persuasion.

He held the Barcelona's offer for two days, and Piqué finally found him today.

"Boss, can I talk to you after the training?" In between practices, he walked up to Twain on the sidelines of the training ground and said in a low voice.

Twain, who was discussing plans for the new season with the other coaches, glanced at everyone. Then he turned to Piqué and said with a smile, "That's strange. You never ask to speak to me on your own."

Piqué was a little embarrassed. He scratched his head and said, "It's good to have the first time, then there will be a second time..."

Twain laughed when he heard him say so. But he said nothing, and just nodded his head.

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At the same time, in another crowd of people.

"I bet that guy, Gerard wants to leave." The man who said this was the other center back, Pepe.

Everyone was surprised. What surprised them was not the fact that Piqué wanted to leave, but that this remark was uttered by his center back partner. They should have a good relationship with each other. Should he not express some unwillingness in his partner's departure?

Pepe found everyone looking at him and knew what these people thought. His straightforward face smiled, "What? I'm not the one who's going to let him go."

"I don't think there's any reason to go. It's good here. Why does he have to go?" As a member of the rear defensive line, Bale naturally hoped that everyone would still be together next season. Stability was the first requirement of the rear defensive line.

"Little monkey, he came from Barcelona, and now Barcelona beckons him. Do you think he can resist?" Pepe was very clear-eyed about this.

"I still can't understand..." Bale muttered.

"Some people are crazy about money..." At this, Pepe glanced at Ribéry, sitting outside the crowd, "Some people care more about fame; some people are loyal; and some people dream of playing for their hometown teams...It's all quite normal." With these words everyone regarded Pepe differently, as if he were a profound philosopher.

"If he must leave, no one can stop him. I think the boss knows this too..."

Pepe stopped talking because Piqué had ended his conversation with Twain and was walking this way.

Sitting outside, Ribéry looked at Piqué walking over and fell into a contemplation.

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Seeing Piqué go, the coaches came over again.

"It must be because of Barcelona, right?" Someone asked.

"Absolutely." Twain shrugged. "We beat them twice on the field and now they've got a chance to get one back at us..."

Everyone looked at Piqué's back and did not know what to say for a while.

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After the training, everyone showered in the locker room and went home. Piqué knocked on the door of Twain's office.

Twain sat alone in front of the computer and played Minesweeper out of boredom. When he saw Piqué opened the door and walked in, he stood up and shut down the Minesweeper game.

"I know what you're here to talk to me about." Although he stood up, he did not step out to greet him. He just pointed to the couch next to him and motioned for Piqué to sit with him.

"The matter with Barcelona is probably..." He meant to say, "troubling you." But he felt it sounded wrong when the words were about to come out of his mouth. The matter was not so simple because Twain had no idea whether this "troubled" Piqué. So, he coughed, "What do you think?"

"I..." Piqué was quiet for a moment and finally made up his mind. He lifted his head and said, "I don't want to lie to you, boss. Barça's invitation is very attractive for me."

"Bigger than staying at Nottingham Forest to continue winning the championship titles?" Twain asked in return.

Piqué was silent again. He knew what the temperament of the manager of this team. It was not okay to lie. If he were to tell the truth... he did not know if the boss would be angrier?

In the end, he decided to tell the truth. After all, the boss might get angry if he told the truth but if he lied to him, the boss would definitely be angry—as to why he knew Piqué was telling a lie, it was because the media had already disclosed the truth... Damn the media!

“Honestly, boss. It’s hard for me to turn down Barcelona’s invitation.”

Twain nodded. That was what the media said. Piqué still had a lot of affection for Barcelona. After he made his name at the Forest team in the first place, Real Madrid spread the news that they wanted to buy him. At that time, he expressed his loyalty to the team. He said, “I’m not leaving Nottingham Forest. I’m doing well here.” Finally, when the media relentlessly asked him hypothetical questions, he said, “If I have to go, I will only go back to Barcelona.”

Those words came true today.

“Go on.” When Piqué became quiet after he said this, Twain could only indicate for him to go on. He said, “Tell me all your thoughts, I’m not an unreasonable person.”

