

Champions 741

Chapter 741: George's Maiden Appearance

Till this very day, George Wood still vividly remembers the words his mother told him when he was first chosen to be a member of the England national team that was going to compete in the World Cup.

It feels like he had only just heard those words yesterday, but in truth, four years had already gone by since then.

Four years ago, he could only watch as others competed on the pitch. He sat on the bench for 5 matches, and did not even get a single minute of game time.

Four years later, he is well aware of the fact that there are many media outlets that have expressed their desire to see him start in the World Cup matches.

Wood was once a player whom the previous manager did not think highly of, but ever since Capello took over, he has managed to earn the favor of the tough Italian manager through his professionalism and willingness to work hard without complaints.

England's midfield defense would become significantly better whenever Wood plays on the pitch. The opponents would only run into an iron plate if they tried to go down the middle.

What Capello has to consider now was not whether or not Wood should play, but rather who Wood should play with.

George Wood might have improved his chances of becoming a regular starting player for the England national team, but he certainly did not improve his relationship with his team mates due to his reticent personality.

He was like a drop of oil in a glass of water.

There were not many people in the England national team whom he could have a chat with besides Leighton Baines and Aaron Lennon, who were both from Nottingham Forest just like him.

Just like Capello, he always puts on a long face, which makes it hard for others to approach him.

During the last few days of training for the World Cup in South Africa, Wood could not think of what else to do other than to train. Everyone else besides him had all gone out together to do shopping.

Their entire shopping trip had been zealously photographed by the paparazzi who were constantly on their trail. However, you would never find a shot of George Wood in any of those photographs.

That was because he would rather make an overseas call to chat with his mother.

Some of his team mates secretly gave him the nickname 'Mama's Boy'. His nickname certainly contrasted his tough personality on the pitch.

The George Wood off the pitch was definitely not someone who captured the interest of others, and neither was he someone who would get on the news. Every single time his name is mentioned in the media, it would only have something to do with tactics or the match. He is never involved in any gossips.

He would make an appearance during training and practice matches, but besides those, it was as if he had vanished from the eyes of the public.

However, those days where Wood went unnoticed would not continue for much longer, because the World Cup was about to commence, and when it does, it would be the time for George Wood to shine on the stage.

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The opening match for the World Cup was between the host South Africa and Uruguay. There were not a lot of well-known football stars playing in the match. South Africa held the home advantage, whereas Uruguay was slightly stronger in terms of abilities as compared to South Africa. In the end, both teams were evenly matched, and the game finished with a score of 1:1.

The match could be considered to be an exciting one, but there were no specific scenes that lingered in the spectators' memories.

It might be the opening match, but to the British fans, it was not a match that they particularly cared about.

Everyone was waiting for the D group match between England and Costa Rica.

England, being a Pot 2 team, got very lucky during the allocation of groups, and was put in the same group as Costa Rica from North America, Korea from Asia, and Brazil from South America.

Brazil was a strong team, but as for the other two teams in the group...

The media from all over the world believed that it would be Brazil and England who were going to progress onto the next stage. They did not think that either Costa Rica or Korea would pose a threat to those two teams.

The Koreans and the Korean media were still living in the 2002 dream where they managed to make their way to the semifinals of the World Cup. They began fantasizing about the numerous ways they would be able to make their way into the knockout stages.

One of the ways was that they would draw with Brazil, marginally win over England and completely triumph over Costa Rica.

Another way was to lose to Brazil and draw with England. They would then progress onto the next stage by scoring numerous goals in the match against Costa Rica and beat England to second place on goal difference.

They could also win against Brazil, England and Costa Rica, and progress onto the next stage by winning in all three of the group stage matches.

However, no one else besides the Koreans believed that Korea would be able to make their way onto the next stage of the World Cup.

The day before the match against Costa Rica, news about England's starting line-up were already widely reported.

During his pre-match show, Tony Twain talked about his predicted line-up for England for tomorrow's match. George Wood was the player he believed would start as a midfielder for the England national team.

Everyone believed that George Wood will make his maiden appearance in the World Cup tomorrow.

However...

Wood was informed that he was not in the starting line-up for tomorrow's match at lunchtime.

Capello, the manager who ruled with an iron fist, did not explain the details of his decision to Wood. All he told him was that he was going to start Lampard and Gerrard in the midfield due to tactical needs.

After he made his announcement, Capello specially looked at Wood. He realized that the lad remained emotionless and simply nodded his head to acknowledge his decision. It was only then that he was able to leave feeling relieved.

Capello was more detailed in his explanation to the media than to Wood. He told them that Costa Rica was not a particularly strong team, hence he needed a team that could score more goals against such a team. Wood was a player that does not contribute much to the offense. There was no need for him to waste a spot in the team just to bolster the team's defense, when that same spot could be used to boost the team's offense. Hence, the decision was to let Wood rest for the upcoming match.

His explanation made sense, but that still did not stop Wood's supporters from being disappointed that they were not going to see him wear the England's national jersey in his maiden appearance for the World Cup the next day.

The England national team without George Wood was pressurized by Costa Rica in the starting 20 minutes of the match that took place the next day, but beyond that, England was generally able to control the flow of the match, and they did not give Costa Rica any other opportunities to score a goal.

As per Capello's wishes, England was able to clinch a 3:1 victory over the Pot 4 team.

Lampard, who took over George Wood's position in the match, scored one goal and provided one assist, and he was named man of the match.

Twain was slightly concerned at the fact that Lampard had been named man of the match. There was not a single manager who would drop his best player in the next match. Moreover, the next match was against Korea, who was not a strong side. Capello had even less reason to put Wood on the pitch.

Before the World Cup commenced, Twain had published an article writing about how George Wood would become one of the leading 'actors' on the World Cup stage.

Now, it seemed like Wood had merely become a 'substitute player'.

Even if he featured in the match against Brazil, it would just give people the impression that he was a player that played only because England had already progressed onto the next stage of the World Cup, and they needed to rest their starting players and preserve their energy against Brazil.

During his commentary, Twain made some veiled criticisms of Capello's decision to not play Wood. At the same time, he suddenly hoped that the Koreans would be able to create a little trouble for the England side and force the England team to make some changes...

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Just as Twain expected, Lampard, who performed brilliantly in the previous match, continued to start in the match against Korea, while George Wood continued to sit on the bench.

The British were all looking forward to the match. They were all hoping to see Capello's team triumph over Korea and make their way onto the next stage of the World Cup in advance with two wins under their belt.

However, Twain did not think it would be an easy match to win for England. "The Koreans have already lost to Brazil. This match is critical in deciding whether or not they have a chance to progress onto the next stage of the World Cup. I don't think that this match will be as easy as some people might think. If anyone in the England side looks down on their opponents, then they might be in for a tough time, even if they are only up against the Koreans!"

Twain did not like the Koreans, but he still approves of their strong willpower. If the Koreans were to really go crazy during the game, and should the England team show arrogance and belittle their opponents, then there really was a possibility for England to meet with unexpected failure and potentially lose the game.

Twain had hit the nail on the head once again.

England met fierce resistance from the Korean side right from the outset of the match.

The strategy employed by the Korean team in the match was an 'all-out offense and defense'. They utilized their outstanding stamina to run all over the pitch, and began snatching the balls from the England players' feet during the first half of the match. Their actions forced England to commit more errors as a result of their frenzy. The number of unforced errors made by England kept going on the rise as the game progressed.

The England players were clearly unprepared to deal with the Koreans' treacherous playing style. They went into a panic every time the Koreans snatched the ball from them, and were unable to play at even half of their usual standard.

Lampard's remarkable performance from the last match turned out to be a 'disaster in disguise'. His outstanding performance had caused the Koreans to 'take really good care of him'. It was normal for Lampard to find himself in situations where he is marked by two players. He would also get kicked at the ankle, get hit on the thigh or get his shirt pulled among many other gestures.

The referee would constantly blow on his whistle every time the Koreans did that, but his whistles did little to deter the crazy Koreans. What were fouls compared to the possibility of missing out on entering the next stage of the World Cup?

Lampard would fall to the ground time after time, and he would raise both his arms helplessly. His gesture almost looked like he was surrendering to the Koreans, but in actuality, he was protesting against them. However, it was useless for him to protest.

The Koreans were clever with the way they are committing the fouls. They rarely make fouls from behind, because those are offences that the referee will definitely give a card for. Sometimes, a red card might even be given in those situations.

Additionally, they also do not only let only one or two players commit fouls.

At halftime when all the commentators began to discuss about the match, John Motson angrily commented that the Koreans were too shameless.

Twain only smiled in response. He actually longed for the Koreans to be even more shameless than they are now...

Capello was definitely not a fool like Steve McClaren. The current situation was that Lampard had been so tightly marked by the Koreans that he had almost vanished from the game in the latter part of the first half and had no chance of scoring. He also made very little contribution to the team's defense as well.

If Twain was Capello, he would definitely take Lampard off the pitch without hesitation and put George Wood onto the pitch. He would make use of Wood's ability to fight and snatch the ball to help the England team regain control in the midfield.

Of course, Wood's offensive abilities did not rival Lampard's, but a team's defense often changes its offense.

Putting four attacking players on the pitch would not lead to the team's offensive abilities multiplying by four, and neither would it improve an originally bad offense.

The key to winning the match was to solidify the midfield defense and use an even tougher approach than your opponents to regain control of the midfield.

Twain expressed his views to the other commentators in the broadcast room. Everyone nodded their heads in approval.

Motson even joked that the Football Association should get Twain to become the manager of the England national team once Capello's time was up.

Twain grinned. "If they did, the officials at the Football Association will suffer from a bad headache every day."

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The second half had barely started, but there were no changes at all to the situation on the pitch. The Koreans continued to stop England's offense by running tirelessly around the pitch and committing fouls during their defense. At the same time, they were also waiting for an opportunity to launch a surprise attack against the England side.

The Koreans could accept a draw as a result for this game, because their final game was against Costa Rica, and they were confident of winning that match.

However, England could not settle for a draw, because their final match in the group stage was against the powerful Brazil. Capello's plan was to win against both Costa Rica and Korea and then play half-

heartedly against Brazil so as to preserve the team's energy before they faced their opponent in the knockout stages.

The Koreans were trying their hardest to drag England down. They were going to draw with England, win against Costa Rica and then compete with England for the spot into the next stage based on goal difference. They were able to only let Brazil score two goals by going all out in their defense in the previous game.

Capello knew that he could not continue the match in this manner against the Koreans any longer. He waved his hand and decided to get Lampard off the pitch.

An individual who was standing by the side of the pitch removed his outer jacket and revealed his jersey within. It was England's No. 13 player George Wood!

"Ohhh... It's George Wood's maiden appearance for the World Cup!" Motson looked at Twain with a smile.

Twain noticed Motson's gaze on him. He shrugged and said, "I think this substitution was only done because things have reached a critical stage... England did not think that they will meet with such fierce retaliation from the Koreans. But I still believe in George's abilities. He has always been entrusted with helping the team find a way to win during critical times in Nottingham Forest as well."

As Twain said those words, Capello had pulled Wood over to him by the side of the pitch, and was relaying his intentions to the player who was about to make his way onto the pitch through his interpreter.

"I need you to help me reestablish order in the midfield and stop the Koreans' momentum. Do you know what you need to do, George?"

Wood nodded his head. "Defend."

Capello smiled. "That's right, that's what you need to do. We are losing the ball too much in the midfield and we've allowed the Koreans to go on the counterattack several times. Things will get risky if we keep letting them do that. I hope you can protect the midfield. If the Koreans snatch our ball then you go and snatch it back... Don't be afraid of committing fouls. This referee does not blow the whistle often and also does not show a card easily as well. Let's show the Koreans what we are made of!"

He pushed Wood onto the pitch.

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"George Wood. Sotonian. Plays as the captain for Nottingham Forest. He has lifted the Champions League trophy twice, the EFL Cup trophy once, and the Premier League trophy once. He has almost earned all the glory that he should earn as a professional footballer. However, his record as a national player remains as blank as a piece of paper. He is not a player that gets utilized much because he only plays as a defensive midfielder. This is the first big match that he has played for his national team. Capello clearly has high hopes for Wood to be putting him on at such a time in the match. Let's see what kind of changes he can bring to the current situation on the pitch."

Motson introduced George Wood in great detail. He actually felt a little uncomfortable when doing the introduction. As a commentator for the Premier League, there was no need for him to introduce George Wood as though he were a newcomer. However, he needed to do that for Wood when he plays for the national team.

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Wood ran onto the pitch and gestured for the team to shift their positions forward.

He had clearly done that at Capello's request. England needed to go forward and attack and they needed to score goals.

As for the midfield defense... They could just leave everything to Wood!

Manchester United's star player, Park Ji-sung, had intended to cut into the penalty box after bringing the ball forward down the flank, but this time he met a powerful obstruction. He had kicked the ball forward a little too hard, and the ball got tackled away by George Wood who had sprinted up front.

Gerrard lost the ball in the midfield?

No problem!

George Wood tackled the ball away while the opponent was still trying to readjust the ball on his feet.

The Koreans' tenacity and their ability to run all over the pitch that they were so proud of had no effect against George Wood.

If they tried to be rough, George Wood was even rougher than them! Wood showed no mercy against the Koreans. He tackled the ball every time he was supposed to, and also fouled them every time he was supposed to. He did not hesitate in the slightest. He was just like a robot who had been programmed before the match, and he carried out all his orders that had been inputted into him.

Park Ji-sung was once again sent crashing to the ground by George Wood. This time the referee finally blew his whistle to signal that George Wood had just committed a foul. However, he only issued Wood a warning. He did not show a card.

Wood's actions caused unhappiness in the Korean players. They surrounded the referee and hoped that the African referee would show Wood a yellow card.

The Korean players' actions angered the British fans at the stands. They started booing them.

Why don't you ask for a yellow or red card from the referee when you are kicking our players?

Now that George is giving you a taste of your own medicine, what right do you lot have to be upset?

Well done, George!

Kick those Korean monkeys to their deaths!

In an instant, cheers directed at Wood burst out at the stands and began getting louder.

George Wood used his usual tough playing style and fierce expressions to intimidate the Korean players, and allowed the England team to regain their control on the pitch. The results were very conspicuous

when the England team finally toughened up, and that was also when the gap in abilities between the two teams finally surfaced.

Only Park Ji-sung in the Korean side had the ability to battle it out with the England players, but sadly, he was already on the list of players that Wood was going to 'take really good care of'.

Now, every single time Park got the ball, he has to run forward while avoiding Wood. He was fearful that he would get sent off the pitch by Wood. He had not seen Wood's playing style before in the Premier League. If Capello had really sent Wood on the pitch to incapacitate him, then he might really be incapacitated by the end of the match...

The advantage that the Koreans gained over England by running all over the pitch slowly disappeared as their stamina depleted.

On the other hand, the England team relied on George Wood's tenacity in the midfield to give themselves the upper hand in the game.

On the 77th minute of the match, Gerrard provided an assist for Darren Bent to score the only goal of the match. The England team was able to ensure their qualification into the next stage of the World Cup, and at the same time, they sent the Korean team packing.

The Koreans stood rooted at the stands. They could not believe the truth that had just unfolded before their eyes. They had intended to at least make their way to the top 8 teams of the competition...

The Korean team has not been able to make their way past the group stages in the next two World Cups after they managed to attain considerable success in the 2002 World Cup.

To the Korean fans, they believe that they were unable to progress past the group stages in the World Cup in Germany due to how the Europeans 'ganged up on them for revenge'. As for this World Cup in Africa, they could not progress further because 'they had bad luck' and was assigned to the 'group of death' (what they themselves defined to be the 'group of death').

However, the whole world knew. The Koreans lost simply because they are not good enough, and that was their true standard of football. They might have a player who plays for a big football club like Manchester United, but it did not mean that their entire team was made up of players who could play for Manchester United. Park Ji-sung is not their savior, and modern football is not invented by the Koreans.

Their current standard of football can only ensure that they can make their way into every World Cup in the future. They might not even be as strong as their closest neighbor Japan.

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Twain was very happy. He was happy that the Korean side that he hated got eliminated from the World Cup in advance, and he was also happy that George Wood had put in a brilliant performance earlier.

"If I were to rate the England players' performance for this match, I'd give Wood the highest score out of all of them. His appearance on the pitch was key in changing the game in England's favor. Capello would also be praised by the British football fans for his decision to send Wood on the pitch for a long while. His decisive action of changing players led to a victory for his team, and also contributed to the

formation of a brand new midfield for England!” Twain could not stop praising George Wood’s performance during his post-match commentary. He was not even scared that others would say he was being biased.

“I believe Capello has also found the best starting line-up to play in the games from here on out. Also, I’d like to remind him of something. Their next match is up against Brazil. There might be a few players on that team who needs to rest, but George Wood does not need to rest! It does not matter how many consecutive matches he needs to play. He does not need to rest. He is truly nuclear-powered, he does not tire ever! Please do not put him on the bench because you want him to rest for the game. He should be a starting player for the England team as long as he is not injured! If England can make their way to the finals then he can play in all the games including the finals. There’s no need for squad rotation and there’s also no need to get him off the pitch earlier. He’s a monster, but what the England team needs the most right now is a monster!”

Chapter 742: St. George’s Protection on England

Even though Twain told Capello not to worry about George Wood’s fitness problem, Capello still kept Wood benched in their third game against Brazil.

He really did not have to worry about Wood’s fitness. He was worried about Wood’s yellow card. Wood received a yellow card for his defensive tough work against South Korea. In the match against Brazil, Capello was concerned that Wood had been shown another yellow card, leading to a suspension. That would have been a big loss for England.

Bearing this in mind, Capello’s view of Wood was already completely different even though he was benched as he had always been.

Both sides tacitly sent off non-main players and eventually England lost to Brazil in second place in the group.

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Unlike George Wood who had a tortuous World Cup tour, David Bentley, who was his team-mate and Twain’s focus on the trip, had a much smoother trip. At the moment in this national team, he had no opponents on the right and was a player Capello relied heavily on.

The games for all three groups started. Their performance left much to be desired.

This strengthened Twain’s confidence in buying him. But with Bentley doing well, Twain was ready to compete with other teams.

Twain was a side-friendly coach, and the new season’s guidance was all from the midfielders, almost all of whom were offensive players. The left and right forwards needed to be added, and there had to be a strong new aid in the forward line.

Žigić and Agbonlahor are both specialised players — they were particularly outstanding in one area but not exactly impressive. Žigić’s height and header, as well as Ken’s good sense of passing for his team-

mates, were the bridgeheads of the team's attack. Abangraho's speed was a sharp weapon in a quick counter-attack. But Twain still needed someone who specialised in shooting, just like Van Nistelrooy.

Right now, France's leading scorer, Benzema, was absolutely in line with the requirements, but Twain knew he wanted to buy a hand almost all the time. There were also the numerous big names who were contending. Satisfying the appetite of Olath's shameless greed was not something Forest can do right now.

As for Huntelaar, he had been bought by Real Madrid ...

Twain felt that deciding who to buy was a headache for him, much more than studying tactics and thinking about how to beat his opponent were. After all, this was something that could not be undone once the transaction was made. The pressure brought about by the prospect of splurging on someone only to buy back a useless player was not small.

Twain decided to continue observing.

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England's team was back up against the United States, the second time the two sides had met since the 1950 World Cup where England lost 1-0 to the United States. After the first match between the two teams 60 years ago where the United States' beat England, England's editors could not believe the match. Therefore, after a very prudent review, they came up with a "perfect" solution. They believed it was the front-line reporters who got it wrong and omitted a '1' before England's score. And so, with great flourish, England trumped America 10:1. The news of the great victory over the United States was published in the newspapers, and it became a running joke in the history of the World Cup.

Sixty years on, England was still arrogant but they will not make the same mistakes as they did 60 years ago. Mistakes on live broadcasts make were almost impossible to repeat.

Wood was back on the bench and given the chance to make his debut. Capello gave him a clear mandate — to defend in midfield and cut the link between the American midfielder and the forward line.

George Wood did a good job. The whole game was under his control, and the U.S. team had to rely on long comings to attack.

England scored one goal in each half and eventually eliminated the United States 2-0 to reach the top eight.

George Wood made his debut, played 90 minutes, shoveled the ball 20 times in the game, made 16 attempts, tackled 11 times, successfully made nine, committed five fouls, was violated six times, passed 51 times, made 40, shot once but none on target, assisted a goal.

That was his technical statistics, and after the game he was second in the team in scoring, behind Gerrard, who had scored two goals.

Commentators around the world mentioned his name again and again during matches, calling him England's midfield pillar. With him, England's midfield was rock solid. England's ability to beat the United States so easily was inseparable from his play. Had Gerrard not scored two goals, the best of the game would have been given to George Wood..

In fact, the World Cup for most players, was a perfect stage to get themselves to the world. Although George Wood had long been a world-class player in England and an impeccable performer at the club, he had been considered a world-class player because of a lack of national team results. There was also this idea that Wood could only perform well at the club where there was a man who trusted him to be at the heart of the team, namely their coach, Tony. When he was on the national team, he was just a side dish; he was just not as good a player. Just like the Italian “Golden Boy” Del Piero. No matter how well the club played, he would not be recognised if he could not play well on the national team.

The club and the national team were the two legs of a professional footballer. Without either, a player would be crippled.

At this World Cup, although the team was on the bench, but in the knockout stages, he became Capello’s most reliable player.

After the game against the United States, Capello publicly praised George Wood at a press conference,:
” He reassured me that he knew what to do. Having him in our midfield is very orderly.”

Many pundits said after the game that although the star-studded England midfielder, George Wood, was a “bright” midfielder, Wood looked the least humble, but he was definitely the last one to replace. Whether it was Gerrard, Lampard, Bentley, Joe Cole, or anyone else, they could all be replaced. In terms of both character and role, George Wood was irreplaceable..

If England wanted to go further in this World Cup, such a diligent midfield tie is definitely the key to the manager’s tactical intent.

To win the title during the big cup want to win the title, it was clear they had to rely on defense. George Wood was the make-or-break when it came to England’s midfield defence. Capello was not a fool; he knew as much. George Wood was the very definition of “defense”.

Despite England’s next match against European champions Spain, Downey boldly predicted in his column that England could reach at least the top four. They might even get to the finals for the second time since 1966 for all they knew. His confidence came from Capello’s reuse of George Wood, and that he was a defensive coach. .

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Before the game against England, Fàbregas, a longtime Premier League midfielder who knew English football best, was interviewed by reporters. They asked, “Who is the most dangerous man in England?” He replied with no hesitation, “George Wood. ”

Till this day, the Arsenal captain and the Spanish national team’s midfield core still could not forget the youth FA Cup he played in England. George Wood seemed to kill the spirit of this young genius. Until now, Fàbregas has struggled to face Wood in the English Premier League.

Spain’s coach Jose Bosque agreed with his men. He said, “Unless we’re going to play England’s traditional long pass, we’re not going to get around George Wood.

Yes, Spanish football was very much about midfield control. Look at Spain’s starting midfielders in the group stage — Fàbregas, Xavi, Xabi Alonso and David Silva. They were all technically skilled, good at attacking as well as intercepting the ball and controlling the tempo of the game. This set of midfield line-

up in the group stage, Spain's three-match winning line-out from the group, scored 11 goals, fully demonstrating their attacking prowess. All 11 goals were launched by the midfield; the four midfield starters directly assisted seven of the goals.

After just two rounds, Spain's midfield combination garnered a lot of attention. Almost everyone wearing "art football" hats over their heads. The Spanish team played a football that was pleasing to the eye, one that was very ornamental with a smooth and natural attack. Fans love to watch them keep the football under their feet, play between their hands by passing back and forth and running around before unknowingly seeing the goal, which was really an art.

So with these three group games, Spain became the top candidate for the title. The media's assessment of the power of the European champions was still there: an opponent that no team dared to look down on.