Therefore, Piqué spoke his mind. The general idea was that he was cultivated by La Masia even though Barcelona did not give him a chance at that time. Hence he was forced to leave for England. But his heart would always belong to Catalonia. As long as Barcelona needed him, he would toss everything aside to step across all trials and tribulations and not be afraid of any difficulty to risk everything to help out—well, though he did not say that, Twain felt that this was what he meant—Moreover, he had already obtained his personal honors. He was still young and wanted to meet new challenges in Barcelona. In addition, the familial pressure was also great. His relatives were loyal Barcelona fans. His maternal grandfather was once the vice-president of the Barcelona Football Club. How could they not be loyal? His entire family wanted Piqué back in his hometown.

“So, in other words... Your dream is to play for Barcelona and play there until you retire?” Twain asked.

“If possible, yes, it looks that way.”

Twain sighed, “So, that means I have helped Barcelona develop a good center back and solve the problems in their defensive line at a critical moment?”

Piqué did not know what to say. He felt that the boss was angry.

Twain was certainly angry. This was a player whom he developed after much efforts. With one sentence of “need to strengthen our defense” from his former owner, this hopeful star player immediately “answered their summon” ... He would not be normal if he was not a little angry. He was not so generous that he could wave and said, “Piqué, my brother, please feel free to go pursue your dream.”

“I don’t want you to go, Gerard. You’re very important in our team. You play well with Pepe in your partnership. Do you know what defense means to me?”

“Championship title, boss.” Piqué’s reaction was quick.

“So, I hope you can stay here.” Twain sat in the boss’s chair with both hands covering his lower abdomen as he crossed his legs.

Piqué was silent for a moment and then shook his head, “Boss, this is hard.”

Twain did not rail at him. Instead, Twain just looked at him wordlessly.

In fact, Twain knew in his heart that he could not make Piqué stay. Piqué and Ribéry were completely different. Ribéry was purely about the money. It was easy to achieve this goal. While what Piqué pursued was ten million times more illusory than money—loyalty. It was not loyalty to Nottingham Forest, but loyalty to Barcelona.

He graduated from La Masia, trained in La Masia from an early age, and his family members were Barcelona’s most loyal fans for generations. He had received this education since he was aware: Barcelona was the best club in the world. Barcelona was the only team he loved and followed. It was a great honor to play for such a great team. Even if he did not win a championship title, there would be no complaints. Even if Barcelona was relegated one day and on the verge of bankruptcy, he would not change his love for this team...

This was what gave Twain the biggest headache. He could still use the carrot and stick to deal with Ribéry, increased his salary, and inspired him with a sense of honor and loyalty. These were totally useless to deal with Piqué. His loyalty was dedicated to Barcelona, for which he could even accept a reduction in his annual salary. If this was a different situation, people might say he was doing something demeaning despite knowing so. But in the football world, this was loyalty and rallying to a worthy cause!

Twain frowned. He did not want to let Piqué go—not because the team must have Piqué. The La Masia kid’s position was different from Ribéry’s position—the reason was this: which manager would not want to have more and more capable players under their command and not fewer and fewer?

To be honest, there was one player in the team who could replace Piqué now. It was Belgium’s hopeful star, Vincent Kompany. But Twain felt sore to just let Piqué go in vain.

After considering it for a long time, Twain chose to resign to fate. He had urged him to stay and did all he could. He could only surrender to fate. Some things could not be settled with hard work. In Piqué’s case, “destiny” obviously surpassed the “facts of life” with overwhelming advantage.

Twain finally nodded his head slowly and imperceptibly. “Well, I understand what you’re thinking. I don’t think it’s appropriate to force you to stay, and I don’t want to destroy my relationship with you. So... that’s it.” He spread his hands a little helplessly.

Piqué did not smile. He straightened his back and said to Twain as he sat on the soft couch, “Boss, I like you and my teammates. I also love this team and the fans. Although I’m a player who graduated from La Masia, I’m equally aware that without you and Nottingham Forest, there would be the Gerard Piqué of today.”

Twain was stunned by his inexplicable words. He froze where he was and did not know what had happened. Could it be that Piqué suddenly had “a prickling of his conscience” and changed his mind about leaving? What was going on?

“I know the club’s financial situation is not good at the moment ... In fact, I like to play here under you, boss. I do not know why, but I feel very relaxed. I want to give you a farewell gift. You won’t refuse, right?”

Twain opened his mouth as he became more and more confused.

“With my cooperation, Barcelona may need to raise the offer again.” At this point, Piqué finally smiled. But he smiled deviously and somewhat embarrassed too.