But for England coach Fabio Capello, he saw a chance to win. Spain scored 13 goals in four games so far, second only to Argentina who had Messi, Aguero and Tevez. But they lost seven balls. Casillas's ability was indisputable, and the reason for losing so many balls was simply that they did not value defense, or that their own level of defense was limited.

For a team so focused on the midfield control layer, with frequent assists from the wing-backs and a very good level of attack, what could be worse than going up against an aggressive middlefield striker?

Against Spain, Capello put on a defensive display, replacing Bentley with defensive midfielder Hargreaves, and in midfield he put on a jaw-dropping three-back line: George Wood in the center flanked by Gareth Barry and Hargreaves. Gerrard was left on attack in the centre.

"Obviously, I'm going to defend," Capello explained his squad in his pre-match press conference. "Against Spain, trying not to lose the ball first is the key to winning the game."

Twain agreed, "I want to do the same! Defense is the basis for winning, and the side that loses the ball first in such an important game can easily lose focus and give the opponent a chance. I don't need 7:6 to win the race, I just need 1:0!"

The Spanish media regarded Capello's decision as a gesture of mercy and weakness, and they proudly declared, "The Spanish team's attack is not even good, the gold medal coach Capello is rather afraid."

"Three backs can't stop us from scoring goals!

The arrangement of the three backs was simply outrageous! This was the regression of football, the detox of utilitarian football! This World Cup was destined to belong to Spain and aesthetic football!

But they all forget that a very important reason why Spain won the Euro 2008 was that there was a full-time defensive midfielder in good form, Senna. It was his tireless running and interceptions at the back that allowed Xavi and Iniesta and Fàbregas to attack as they wanted to.

At this World Cup, Senna did not even make the final list because of the fact that he was getting older and slipped so fast. Bosque didn't even bring a defensive midfielder to South Africa. No, it's just the nature of the Spanish nation, who worships aggression and art from the heart, and they despise defence and utility from the heart.

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The match was held in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The direct collision of art football and utilitarian football, the strong dialogue between the title favourites Spain and England attracted the attention of the world. Any reporters gathered on the scene and hundreds of television media around the world broadcast live; the seats were full, and the grandstand had long been crowded. Everyone was looking forward to this quarter-final between Mars and Earth.

“Who are you rooting for, Tony?” Newcastle coach Alan Shearer who was also invited as a guest of honour prior to the game asked his colleagues. At this time both men temporarily set aside their obligations as head coaches and formed an easy alliance.

“England.” If Capello was to play Spain in the group stage, I would bet on Spain.”

“Three backs. I really didn’t think of that. “Alan Shearer once played as a striker and even as a coach he was known for his attacking approach.

Twain was very happy, and now he saw Capello as a fellow.” I heard the Spaniards’ reaction before the game, and I bet that after half a game the arrogant Spaniards would have broken their glasses. Three backs, Harvey they don’t want to have anymore to play. Ha ha!” He’s looking forward to the game for a while now.

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After the game officially began, everything was as Dunn said. With less than half a game to play, the Spaniard was already looking very anxious.

George Wood, Hargreaves, Gareth. Three of Barry’s midfielders piled up in front of the line-up, leaving the passing of Xavi, Iniesta and Fàbregas. Later, possession of the ball would become a luxury, let alone actually managing a pass.

Capello’s task for the three backs was simple and clear — no matter the method, do not let the Spanish midfielder comfortably get the ball to organize the attack. As such, the Spanish players suffered a lot with the many fouls, small movements, reasonable use of the body of the collision. At the group stage, the elegant artists in the face of England’s tough rush looked miserable.

Xavi and Iniesta were largely submerged in England’s muscular forest, only for Fàbregas, who had been in the Premier League for a long time, to be slightly better off physically. By then, the Spanish team had essentially given the ball to Fàbregas, who had been placed on the right, and slowly moved himself to the centre, resulting in Harvey’s power, in the middle and old rival George Wood spun around.

The ensuing game was deadlocked. England’s whole-hearted defence was powerless to fight back, while Spain’s attack was goalless.

The first half was a 1:1 battle between the two sides.

In the second half Bosque made adjustments, replacing with Diego Capel, moving Fàbregas to the centre, and Xavi forming the centre-forward, the side hand silva and Cazorla to break through, with the intention of opening the gap from the side .

This change brought about some effect, but Capello adjusted quickly enough]. Let the defensive area of the three backs increase. The middle road was mainly left to George Wood, leaving Gerrard to help cope with Cesc Fàbregas and Xavi's shock.

Capello had no intention of fighting back at all.

The game was so dull that viewers around the world waited in front of the television. Spain's most proud and popular offensive football, art football was thrown out of rhythm because of the opponent's three-back midfield configuration. England drew back as well, as if they lost the desire to attack. What was the point of watching such a game?

But Twain looked so fond of watching Spanish attack blocked by the three-back configuration. Each time he saw George Wood defend again he cheered silently.

The score was 0:0 until the end of the ninety minutes. The two sides went into overtime after a short break. This was the first extra-time game of the World Cup.

Commentators had been critical of Capello's conservatism, but Capello could not hear the criticism, and even if he heard it, he would continue to do what he did. There was no point in pleasing the audience instead of winning the game.

In the first half of extra-time England suddenly made a big difference on the attack, narrowly breaking Casillas' goal in three successive attacks, making the Spanish fans sweat. Tony Twain's solution was that it must have been Capello's own instructions, because if the game was dragged into a penalty shoot-out, it would be no good for England.

The impact of Germany's World Cup penalty elimination by Portugal must have sustained until now, not to mention in the goalkeeper's ring, Joe Hart missed Casillas by more than one grade.

So Capello was hoping to take advantage of the Spanish player's physical decline in extra-time to let England, who had endured a 90-minute strike, take the game. They came close to succeeding –if not for “St. Igor” to show spirit again.

In the second half of extra-time, England's attack faded and Spain regained the initiative, seizing the last time they were hoping to decide the outcome of the regular season, even if the man standing behind them was Casillas, and no one wanted a penalty shootout. Bosque, on the other hand, was already thinking about the order of the players in the penalty shootout.

The singing in the stands faded. The Spanish fans were so worried that they would not expect the highly-anticipated team to play so badly, and England's fans were worried because Capello's three backs gave them no hope of winning.

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The game went to 118 minutes with two minutes left in overtime.

In the backfield after breaking Fàbregas' pace, George chose to take the ball forward instead handing it to Gerrard, Barry or anyone else as usual.

His sudden movement caught the Spanish midfielder off guard and everyone but Fàbregas was always with him, who forgot to defend the England No.13 with the ball.

Fàbregas knew nothing more about what the boy was going to do. When Nottingham Forest was in trouble, Tony occasionally let George Wood step in at the last minute to organize the attack, which often ended curiously.

"Go, George, go!" Twain said on the live broadcast.

" George Wood himself took the ball forward and the Spanish midfielder had no interceptions at all. ...No, Fàbregas followed him, But he was not fast enough! Mortensen raised his fist and shouted.

This was England's last attack ...

Capello rose from his seat, pursed his lips and looked motionlessly at the pitch, as if he were a statue.

"Gerrard is picking him up ...Puyol's up! Passing the ball? No! Force a break! Well done, George!! "

Wood relied on Puyol's combination of body and speed to force a pass past the Barcelona captain.

"Into the 30-meter area! "

Twain seemed to have forgotten that he was now a commentator, not the Nottingham Forest manager. He got up from his seat and raised his fist and yelled at the field, "Shoot! George! Shoot! "

"But the shot's a little ..." Shearer disagrees. He thought the pass was better.

Before he could finish speaking, Wood abruptly got up about thirty metres from the goal, and even Fàbregas didn't expect him to be so decisive.

The football rose from the sky, did not spin, flew straight to the goal, with a gust of wind.

It was too late for Casillas to adjust the position, and he had to rise up, stretching his arms and trying to pounce on the corner. At this moment, "Saint-Igor" is the only Spaniard the Spaniard can rely on, all defenders can do nothing about Wood's foot.

"George_WOOOOOOOOOO—GOOOOOOOAL!!!"

With Motson's long whistling, Casillas fell from the air and he did not touch the ball. The football pierced the "St. Igor" defense boundary and turned into a meteor crash into the net!

The deadlock of nearly a hundred and twenty minutes was broken ...

"A shocking move!" Mortensen, who had been repressed for a hundred and twenty minutes, also broke out, and he stood up and waved his arm and shouted, "GOAL! GOOAL! GOOOOAL!! A kill right before the end! There's no better killing than this! Casillas lost to George Wood! George..St. George. St. George defeated St.Igor! He is the patron saint of England! Four we go, goodbye Spain!" St George, who scored the kill, was pushed to the bottom by his frantic teammates, and the escaped Capello and his colleagues hugged each other tightly, swearing in Italian and venting their feelings of being repressed for 120

minutes. The England FA's goal for Capello before the World Cup was to finish in the top four, and now he has done it.

The Spanish side was dead, and no one could believe that England's goalkeeper, George W. Bush, could not score. Wood kicked the ball out of the world and kicked them back home in Spain at the last minute.

"Yes! He's bad at shooting! But it's not the first time in his career that he's hit such a wonderful world wave! Manchester United and Chelsea have both lost to his footy. The Spaniards should have learned their lesson! You have St Igor and we have St George!"

"Four hundred and twenty-two years ago, the British Navy hung the flag of St. George in the Red Triangle in the Atlantic Ocean, fought to the end, and never backed down, defeating Spain's invincible fleet! Now we see the flag full of glory, it is flying over Johannesburg, South Africa! Once again, we have defeated Spain's Invincible Fleet!"

"St. George for England!"

Chapter 743: St. George's World Cup

Apologies for not updating it on time...

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A day had passed since the game, and it was possible that the Spanish fans were unwilling to accept the fact that the predicted champions Spain were knocked out by England's most incapable shooter.

This game boosted George Wood's fame in world football, and even most pseudo-fans now knew George Wood.

After the game against Spain, George Wood passed the urine test without any problems. He was then named the most valuable player on the spot. FIFA's official website comments on him were, "Impeccable defence and game attitude, last-minute elimination of the favourites Spain, embodying the full value of a central midfielder."

Motson's new nickname for Wood was also widely spread along with the goal, and now England fans had a new moniker for George Wood: St. George. After the game, on England's streets, public squares, echoes a sound – "St. George protects England!"

The English media said that George Wood's stunning shot was perfectly comparable to , David Pratt's last-minute shot against Belgium in the quarter-finals of the 1990 World Cup in Italy. Pratt's goal 20 years ago saved England and helped the team to reach the top eight, and two decades later George Wood's screamer helped the team reach the Top Four.

Fàbregas looked frustrated after the game, but in the interview he still praised George Wood's performance, "I tried to intercept the ball, but he was too fast. Maybe I should have fouled earlier...That's football, a second of hesitation costs us the game. He did well and deserved to win the game, and I wish him good luck."

Capello rarely praises a player individually, but this “rule” did not apply to George Wood. He was very emotional after the game and he took the initiative to mention Wood to the media, “He’s a great player and I’m happy to have one of those players in the team. Yes, he played beautifully but what I valued most was his performance in the 119th minute before the goal — it was perfect. He completely contained Xavi and Fàbregas, and not losing the ball was the best affirmation of his efforts.”

Bosque was calm after the World Cup loss. When he was asked about George Wood, he replied, “Capello’s three full backs were successful, but without George Wood, the three full backs are not as strong as people think. He is the core of the midfield defence...Yes, I think he is the best defensive midfielder in world football in recent years. But maybe in a few years I’ll have to get rid of the ‘defensive’ aspect. That was a beautiful goal. I have nothing to say after being beaten by a goal like this.”

Twain, who trained George Wood, was also the subject of media pursuit after the game. He was not surprised at Wood’s success. “Because I knew he would succeed. If Eriksson had been as clever as Capello, England might have gone further in Germany. If McClaren had a clearer head, England wouldn’t have had to be spectators in the summer of 2008. You see, anyone who looked down on Wood had a miserable ending. Do you think Nottingham Forest’s two European Champions Cups and one league title in two years were due to luck? What is there we can’t achieve with St. George?” At this point, Twain laughed with pride. He liked Motson’s new nickname for Wood in the live stream, it was a lot better than “monster”, “artificial man” and “future soldier”.

So many people complimented George Wood, but what did he think of himself?

“I’m happy to get into the top four. I’m just playing as I usually do.” He said he was glad, but there was no obvious smile on his face.

“He’s just playing normally, and I really want to see how his extraordinary play looks like...” The reporter who interviewed him said in the report.

In short, George Wood had established himself as a god in the football world.

From before the World Cup began, all the way to the group stage. The English media was still trying to debate whether Lampard and Gerrard or George Wood and Gerrard should start. There are people who supported Lampard but there are people who supported George Wood. Capello’s arrival did little to solve England’s “double German”; on the contrary the issue exacerbated.

Now, all the arguments disappeared overnight. Some media even said this, “Capello should not think about whether George Wood or Lampard should start, but instead who should start with George Wood?”

It seems like “St George’s” World Cup journey was just beginning but he still had time to write his own legend. Thanks to Wood’s excellent display, England’s fans were even starting to look forward to the finals and him lifting the Champions Cup.

“... Since 1966, we never got close to that trophy. Every World Cup, we say we’re the strongest English team in history, but in reality? But this World Cup may have a different ending. Capello is a coach who prioritises defense and, in the World Series, defending meant champion and victory. Now with ‘St. George’, we have the power to dream big!”

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But St. George's World Cup trip ended.

In the semi-finals, they encountered the Italian team led by "Silver Fox" Lippi.

It was a contest between the two Italian coaches and a direct conflict between a conservative person and another who was even more conservative. In the end, Italy's reinforced concrete chain-link defence beat England. In the face of Italy's shrinking defence, England lacked the means to break the deadlock. Revealing their weakness in the lack of a deciding midfielder, Gerrard and Lampard acted both more like scoring midfielders and were slightly inferior in passing.

On the Italian side, Pirlo sorted the team's midfield in a well-organized way. Threatening England's goal with a defensive counter-attack kept England from full-out attacking.

In the end, the game was dragged into a penalty shootout. In fact, England was exhausted by the time they entered the overtime period. Playing 120 minutes against Spain consumed too much energy, and now they played another 120 minutes against Italy. With that in mind, the mindsets of England's players began to collapse.

Only George Wood and Gerrard were exceptions, both of whom were still running tirelessly in the hope of breaking the deadlock for the team. Wood wanted to repeat history, by scoring from the back. In fact, in the last minute of the game, England's fans and the media all wanted that. But their opponent this time was not Spain, who did not guard its midfield, but the defending footballer's forerunner, Italy.

George Wood was focused on the defence and the Italian players were more willing to foul early and would not have given Wood a chance to step in. There were times when Wood rushed to shoot but it was way off. Despite England fans shouting, "May St. George bless England", St. George had no energy left and he could no longer watch over England.

The game was dragged into a penalty shoot-out and England had completely lost their confidence, even though it was not the first time they had fallen in penalty. During a penalty-shootout, almost everyone would have an inexplicable psychological shadow.

George Wood was not put on Capello's penalty list. Although his psychological state was good, but his shooting skills were really not reassuring.

The result was indisputable. The world's best goalkeeper, Buffon, who dived and blocked a penalty shot, "frightened" away another penalty shot. The Italian side made four penalties and England's fifth man did not even play before the game was over.

Twain was not sad about the result. On the one hand, he was not a real Englishman, so his emotions will not be affected by the fate of this team. On the other hand, when the game was dragged into overtime, he had seen England's fate. They could not keep up on a physical level. Not being eliminated by Italy in overtime would only be because they were lucky, but now they were out of luck after the two overtime games and could not afford to return in the penalty shoot-out.

George Wood stood side by side with his teammates in the middle circle, watching his teammates step up one by one to the main penalty, whether they would be happy or frustrated. However, he could only watch his World Cup journey come to an end.

He did not get a minute off at the World Cup in Germany, and even if England was knocked out by Portugal, he had no special emotion other than to experience Beckham's sadness. Four years later, South Africa was different, he had been a major player since the knockout stages and he really felt he was part of the team. England could finish in the top four but he deserved more than just stopping at the top four ...

He felt sad, but he did not cry. He could not remember ever crying in his lifetime. He just stood in place with his back straight, not even wavering in the slightest even to vent his frustration. He could not move because a man was leaning on his back.

Lampard, who came on as a substitute in overtime, was the fifth to play, but the game was finished before his turn and he cried behind Wood. It was not because he was not strong enough, but because he knew this could be his last World Cup. He would turn 32 in 2010, then 36 four years later, making it almost impossible to play for his country again.

Nobody, no matter how strong they were, could withstand such a blow.

Beckham was initially criticised for not being seen at the time when he was substituted for the match against Portugal and sitting on the sidelines and sobbing. Those people were just trash talking, because nobody could understand how sad they were if they had never been in their position.

When the fourth Italian player, Grosso, kicked the ball into Joe Hart's goal post, the Italian players next to him buzzed him immediately and half of the crowd in the stands cheered.

Wood looked at his opponents' ecstatic expressions and raised his fists. He now regretted that he could not make a little more contribution to the team on offense. Had his shooting been better, had he taken one of three chances in overtime, he would not see the Italian's expression right now. .

He hated to see his opponent laugh, and he liked to see people who were fighting against himself cry.

Shoot a little better! Attack a little better! I'm not going to be a midfielder who would only defend! I do not want others to take control of the direction of the game! I want to take destiny in my own hands!

I'm going to be the real "St. George" !

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Mortensen kept silent for a long time, as if he were dead. Alan Shearer shook his head helplessly. Twain sighed. The first two were really sad for England to finish only as the top four again, but Twain just felt sorry for George Wood.

"Regardless... being in the top four was part of their pre-World Cup goals. But after watching the last game against Spain, I'm sure all the English people are looking forward to more, but..." Mortensen had finally recovered a bit of anger. "This is football. It does not bend to our will. England's lads are good...24-year-old George Wood, 23-year-old Alan Lennon, 18-year-old Jack Wilshere, 19-year-old Jack Rodwell, 22-year-old Micah Richards, 21-year-old Walcott, 23-year-old Joe Hart, 24-year-old Wayne Rooney, 25-year-old Ashley Young, 26-year-old Bentley, 26-year-old Stewart Downing. Look at these young people, I think we can continue to look forward for another four years. "

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In the third-fourth placing finals on the day before the final, George Wood continued to play as a starter in the match with Lampard as his partner. In the third-fourth placing finals, England's opponents were Brazil who were in the group stage. Losing the semi-finals did not affect Wood negatively. Conversely, he had become more competitive.

Capello handed Kaka over to him, and he was on the pitch faithful to the manager's tactical demands. He did not let Kaka receive the ball easily, did not give him the space to start a breakthrough, did not let him easily pass the football, even if it were at the expense of a yellow card. He was out to completely freeze the core of the Brazilian team completely.

George Wood and Kaka's duel was wonderful and became a beautiful scene in the game. Neither side was on top, both had their wins and losses.

In the end, England, who was not as good as Brazil overall, and with two 120 minutes matches in a row which exhausted their entire stamina, lost to Brazil 1:2 to finish fourth in the World Cup.

The final match was between Italy and Argentina, for a fierce 90-minute battle. Argentina beat Italy 2-0 with two flashy plays from Messi and Aguero, winning the World Cup for the third time in history. After this battle, Messi was labelled "God", and the media and fans called him the king of the new generation of football. For a moment, "Mesidona" was shouted all over the world.

"2010 is Messi's year!" At the club, he wore the No.10 shirt to lead Barcelona in the league and The Champions League! In the national team, wearing the No. 10, he finally became the king of the world! We have the honour to witness the birth of a new king in the soccer generation in South Africa! "

In the midst of such praise, only one person thought the opposite.

Tony, who had a me-against-the-world mindset and despised people who blindly followed the majority, wrote in his column after the finals, " I'll admit that Messi has won three championships, but it's still too early to call him the new Soccer King. Argentina only won the World Cup because they didn't encounter England. Barcelona only won the Champions League because Nottingham Forest was not there! "

Some people called Twain a sore loser.

Twain rebutted, saying his team would return to Europe to play next season and he would let everyone know who was right and who was wrong.

"I don't mind UEFA pitting my team up against Barcelona, I would even hope for it. Come on, use your 'unspoken rules' on me! "

He was later fined 20,000 euros and given a severe warning for his speech convincing people that there was a covert operation inside UEFA. The tension between him and Barcelona was exacerbating. Losing money and fame, and creating a deeper feud with his opponents. In the eyes of outsiders, Tony Twain was an idiot who behaved in an unacceptable manner. But Twain thought he was just calling a spade a spade.

If George Wood had gone up against Messi, all Messi had to do was pray he would not be injured and ejected in 90 minutes and nothing else. As long as Twain was still the manager of Nottingham Forest, he would do it. Why did Italy lose? They lost because they had been too civilised when marking Messi. Unfortunately, as he aged, Gattuso's standards slipped as well. If Gattuso were in his prime, it would be

hard to say what the outcome of this final could have been. In the game, Gattuso clearly could not keep up with Messi's pace and was always easily left behind by Messi's speed. He could not even foul quick enough.

The new ball king? Messi was still far from dominating everyone. He still had a long way to go before he could be king. At the very least, let St George test his mettle first.

Chapter 744: A Pair of Forest Wingers

The World Cup was over. The matter of other people's reactions was not something Twain should care about. He had to think about how to maximize the club's transfer budget of fifty million pounds.

Bentley's performance at the World Cup was far less brilliant than that of George Wood but Twain was basically positive about his strength and form. He had already commissioned the club to ask Tottenham Hotspur for a price while the World Cup was still going on.

Tottenham Hotspur initially did not agree to sell the England starting right back, so Twain took time out during the World Cup to go meet Bentley's agent and got in touch with Bentley through the agent. Bentley has told Twain that he wanted to join Nottingham Forest because the Forest team could play in next season's UEFA Champions League while Tottenham Hotspur was only qualified for the UEFA Europa League.

Consequently, Twain wanted Bentley to put pressure on Tottenham Hotspur himself and lay his card on the table for Levy.

Bentley promised to do it after the World Cup. Now he just wanted to play well in the World Cup.

After the World Cup, he once again urged Bentley to lay his cards on the table with Tottenham Hotspur through his agent.

Firstly, Tony Twain publicly declared his appreciation for Bentley—he used his work to build momentum for the matter during the World Cup broadcast.

Then Bentley went along with the flow to respond. In an interview with the reporters, he said he was delighted with Manager Tony Twain's appreciation of him. He thought Tony Twain was the best English manager now because he could lead the team to the championship title. Pierce Brosnan who interviewed him, went along and said, "What if you play for him?" Bentley smiled in reply, "I think it must be great!"

Well, now that both parties were willing, it was up to Tottenham Hotspur's say-so.

After the World Cup, Bentley had a private discussion with the Tottenham Hotspur manager, Redknapp. During the meeting, Bentley made it clear to Redknapp that he wanted to leave Tottenham Hotspur and go to Nottingham Forest in pursuit of his desire for championship titles and honors. He hoped the team could support his personal pursuits, which had nothing to do with his salary.

In fact, after the incident with Berbatov, Tottenham Hotspur should have made one thing clear—that as long as the player himself wanted to leave, it would not help to force to detain.

If Levy was smart, he should not have continued to rebuff Nottingham Forest's "good faith." Instead, he should seriously consider how much money Bentley can be sold for.

Tottenham Hotspur agreed to Bentley's departure after two days of consideration. The rest of the matter was simple. It was just a question of how much money was appropriate.

Tottenham bought Bentley for fifteen million pounds. With the onset of the world financial crisis, the clubs spent more wisely in the transfer market, and the value of the players generally fell. Bentley was no exception. It was considered good to be able to sell fifteen million. In fact, Tottenham Hotspur had quoted the Forest team a price of fifteen million pounds. They hoped to at least not sustain a loss.