Twain did not smile. He looked straight in the eyes at this center back who would soon no longer be his player and could no longer call him “boss.”

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A day later, Nottingham Forest officially responded to Barcelona’s ten million offer—they refused!

“With two Champions Leagues titles, one Premier League victory, the absolute main stay and core defender in my team, how can he be only worth ten million?” Twain said angrily in an interview, “I don’t believe Barcelona can’t show enough good faith.” Everyone in the industry knew that Twain was used to refer to “money” as “good faith.” “You know, they’ve spent almost one hundred million euros this summer.” In fact, it was not quite one hundred million. Barcelona had spent seventy-three million euros so far.

Then it was not known how Piqué asked his agent to talk Barcelona. In fact, the general meaning could be guessed—it was certain that Piqué wanted to go back to Barcelona! But! Nottingham Forest would never let go of their main center back so easily. Furthermore, everyone knew what kind of man Tony Twain was in European football. All the negative words created by all mankind were not enough to be used to describe him... And analyzing this rationally, this was not about his reluctance to let go of the main center back. It was clear that Nottingham Forest thought the money was too little. Did they not heard that they were building a new stadium now? The supposedly sixty thousand-seater stadium must cost a lot of money...

Barcelona’s second offer soon came, which was sixteen million pounds! About twenty million euros!

To offer such a bid for a center back, one of the important reasons was because Piqué was a Catalan in addition to the fact that he was a defender who had proven himself. Guardiola was an authentic product of Barcelona. He cared more about keeping the purity of the pedigree more than his predecessor, Rijkaard. As a result, he cleaned up a large number of players from the former dynasty. One of the reasons was because he believed that as long as the player was not a real Catalan and Barcelona person, he could not really give one hundred percent of his effort and loyalty to this team. This group of people could not be relied upon. Look at what Ronaldinho, Deco and Eto’o had done in the past two seasons...

Nottingham Forest did not care what Guardiola thought since they felt good about this price anyway and nodded their agreement.

And so, the young Gerard Piqué who was made off with by Tony Twain from La Masia, went through the trials and finally made his mark. When he was tired, he wanted to go back to his roots, so he returned to his original hometown of Barcelona. It was a touching development.

A cheesy inspirational story of adventure...

There was no ceremony during the farewell. The Nottingham Forest team were in training at Wilford. For these professional players, it was simply a person leaving. Such a scene would be repeated every

summer. At first there would be people who felt sad, and now after their experience in professional football, they were used to it.

Piqué packed up his things he had put in his locker in the locker room and carried his bags to the training ground to say goodbye to Twain.

"I did not think you'd come specifically..." Twain was a little surprised.

"I just wanted to take another look, boss." Piqué stood by his side and looked at the grassy training ground. His former teammates were training hard on it. The assistant manager, David Kerslake's ever-vibrant voice rang out constantly to remind these people not to be lazy.

"When I came here from La Masia, I never thought there would be today. I thought I wouldn't have that kind of feeling about another training ground except for La Masia and Barcelona. Thank you, boss."

"I'm not your coach anymore. We will be enemies the next time we meet and these people here are..." Twain pointed to the training ground and said, "You know, how Nottingham Forest has always been to the enemies..."

"No mercy." Piqué helped him finish the sentence.

"It's good that you know."

"So, I'm leaving, boss."

Only then Twain turned to look at him. He opened his mouth, "I mean in the event that, if, just in case, if, perhaps ... if it turns out that you might not be able to stay in Barcelona, you can come here."

"Then I must be too old to play football at that time."

"Did not you hear what was said outside? 'Nottingham Forest is a nursing home!'" Twain laughed.

"I'm a Catalan."

"This fact really annoys me."

"If I wasn't a Catalan, I'd be in the Forest team playing out my remaining years, boss."

"There is no such thing as 'if' in reality..." This fact made him feel helpless. Demetrio had also said a similar thing to him in the same tone.

"Goodbye, Gerard. I wish you all the best." He turned his face back and continued to look at the field.

"Goodbye, boss." Piqué turned and strode away from the sunny Wilford. His agent was already waiting for him in the parking lot, from which they would go straight to Heathrow and then fly back home.

The wandering son had finally returned home, like a falling leaf returning to its roots. In this dense Nottingham Forest, after more than a hundred years of precipitation and accumulation where the soil below had long been covered, the ground was covered with layers of thick leaves, but not one leaf was called "Gerard Piqué."