Whereas Allan Adams insisted that the Forest team could only offer eleven million pounds.

The talks were deadlocked for a week, and the two sides eventually met each other halfway. The deal was made for thirteen and a half million pounds. The Forest team made a down payment of eleven million pounds. When Bentley made a full thirty appearances for the Forest team, they would give Tottenham Hotspur another two and a half million pounds.

The individual package contract was long negotiated.

Less than two weeks after the World Cup, Nottingham Forest and Tottenham Hotspur jointly announced that England's "new Beckham", David Bentley had officially transferred to the Forest from Tottenham Hotspur for a transfer fee of thirteen and a half million pounds.

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After Twain handed over the negotiations to Allan, he was busy looking for the left winger for the team.

After a repeated screening process, he set his sights on La Liga's Villarreal's left midfielder, Matías Fernández.

On the one hand, Fernández had the desire to leave The Yellow Submarine. While Villarreal could safely guarantee that they could participate in the Champions League in recent seasons, to win the title was amount to nothing more than a pipe dream. Whereas, Nottingham Forest had just defended the championship title for the tournament two seasons ago. A discerning eye could tell the difference between Villarreal and Nottingham Forest at a glance.

On the other hand, Villarreal also needed money. As a small club, its budget had always been tight. They could only make money by selling their star players. If Forest wanted to buy Fernández, the club would not be a barrier.

When Twain purchased players, he still employed a two-step strategy—one step was to the contact the club and the other step was to approach the player. Before he contacted the club, he would approach the player in private to see what he had to say. If he wanted to come, then he would tackle the club. If he did not want to come, he would take care of the player first. He would change the target if he could not manage it.

This time, Fernández did want to leave. He longed for a bigger arena and a new challenge. He could not do that in Villarreal. In fact, if Real Madrid, Barça and other clubs were interested in him, that would be the best result. But these big clubs were currently not that interested in him. Only a few mid-tier clubs

were. The examples included Italy's Roma and Fiorentina, Bundesliga's Schalke 04 and Werder Bremen, English Premier League's Everton and Aston Villa, and La Liga's Deportivo de La Coruña and Valencia.

By comparison, he thought it would be more worthwhile to choose Nottingham Forest. No matter what, the Forest team was also a team that had just won the UEFA Champions League for two years in a row. Despite some setbacks over the past two seasons, as long as their manager, who pursued victories and championship titles was still around, the team's confidence would still be there.

Matías Fernández comprehended this: the pillar of a Premier League team was the manager, so as long as the manager was still there, the team was not finished.

His understanding was very much in line with the current situation of the vast majority of Premier League teams.

Twain assured him that playing for the Forest team would be more promising than playing for Villarreal—"because we are a team with a tradition for championship titles."

Fernández had assured Twain that if Nottingham Forest could meet Villarreal's transfer fee and conditions, he would consider signing for the Forest team first.

Following which, Nottingham Forest made a bid to Villarreal for twelve million euros for Fernández.

Villarreal did not rebuff the Forest team right off the bat but gave another quote: the amount was still twelve million, but for them to change from the euro to "pounds."

Twain did not hesitate and nodded in agreement to the other side's quote.

The following procedure was to compete with several other clubs to see who could get the "rose" that Matías Fernández threw."

Since an agreement had been reached in private, Fernández eventually opted for a contract with Nottingham Forest.

In this way, Tony Twain spent a total cost of twenty-five and a half million pounds and got the left and right wingers he wanted. Bentley was on the right, and Fernández was on the left.

With half of the transfer budget left, how should he spend it?

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"What do you think of Adriano?" Twain suddenly said to the busy Dunn around him as they prepared for the upcoming training at the Wilford training base.

"If you're interested in him, I'm going to say nothing great about him." Dunn replied Twain without looking up and continued to do his work.

"Well..." Twain did not refute. He just rubbed his chin and pondered.

"You're right, there's really nothing great about him" Twain spoke up after a moment of contemplation, "I'm just thinking about it casually..."

The two new wingers were just introduced to their teammates, the fans and the media a day ago, and the Nottingham Forest king was worrying about the candidate for the striker.

Žigić's performance in the second season was much better than his first season and his contribution to the team's tactics was remarkable. However, it seemed that because he always needed to be a bridgehead in the tactics, his scoring rate was on the decline. His assists went up and he was very helpful in the forward line, but his own goal scoring numbers could not go up. Twain had decided to give up the idea of purely using Žigić as a striker. He found that Žigić did a good job in the tactical center forward position. He could hardly pick out any faults except that he scored fewer goals.

Agbonlahor was very fast, extremely fast. But his shooting skills was a bit rougher, and he preferred to be active on the sides—because there was enough room for him to break through there. He was more useful than anyone during counterattacks, but the Forest team could not always counterattack. This set of routine had long been thoroughly studied by their opponents.

Eastwood's form was stable provided that he was not injured. The Forest team would have to play in at least two tournaments this season, and Twain could not expect Eastwood to play all the games in the season alone.

Millán and Moses were too young to be counted on to take on the big responsibility.

Therefore, the Forest team still needed to strengthen the force of the forward line.

To make room for a new striker, Twain decided to put Moses and Millán out on loan to train them. These two young guys were in high demand due to their excellent performances last season. Twain did not need to worry about their positions.

So, the only question now was—which striker should he buy?

Twain's current transfer fund was still worth up to thirty million pounds—after he bought Bentley and Fernández, Allan Adams added in another five million pounds to the transfer budget for Twain. It looked like the Forest team really wanted to make a big splash in the new season.

Who could he buy with thirty million? The players he could actually buy were a lot, but in fact they were also very few players whom he could buy.

The financial crisis had led to a decline in the value of the players. The star players who used to readily have sky-high prices were now down to ordinary levels. In a classic example, Real Madrid announced the acquisition of Benzema this summer. The haggling over prices went on for the entire World Cup, which eventually ended with a total of thirty million euros. What did Aulas say two years ago? "Benzema is worth one hundred million euros!" At that time, the actual price would not be less than fifty million.

Ibrahimović, Eto'o, Villa, Tevez, Berbatov.....These men were currently available for a transfer fee of thirty million pounds, but not one of them could be bought by the Forest team.

On the one hand, the Forest team was a lot worse as compared to those real powerhouse names. On the other hand, even if they could buy these superstars, they might not be able to afford to pay their salaries. One must know that Ibrahimović enjoyed an annual salary of twelve million euros after tax at Inter Milan. Italy imposed a one hundred per cent tax on football. An annual salary of twelve million

after tax implied that Inter Milan pay twenty-four million euros a year for just Ibrahimović's salary alone...

Even if England did not impose such a heavy tax on the football industry, the figure of twelve million was beyond what Nottingham Forest could afford.

As a result, Twain could only look at two categories of players: one category was a world-class striker who had long proved his place in the football world but was currently in poor form. The other was the less famous, capable and about to become a first-class striker.

The former's best candidate was in fact Adriano, who was soured by the loss of his hopes at Inter Milan.

Twain had seriously considered the possibility of the Brazilian joining the team before. First of all, although he and Mourinho were at loggerheads, he believed that Mourinho would not be difficult in the matter of Adriano's transfer. Inter Milan also wanted to get rid of the burden, Adriano as soon as possible. Moreover, they would never allow Adriano to be sold to an Italian team, so the foreign teams were the Brazilian's only option. Meanwhile, Adriano and his agent would not agree to return to Brazil, so an English team was the best option.

But the core issue that left Twain indecisive was Adriano himself. This was a player who was technically fine but questionable attitude-wise. Late to the training, the absences, the late-night jaunts to the nightclubs that lasted to the next morning, the prostitutes, his self-confessed big-shot attitude that he was not willing to correct, face-to-face confrontation with the team's manager, questioning authority ...

None of these problems was something Twain did not hate.

He had a similar temper as Mourinho. If Mourinho could not tolerate Adriano, then Twain most likely could not.

Maybe he could keep Adriano honest for a season by all means, but Twain was well aware that it was not going to be easy to turn around a character like Adriano. Once he was flushed with success again, it would be the endless off-field scandals that awaited Twain. Could he change such a self-sabotaging genius?

Twain and Dunn had discussed it several times. Dunn's conclusion was always the same—perhaps he would do before his father's passing but after his father died, he was completely hopeless.

He also advised Twain, "If the club thinks you've spent tens of millions of pounds on him to only play well for the team for one season, I'm not sure what the chairman will do to you. Adriano is too risky, and we have many ways to avoid the risk. I don't think bringing in Adriano is a good deal."

Twain agonized for days. After studying Adriano's performance in the recent years and his off-field gossip, he officially announced that he had given up on him this morning.

The Brazilian was a hopeless case, and Tony Twain was not an omnipotent God. Although he felt deep down that it was a shame for this once talented striker, the reality was very cruel. He did not have to use tens of millions to do charity and save a young man who was neither a relative nor a friend and had taken a wrong turn in life.

So, the problem was here again.

“Hey, Dunn. Can you recommend a few more to me? The ones whom you previously recommended already had some areas that I was not satisfied with. You know I’m a perfectionist...”

Chapter 745: *Super Ibi’s Troubles*

The only light source in the dim video screening room came from the big screen in front. The drawn heavy curtains made the room appeared to be night. The German language that sounded in the room was completely incomprehensible to Twain, but it did not matter. He could understand what the commentators were jabbering about by filling the gaps in his mind. The key was that he could repeatedly hear a word popping up among the German spoken:

“Ibišević!”

Every time the commentators, full of enthusiasm, called out the person’s name, the birth of a goal would be shown on the screen.

Sometimes the commentators did not shout in this way. They yelled out, “Super Ibi!”

But no matter what the tall player on the screen was called, he always scored goals.

He shot hard, he jumped for the header, he leaned on the opposing defender and then turned to shoot...

“Even though while watching the best of the highlights, any player will look like an awesome player like Pelé and Maradona. But at the very least we can know what the other party’s strengths are and he’s very good at scoring goals.” Once they finished watching the video, the screen faded to black, and the room was dark, Twain opened his mouth to speak in the dark, “Also I want to ask, isn’t anyone sitting next to the switch?”

“There are only three of us here, Tony. Dunn and I are next to you.” Kerslake’s voice sounded in the dark, “In addition, the data indicates that his assists are also very good.”

“All right, I’ll go...” Twain had just gotten up and knocked down the chair next to him. He gave an ouch, and then scolded, “Damn chair!”

Dunn thoughtfully took out his cell phone to illuminate for Twain, but the light was too weak.

Twain did not grope about. He directly kicked over everything blocking in front of himself. Amid the crashing objects, he went to where the switch was and turned on the lights in the room. All three men squinted their eyes when the bright white light came on.

The room was in a mess. Several chairs laid scattered about in the room.

Twain then picked them up to put them upright again.

“Back to the topic just now. What do you think of this man?”

Dunn did not say a word while Kerslake shook his head and said, “We’re looking at a video of him a season ago. His performance that season was amazing. But Tony, Bundesliga regularly produces

'ordinary strikers' who only hit the big time for one season. Look at his performance last season, it was as if he was a different player in the video. I don't think highly of him."

Twain did not make any comments yet. He just turned to Dunn.

"It's a risk, Tony." Dunn's words were simple, but he did not explicitly object. To tell the truth, he also could not make up his mind.

Twain nodded and said, "I can understand your concerns. He scored thirty-seven goals in the 08-09 season and almost broke Gerd Müller's record of forty goals in a single season. It was absolutely a miraculous performance. Based on the performance of that season alone, we can't even buy him with thirty million. But in the 09-10 season, his performance was completely incomprehensible to people. He only scored ten goals in the season... It was a far cry from previous season's performance."

"Since you know all these, why did we still have to watch his video?" Kerslake asked.

"Because I don't think the man's success was accidental. Instead, his strange performance last season was accidental." Twain said with a chuckle, "I like his background story and his character. I think his success is definitely not down to luck. There are many reasons why he played poorly last season—Firstly, the tactics that Rangnick devised for Hoffenheim had been studied by the Bundesliga teams. Hoffenheim was not a newly promoted team, but a participating team the Champions League. Obviously, no one looked down on them; Secondly, as the Bundesliga's best goalscorer and Europe's best striker for the 08-09 season, Ibišević was the focus of his opponents' marking, which somewhat limited his play; Thirdly, competing in multiple tournaments had left Hoffenheim's team exhausted and in poor form. This affected Ibišević's goalscoring; Fourthly, there were injuries. He suffered an injury last season and had not been able to get back into his form after a two-month break. It's a little strange, but understandable. A player's form is not something we can fully grasp. So, I don't think his decline in goals last season has anything to do with his individual ability... You want to hear why I'm optimistic about him?"

Kerslake nodded.

"Psychological quality." Twain retracted three of his fingers he had extended just now, leaving only one. "Why did I say his success was not accidental? Look at his experience for the lower level leagues and as a substitute, those are valuable assets for a striker. He has a good mindset and has never given up on his efforts to be a good striker. This is very important. Bayern Munich's leading striker, Luca Toni did not do well in Fiorentina before he became famous, but he eventually broke out. I believe Ibišević can be the second Luca Toni. He just needs a bigger stage, and Hoffenheim is no longer suitable for him. The boss there would never have more money than the UAE royal family. They spent so much money and yet Manchester City did not win a single title, nor did Hoffenheim. I think Nottingham Forest is an entirely new stage suitable for him to play to his full potential."

"Also, thanks to his poor performance last season, we shouldn't have to spend too much money on him now. Moreover, as a Bosnian who had lived in the United States, he also speaks fluent English. To play in England without any linguistic problems, it will help him fit into the team better and faster. The striker is the one who needs to adapt to the style of the team as quickly as possible. It is beneficial for him and for us."

Kerslake looked at Twain and said, "So in actual fact, you've made up your mind, haven't you?"

"Don't say that, David." Twain laughed, "I always listen to both your opinions."

"Since you've said what you're supposed to say, what other opinions can we have? Isn't that right, Dunn?" Kerslake turned to ask Dunn, who sat next to him.

"Tony believes that a player's psychological quality can determine his achievements." Dunn answered, "I reserve my opinions on it. But as an assistant manager, I support the manager."

"That's it!" Twain gave a clap and exclaimed, "Tomorrow, let our guy sound out Hoffenheim!"

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Including the transient population, the small village of Hoffenheim only had three thousand and three hundred people and belonged to the German city of Sinsheim in Baden-Württemberg. But in fact, Sinsheim was not considered a big city. Albeit labeled as a city, it was most like a "town." The train that passed through the Sinsheim station was a single track, which made it a veritable small station.

But such a humble little place caused a whirlwind in Bundesliga and European football in the 2008-09 season. They did well and ended up the runner-up in the league tournament as a newly promoted team as well as their first ever appearance in Bundesliga. The team's top striker, Vedad Ibišević became Bundesliga's top striker that season and was awarded the European Golden Shoe.

It was truly a crazy season. At the end of the season, all of the Hoffenheim players had attracted looting by teams in Germany and Europe.

But the owner of the club and European software giant, SAP, Dietmar Hopp was ambitious and had money. So, not only did he not sell a single player, he also signed a number of well-known players to supplement the team's strength and got ready to play in the new season in the Europe arena.

Unfortunately, a football was round...

The team's results in competing in two tournaments in the new season went down the tubes.

The Golden Boot, Ibišević, who did well last season, also appeared to lose his goalscoring ability overnight. He scored only ten goals in the league tournament and scored only three goals in the UEFA Champions League, which was a far cry from what people expected of him.

Even the team's manager, Rangnick, was baffled by his sudden breakout and dormancy once again. "Why was he able to score thirty-seven goals in one season and only ten goals in another season? It's the same thing when he scored five goals in a single season in 2. Bundesliga. I don't understand."

He was not the only one. Ibišević himself could not understand. He believed he had made great progress as compared to his previous self. At least after a successful Bundesliga season, his confidence was greatly reinforced and strengthened. He definitely did not take a step back in his skills. So, what made him suddenly lose his state?

Perhaps this would become a famous unsolved mystery in German football...

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It was only a slightly more than ten-minute drive from Sinsheim to Hoffenheim, and the distance between the two places were actually short enough.

After Vedad Ibišević drove his cherished car into Hoffenheim, he would often be greeted by the oncoming Hoffenheim villagers. It was a quiet little village... even if the people here had their first ever foray into the Champions League last season.

But Ibišević was not in the mood to greet the fans who liked him one by one. He had his own troubles.

Just before driving to Dietmar-Hopp-Stadion, he received a call from his agent's firm, Stars & Friends International Holding.

The agency's person asked him over the phone if he was interested in playing for another club.

He received a lot of such calls last summer. Manchester United, Inter Milan, Bayern Munich, Barcelona... the European powerhouses practically came everywhere for one purpose—to take him away from the small village of Hoffenheim.

At that time, he only had one year left on his contract with the club, but he refused them all and opted to renew his contract with the club until 2013. He achieved success in Hoffenheim and had a good time. He could not think of a reason to leave. Just because Hoffenheim is a small place? But I love life in the quiet countryside. Sinsheim sells everything I need, and I don't think big cities have any advantages over Sinsheim.

But a year later, it was not known if he would have regretted the choice he made at that time.

He did not see what he wanted to see in the new season. His form and the team's form slipped and Hoffenheim's great plans had not gone down well. Hopp's ambitions had suffered setbacks. He was also labeled as the "brightest shooting star in the history of the Bundesliga."

The powerhouse teams that were once interested in him, had all withdrew without exception. As the number of football scouts dwindled in the stands at the Rhein-Neckar-Arena, everyone shook their heads and sighed that he was just another Mintál—"scored a lifetime's worth of goals in one season."

The biggest problem was not that he scored fewer goals, but that he did not know why it became that way.

There was nothing wrong with his body before the injury. The team doctors smacked their lips and proclaimed that he was as strong as an ox before the start of the season.

In the middle of the season, there were reports in the German press that Ibišević was in a state of flux—he wanted to be paid and treated according as the team's number one while the off-field scandals also interfered with his normal training. He sneered at those things. Only he knew the state of his mind in the world. He had never relaxed the demands on himself because of his successes last season. Because the wandering years of playing in Europe's lower leagues had taught him one thing: there was no pie in the sky in the world. A euro's worth of success would cost him eleven million euros' worth of efforts.

Maybe the injuries could explain some things? But it was not the type of injury that could threaten his career and not something that a professional player was immune from while playing. If an injury would

completely sink him, then he was not fit to be a professional player. Ibišević did not think of himself as that kind of person.

After he recovered and returned from the injury, he still gave himself half an hour of shooting after training every day and had no complaints about Manager Rangnick's arrangements. But he and Rangnick were caught up in an inexplicable crisis—at the end of the season, he was no longer the “Super Ibi” that made the Bundesliga strong teams trembled with fear. More often than not, he was just wandering between the wasted opportunities and the search for chances. The team lost the qualification to play in the UEFA Europa League. At one point during the season, Rangnick was also rumored to be fired early by Hopp.

Another summer came, and the transfer market was in full swing. Ibišević, whom the entire Europe went crazy for last summer, was suddenly at the “bottom of the heap.” There were still teams interested in him, but they were all the second-tier teams. It would have been better to stay in Hoffenheim and looked for a chance to prove himself again than to go to those teams.

But a completely different name was mentioned in the call from the agency today—Nottingham Forest.

He knew the team. The history from last century's late 1970s and early 1980s was too far away for him but the red team that won the UEFA Champions League titles for two years in a row in 2007 and 2008 to become the first team to defend the Champions League title since the reform, was world famous and without parallel for a moment. During that time, Hoffenheim was still working hard to be promoted to Bundesliga from the 3. Liga and 2. Bundesliga tournaments. The club's Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Rotthaus, always used Tony Twain's team to inspire the young blue-and-white team—“One day, we will be like the Nottingham Forest team! This is by no means an impossible dream!”

They almost succeeded...

Later with Manager Tony Twain's sudden heart attack, the team, known to create miracles, suddenly lost its miraculous halo and, at one point, even lost the chance to play in the European competition. It was not until they squeezed out Chelsea in that thrilling final stage of last season that they were able to qualify for next season's UEFA Champions League.

He thought the team's experience was very similar to his at that time, but he did not think he'd receive an offer from Nottingham Forest.

He told the agency that he had to think it over. Now he was not confident enough to say, “I just want to finish my current contract with the club.”

Maybe a change of place can bring about new changes? There was such a voice in the deepest part of him.

Chapter 746: The Drifter

Rotthaus was the Chief Executive Officer of the TSG 1899 Hoffenheim club and the man who gave the club an injection of funds to determine the direction was the owner, Dietmar Hopp. But the man in charge of all the specific affairs was this middle-aged man.

He used to be the head of marketing at the Bundesliga elite squad, VfB Stuttgart. He resigned from Stuttgart in 2005 and accepted Hopp's offer to move to a small team that was still in the 3. Liga tournament at the time. It actually took some courage to make such a choice. After all, Rotthaus did well in Stuttgart and had a satisfactory income. There did not seem to be a need to change places and start from scratch. He could get stuck in a quagmire going to a small team in 3. Liga if he was not careful. But after months of deliberation, he decided to come to Hoffenheim to make something out of it.

If it were to be compared to the Hoffenheim team when he first came, he had already succeeded.

They finished second in the Bundesliga in the first season they were promoted to Bundesliga and even cultivated two Germany national footballers and the best striker in the Bundesliga and Europe. Their results in the second season were not as good as the previous season but they were situated securely in the Bundesliga. At least they had no worries about relegation. Their original plan was to secure a place in the Bundesliga in two years' time.

Neither Hopp nor he was in a hurry to forge Hoffenheim into a team that could win the title. Hopp had invested heavily to first build the new training base and stadium, as well as to look for young players. They did not buy the big-name star players.

From this point of view, they were equally a miracle maker, but they were a far cry from Nottingham Forest.

Last season, news of Rangnick's impending dismissal from the club circulated so much that Hopp immediately instructed Rotthaus to offer Rangnick a new five-year contract. News of the manager's contract renewal quickly appeared in the major news media, and the rumors were discredited.

Rotthaus was not disappointed with what happened to the team last season as it was within his expectations. The ones who were disappointed were only total strangers who had high hopes for Hoffenheim.

Rotthaus had a big dream, probably bigger than that of his boss, Hopp. He wanted to make Hoffenheim a club that could survive without relying on Hopp's investment and be kept afloat. Like the famous football clubs that already existed in the world, the investors could be changed many times over, but the team would always exist. He and Hopp would grow old and die one day. Hoffenheim could not fall to the seventh-tier tournament because of Hopp's departure. They should have the ability to continue to stay in the Bundesliga. He must let the team gradually move away from Hopp's investment and influence and become independent step by step.

Now there might be a chance to start the first step.

Just this morning, he received a fax from England.

Nottingham Forest had made an inquiry to him about whether the team's striker, Vedad Ibišević was for sale. The miracle of England and the miracle of Germany finally had its first formal contact.

He received numerous faxes like this last summer. At that time, he rejected them all without asking Hopp for advice. No ambitious club would sell its leading striker in its own team. Not to mention Hoffenheim was not short of money and would be competing in next season's Champions League. He did not think Ibišević would choose to leave.

There were much fewer such faxes this summer. The teams that were interested in "Super Ibi" had stated one by one that they would not sign the once-famous super striker. The teams that were still interested in Ibišević were only the second-rate teams in the top leagues, or second-tier leagues.

At the end of last season, the German press once quipped sarcastically, "Ibišević has always been a drifter mixing in in the lower level leagues in Europe. He has no problem adapting to that level of football. He may perhaps be successful starting from a different place again. To be honest, he's not a striker who can play in the top leagues..."

These remarks might be harsh, but many people truly thought that in their minds and thought that Ibišević's wild performance in Hoffenheim's debut in Bundesliga was just an accidental breakout. He was actually better suited to play in the lower league tournaments. Was it not evident that he showed his true level for the second season?

In fact, there was also debate within Hoffenheim about Ibišević's true level. Some people thought that he indeed had what it took to be the top striker, while others thought he was just lucky. It seemed reasonable on either side. The manager, Rangnick did not belong to either side, but he was also worried about Ibišević's sudden erratic performance.

When he first joined Hoffenheim while Hoffenheim still played in 2. Bundesliga, he made thirty-one appearances, mostly as a substitute and scored only just five goals. This figure was simply terrible for a striker. At that time, the local media believed that Hoffenheim had bought the wrong player, and Ibišević's experience from a long time had proved that he could not meet Hoffenheim's requirements. Everyone was not clear why Hoffenheim would be interested in Ibišević, who had not shown any abilities while he was still at Alemannia Aachen.

If it was not for the Beijing Olympics, perhaps Ibišević would have continued to sit on Hoffenheim's bench until his contract expired, or he would be dumped and sold by Hoffenheim to any club and be abandoned. But fate was often so wonderful, unpredictable, full of all kinds of changes and surprises.

His rise was not due to the fact that Rangnick had the foresight to recognize talent, but purely a coincidence. You know, just before the 08-09 season, he was only a substitute striker in the manager's mind. But the team's main striker, Obasi, would miss most of the team's preparations and the first few rounds of the season as he had to participate in the Beijing Olympics.

Ibišević was then able to make his mark in the first round of the league tournament.

It was Hoffenheim's debut in Bundesliga against Cottbus that became a legendary beginning. Never been thought highly of, acknowledged and noticed by others, the nobody, Vedad Ibišević scored twice in the game! He helped the team scored a major victory of 3:0 over Cottbus. Then he scored in every game and even scored twice in many games. Even if Obasi returned to the squad after he ended his run in the Olympics, Rangnick found that he could not let Ibišević who was in excellent form, play as a substitute at that time. But Obasi was also a very capable striker, he also could not bear to let the striker be on the bench. So, he simply modified his tactics and allowed Obasi, Wellington and Ibišević to play at the same time, using the more aggressive 4-3-3 formation! It produced a wonderful effect as a result and for a time, they were unstoppable in Bundesliga.

Ibišević became the best striker and Rangnick even added, "To me, he's like a player we've just brought in this season."

In the second season, Ibišević was bizarrely in a state of doldrums and Rangnick said again, "To me, he's like a player we've just brought in this season..."

The Bundesliga manager was also at a loss with regards to Ibišević.

Perhaps he should sell him?

The idea flashed through Rotthaus' mind.

But still he rebuffed Nottingham Forest and said they would not sell Ibišević for he was a big part of their team.

He did not receive Nottingham Forest's second fax. He thought the team must have given up. Perhaps they just asked casually...

He did not expect to receive the Nottingham Forest manager, Tony Twain and his German translator.

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"Hoffenheim is really a tranquil little village. I like it here... I would choose this kind of place to live."

Dressed like a tourist in a pair of sunglasses, Tony Twain and his German translator stood on the sidelines of the training ground and watched a person trained alone on the pitch across a barbed wire fence.

The time for normal training was over. The fans who had surrounded earlier had long since dispersed. Not many people stayed behind.

They were all fans of the man on the pitch.

Vedad Ibišević was giving himself extra shooting drill on the training ground. It was a rigidly adhered procedure—half an hour extra practice after training every day. He was a striker and there was nothing more important than shooting.

Twain looked on from the sidelines. His shooting skill was very good. Perhaps it was due to his long-term persistence in training.

Half an hour passed quickly. Instead of going straight to the locker room, Ibišević came over to sign autographs for the fans waiting outside.

With a height of 1.89 meters tall and a weight of eighty kilograms, he was sturdy but not heavy. He stood behind the barbed wire fence and signed autographs for the fans. Then he walked up to Tony Twain.

Twain passed the blue Hoffenheim jersey with Ibišević's name and number that he had just bought in the souvenir shop outside through the fence, along with a marker pen as well as a business card.

No fans would hand over their business cards when they asked him for autographs. Ibišević looked up somewhat strangely at the middle-aged man in sunglasses.

“Tony Twain. It’s very nice to meet you, Ibišević.” The man outside made the first move to introduce himself.

The name sounds familiar... Wait a minute!

Ibišević widened his eyes and asked directly in English, “Are you the Nottingham Forest manager? What are you doing here?”

“Because Nottingham Forest is interested in you.” Twain grinned.

Three days had passed since he received the call from his agent’s company. He had not yet given a reply to his agent’s company. Because he did not know whether he should leave here and whether he should go to Nottingham Forest. There was more than one team interested in him besides Nottingham Forest.

“I had watched the videos of you playing football. But I thought it was better to see it with my own eyes when it came to matters such as this, so I’m here. Do you have extra practice every time you finish training?”

Ibišević nodded.

“No wonder your success was no accident. So, what do you think? Do you want to go to England with me? I’ll help you find your form again and get it back in the Champions League.” Twain laughed like a demon who was seducing the mortals.

Ibišević was silent for a moment and then shrugged, “I don’t know how to answer you, Mr. Twain. Maybe a change of place will bring new experiences, but I still have a contract with the club. If the club doesn’t let me go, then it’s no use saying anything.”

“Well, you just have to show the club that you’re thinking of changing to a different environment and leave the rest to us.” Twain patted his chest.

“I know Nottingham Forest is a team that is going to play in the Champions League the new season, but I don’t understand why you come to me.” There was another question that Ibišević did not understand. In his view, a team that was capable to compete for the title should go after those well-known star players. Anyway, the financial crisis was still in progress, those big-name star players were not expensive.

“I only buy players who meet my requirements and never care if they are famous or not, whether they are big names or not. You’re the one I need, Ibi. Come to my team and I’ll give you a bigger stage.”

Ibišević was silent for a moment and then nodded, “Okay, Mr. Twain. If you can convince my club, I will give priority to the Forest team for the signing of a contract.”

With that, he was going to leave but he did not expect Twain to stop him and said, “An autograph.” He pointed to the jersey still in Ibišević’s hand, “I’m your fan. Give me an autograph.”

Ibišević signed his jersey somewhat reluctantly and handed it back. But he kept the business card.

He felt that it was indeed time to change places. Anyway, he was always changing teams, from America to France, from France to Germany, and now it would just be from Germany to England. It was no big deal. He changed teams almost every year. Hoffenheim was the team he had ever been with the longest. What did the European media call him?

The Drifter.

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On the same afternoon, Twain brought his German translator and met with the Hoffenheim club's Chief Executive Officer, Rotthaus.

The two sides held a secret meeting.

No one knew what they discussed. The outside world did not even know about Tony Twain's sudden trip to this small village, south of Frankfurt, Germany, to meet Rotthaus.

A day later, Nottingham Forest and the Hoffenheim club officials announced at the same time that the former European Golden Shoe winner, Vedad Ibišević would transfer to Nottingham Forest for a transfer fee of ten million euros plus an exchange of players. The two parties signed a four-year contract with an undisclosed annual salary.

The German media only met Tony Twain returning to Nottingham with Ibišević at the airport in Frankfurt.

"He's the player I need." After being surrounded by the reporters at the airport, Twain did not care about the doubtful voices. "I'm not concerned about what you think of him. I bought him for me, not for you. Inferior foreign imports? If you are so sure of a player's future development, why don't you quit to become an agent? I promise you'll have more money prospects than wracking your brains to make up stories in the papers!"

"What are you unhappy about? From now on, Ibi is my man and a Nottingham Forest player. He's someone who is going to be a registered player in the English Premier League. The German media has no say in it."

"I believe in his ability, and I'd like to give him a chance to prove himself again...I have a problem with my judgment, you say? Sure, but for me to be able win the championship titles, it's precisely because of those 'foreign imports' that I had chosen."

"Am I wasting the club's money? It's my prerogative. Why do you care?"

...

Amid the noise and doubts, Ibišević was pulled by Twain on a flight from Germany to the United Kingdom.

Eleven years ago, at the age of fifteen, Ibišević left his war-torn homeland and briefly stayed in Switzerland. Because he did not have legal residency due to visa problems, he moved again and traveled across the ocean to St. Louis in America to rely on help from his relatives. He stuck to his professional football dream in the United States, a country that was a barren land for football. He relied on his outstanding performances in the local team for the manager of the France Ligue 1 powerhouse club, Paris Saint-Germain to take an interest in him. Following which, he returned to Europe again. He was only nineteen at that time. He was then loaned out to the small Ligue 2 team, Dijon FCO. He grew up quickly there, received chances to play, even scored some goals and learnt a lot of new experiences. Then he was released by Paris Saint-Germain from his contract. He faced a situation like that of a young

man without any prospects. Fortunately, his last two games in Dijon were watched by a German agent who recommended him to two German teams. He chose to join Alemannia Aachen, which was still in the Bundesliga at the time. He only played for Aachen for a year when Aachen was unfortunately relegated. Wearing the number 9 jersey, he did not make any great contribution to the team. This time he chose to leave Aachen and moved to another German team, Hoffenheim in 2. Bundesliga.

He made thirty-one appearances in his first season and scored only five goals. In the second season, he was Bundesliga's top striker and the European Golden Shoe winner. During his third season, he was said to have "scored all the goals in his lifetime in one season." Just like a shooting star, he rose rapidly from the horizon, and quickly vanished in the vast sky.

He had been unknown before and had been red-hot popular. He had succeeded before and failed as well. He had experienced big things and had also once persist in his ideals in a plight that others could not imagine. He believed that one day he would succeed. Eleven years on, he was no longer the kid who had fled with his parents. He became a professional footballer, lived in a spacious house, had his own car and enjoyed the cheers of the fans. He had changed a lot.

But one thing had never changed—he was always drifting, from one place to another.

This time, the drifter, Ibi embarked on an entirely new journey.

He might continue to drift and live out the label of "The Drifter." Perhaps he would stop his wandering and choose a place as his last stop.

Would it be the forest that the heroic robber, Robin Hood once settled his debts of gratitude and hatred?

Chapter 747: Let's Make a Wager!

Twain's swift decision to sign Vedad Ibišević shocked the British media.

The media was well aware that Twain intended to buy a 'quality' forward from before, and they had linked numerous players to Nottingham Forest all this while. Nobody would have guessed that Twain would end up buying Ibišević, who was an ordinary player that no one thought highly of!

Some media outlets commented that if Twain's signing of Ibišević was not to go against the media, then there must be something wrong with his brain. Other outlets expressed a different opinion, they believed that if Twain's sole intention behind the signing was to go against the media, then his brain was definitely out of whack.

"Twain has actually placed his hopes on a player who so far has only played well for one season. Ibišević has spent 90% of his footballing career playing against lower-ranked leagues, and even then, his performance has been terrible. What did Twain say a while back? 'Our goal is to win the Champions League'. Now, would you allow me to laugh for three minutes..."

Carl Spicer was very excited on a TV show, because he had just found a reason to attack Twain. He smiled gleefully in the show 'Football Matters'.

Ever since Twain had really led his team to fourth place in the Premier League and successfully earned the spot to play in next season's Champions League, Carl Spicer has been in for a rough time. Twain chastised Spicer in his own column, and Spicer was not able to do a single rebuttal against his words.

Before the Premier League started, Spicer had gone on and on about how he did not think highly of Forest. He was confident that they would not perform well in the league, but who knew, at the end of the league, Twain's team had really accomplished what he thought was impossible for them. His 'juvenile footballers' had won. Carl Spicer got slapped in the face and he could do nothing but swallow the pain. After all, he could not be a 'crazy dog' like Twain and scold everything regardless of the reason. If he wants to criticize Twain, then he could not become just like the person he criticized. He had always asserted that he was 'impartial' and he needed to maintain that image of him before the masses.

This was the chance he has been waiting for after feeling aggrieved for the past few months. He finally has a reason to admonish Twain openly. He definitely had to scorn and ridicule Twain to his heart's content in the show.

"I don't deny the miracle that Hoffenheim had created in the 2008-09 season. I also felt excited to see them achieve the things that they did. But clearly, Tony Twain is merely acting based on his emotions this time. He must also really like Hoffenheim just like me, because their performance probably reminds him of Nottingham Forest when they first made their return to the Premier League. However, you can't buy a player based on your emotions alone. If he had cooled his head and analyzed Ibišević's abilities as a player, then even a fool would have been able to tell that Ibišević is not a player who can attain success. I think the German media was spot on with one of their descriptions of Ibišević. He is a player who has scored his entire career's worth of goals in that one season where he performed well! Look at his stats for the 2009-10 season! It's beyond terrible..." Carl Spicer covered his face with his hand. "It is a waste to even spend 1.5 pounds on a player like him, let alone 10 million pounds and Petrov as a part of the deal. Rumor has it that Tony Twain personally made a trip over to Hoffenheim, and he had a secret meeting with Rotthaus. No one knows if there was some kind of secret deal made between them..."

Spicer claimed that 'no one knows' anything about Twain's secret meeting with Rotthaus, but he deliberately kept trying to direct everyone's attention towards it.

"I don't think we need to wait till the arrival of September the 1st. I can already award Ibišević with the titles of 'worst summer signing' and 'the biggest flop of the new Premier League season'. He is more than deserving of those awards! I've already prepared my popcorn and drinks and I'm ready to watch Tony Twain and Ibišević make a fool of themselves after the new season starts. Twain thinks Ibišević is going to end up becoming a superstar? He should thank the gods if Ibišević doesn't end up becoming a 'super big joke'!"

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Carl Spicer has never been alone and unsupported in his every criticism of Twain, because there were quite a few people in the media who questioned and disliked Twain.

It is also why he was able to land a job as a host for a new Sky TV show just by lambasting Twain.

The reason why he was seen as the leading figure for 'anti-Twain' sentiments was because he was always the first to criticize Twain, and has always used sharp expressions and words to attack him. Out

of all the critics of Twain, he was the most famous and resolute one. Others might change their opinions towards Twain on certain issues, but not Carl Spicer.

With this information as the context, it is not difficult to understand why the press conference where Twain introduced Ibišević to the media and the fans became yet another battlefield.

Carl Spicer personally made a trip to Nottingham as a reporter for Sky TV, and looked set for a showdown with Twain.

The press conference was scheduled to take place at 3 p.m. in the afternoon at City Ground stadium's press room.

A total of 30 reporters turned up for the press conference. Carl Spicer sat amongst them and had a pleasant chat with these individuals who were all of the same profession as him.

He never concealed his hostility towards Twain in the slightest during his conversations. He treated it as his trademark and went around bragging about it to others. He mentioned more than once during his chats with the other reporters that there was likely to be some inside story behind the transfer.

When Twain walked into the press room alongside Ibišević and the press officer, the entire room instantly quietened down. The reporters returned to their seats and silently waited for the segment where they could raise their hands and ask questions.

The moment Twain sat down, he saw a beaming Carl Spicer who was seated at the front rows. He was well aware of what Carl Spicer has been saying for the past two days, but he remained unaffected and began his introduction of Ibišević.

The introduction was nothing special. All the reporters present at the scene already knew Ibišević very well. What they wanted was to raise their hands and ask questions.

Ibišević also did a self-introduction after Twain finished speaking. He did not boast about his remarkable performance in the 2008-09 season, and neither did he mention his terrible performance last season. All he did was to praise the glorious past that Nottingham Forest possessed as a football club, and then humbly commented that he hoped to be able to contribute a little to the club.

When they had both finished talking, the press officer signaled that the floor was open and the reporters could ask questions freely.

Carl Spicer was the first to raise his hand. His arm shot straight up towards the ceiling. It was as though he was afraid that Tony Twain could not see him even though he was seated right in front of Twain.

The press officer, Sandy Albert, who has already established a good rapport with Twain, deliberately ignored Carl Spicer and directed his gaze towards a reporter at the back.

However, the reporter asked a question that was similar in nature to Carl Spicer's. "I am a reporter who works for The Times. I'd like to ask Mr. Twain this, Ibišević has not proven he possesses the abilities to play for a top team in a top football league besides his good performance in 2008-09 season. Do you think this transfer carries too much risk?"

"Every signing has its risks. I am not a clairvoyant. I only buy players whom I deem fit for my football team."

The second reporter who stood up works for England's 'FourFourTwo' football magazine. He was also concerned about whether Ibišević would be able to adapt to the Premier League and live up to the team's expectations.

Twain's reply was, "I believe he can adapt to the Premier League and can also live up to the team's expectations."

The reporter followed up with a question asking for a reason.

"He is physically strong and is an all-rounded striker. He is able to score goals on his own, and is also able to create chances for his team mates. He is able to put pressure on the defenders in the penalty box, and can also control the ball well. He also plays in a composed manner during games. These are all points that I can see from him through his past games. I cannot find any flaws to him."

"But he does not score goals consistently." The third reporter to ask questions was Carl Spicer. He kept his hand high throughout, and kept waving it before the press officer. Twain signaled to the press officer that it was all right to pick him.

Carl Spicer stood up and did not even bother doing a self-introduction. His very first comment was, "He only scored a lot of goals in that one season alone. His performance in the other seasons have proved that he is nothing more than a European player on the decline!"

Twain sneered. "You don't have the right to decide if a player is on a decline or not, Mr. Spicer."

He then glanced at Ibišević, who looked awkward but was trying his best to maintain his smile.

"How about this, Mr. Spicer. Why don't the two of us make a wager? If Ibišević scores a total of at least 20 goals in all the various competitions this season, then you'd have to shave your head. If he is unable to do that, then I'd shave my head. What do you think?"

Commotion broke out in the press room. Even Ibišević turned around to look at his manager in shock.

Twain just smiled confidently as he looked at Spicer.

Carl Spicer smiled as well. "Very well. I will make a wager. If I lose, I will shave my head in my show. If you lose, you have to specially hold a press conference and let everyone watch as you shave your head."

"Deal!"

This was a situation that nobody had expected to see. Both parties looked glad to see how things would unfold in the future.

The small commotion that arose as a result of the wager gradually vanished following Spicer's silence.

Everyone focused their attention back on Ibišević.

All the questions they directed at the Bosnian were still ones of skepticism.

Ibišević forced a smile as he dealt with the England media's acrimonious words.

In the end, Twain signaled for the press officer to end the press conference, and he brought Ibišević towards the stadium to meet with approximately three hundred fans.

The previous fan meeting involved both David Bentley and Matías Fernández. At that time, around 1500 fans had turned up. Majority of them had turned up to see England's starting right back David Bentley.

However, this time round, there were only around 300 fans who turned up for Ibišević's fan meeting. Most of them were related to Fat John, and they had all turned up for Twain.

There are numerous Nottingham Forest fans who did not think favorably of Ibišević's future at Nottingham Forest. They liked Twain, but they simply could not harbor high hopes for this new signing of his.

He was a player who has scored 37 goals in one season and had no particularly notable performances in the other seasons. His total number of goals scored in all those seasons combined might not even exceed 37...

A player like this was going to be a part of the Nottingham Forest during a time when their goal is to climb back to the top.

Such a player and such a situation seemed like something that will only appear in one of Hollywood's motivational movies.

They would not openly oppose to the club signing Ibišević, but this deserted stadium was a way of making their feelings known.

The good thing was that Ibišević has a good mentality. He never thought of himself to be a superstar, and never thought that he had to receive the cheers of tens of thousands of people.

Even if only 300 fans had turned up for him, or even if 99% of the 30 reporters were there to question him, he would still earnestly wear a smile on his face and show his skills in front of everyone. He would still hold up the club's jersey and scarf for the reporters to take photos, and he would still kick his signed football into the stands.

Truth be told, this was the biggest turnout he had seen in his career having joined numerous other football clubs before. What's more, all these people have all turned up just for him. He knew that most of them have turned up because he once scored 37 goals in a single season and nearly broke Gerd Müller's record, and also because he was lucky enough to get awarded the Golden Boot back then as well.

He could not ask for too much.

After the relatively quiet and unenthusiastic fan meeting ended, the staff carried the board that had Nottingham Forest's name and sponsors printed on it. The reporters and fans also left the stadium.

Before long, there were only two people left in the empty stadium.

Tony Twain and Ibišević.

The two of them stood at the spot where he tossed the signed football towards the fans.

Tony Twain was explaining how England's media is typically like to Ibišević.

“They are always like this. Every single one of them only follows where the wind blows, and they have no mind of their own. When you are good they will praise you, and when you are bad they will scold you. You don’t need to take their words to heart. For me, I am always on loggerheads with them. It doesn’t matter whether they praise or scold me. My opinion towards them never changes. As humans, we all ought to have things that we never waver on and persist with. The reporters are always changing their minds about something, but we don’t need to be like them.”

“The media’s the same wherever you go, manager...”

“Call me ‘boss’.”

“All right, boss.”

Ibišević was a down-to-earth man. His experiences from before have forced him to be so. Any unrealistic fantasies of his have long been sent to Mars. Knowing how to keep a low profile was something he picked up when he left his home country at 15 years of age.

“Do you have anything to say about how I had a bet with that reporter without your consent?”

“Me? I will try my best to help you win your bet...” Ibišević was still being low-key as usual.

“No no.” Twain shook his head like a rattle-drum. “That’s not what you are supposed to say at a time like this. You have to say ‘No problem, boss! I will personally shave that bastard’s head!’.”

Twain laughed after seeing Ibišević’s puzzled expression. “This is how we do things at Nottingham Forest. And also... This is not just to help me, it’s to help you, Ibi. The one who has it worse when you don’t perform is not me, it’s you. I will put you on the bench or in the reserve team when you don’t perform well, and I won’t show you any mercy. It doesn’t matter how much money I spent to acquire you. I might be smiling to you today, but my face might go dark tomorrow and I might chase you out of the team. I’m sure you have experienced many of such situations in the past. You don’t need me to elaborate further right?”

Ibišević nodded his solemnly.

Twain slapped his broad back hard.

“You can lose games but never your face. You must never let others get you down. You must go against them when they question you. You must never admit defeat. I don’t care what you think in your heart. You must keep your lips sealed till the end.”

“But... If I really lost...”

“I never think about things that have not happened. I’d only say it when I’ve already lost the bet and have to shave my head.”

Twain called for Ibišević to leave.

“I promise you, you will fall in love with this place. This place has the best fans, the best team mates, and the best manager.” Twain broke into a radiant smile.

The two walked side by side and disappeared down the tunnel.

Chapter 748: Players Come and Go

Since Ibišević was only a target late to join, and because of his poor performance last season, his transfer fee plummeted, for the striker position that was supposed to be the most expensive, the Forest team spent only fifteen million euros, or about fourteen million pounds. Taking into account the costs of Bentley and Fernández and the further injection of five million pounds, the fifty-five-million-pound transfer budget was left with sixteen million.

What was sixteen million enough for?

Twain decided to bolster the right back positions. The right back position had become a common headache in the world. A good right back was currently hard to find. Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos, Barcelona's Dani Alves, Inter Milan's Maicon, Arsenal's Sagna, ... were all among the best in the world. However, Nottingham Forest definitely could not buy such a player.

Twain could only start with a younger player who was less famous than them.

After a selection, he set the target for AS Monaco's full back, Nicolas Nkoulou.

The twenty-year-old Cameroonian young player had been playing as the main force in Monaco for a season. In the 07-08 season, he went to the France Ligue 1 team, AS Monaco for a trial and received recognition from the Monaco team, which signed a contract with him. He played in the Monaco First Team in the second season. Following which, he was the mainstay in the 09-10 season.

Nkoulou could handle both the right back and center back positions. As a center back, his height of slightly less than 1.8 meters was like the fly in the ointment, but he did a good job in the right back position. He even also guest starred as the goalkeeper once when he played for the Cameroon national team. He was a "multi-faceted player."

In fact, Nkoulou was noticed by the Nottingham Forest scouts two years ago, and the Forest team had asked him to come to England for a trial. But at that time, he chose to go to the France Ligue 1 to try his luck, instead of accepting the Forest team's invitation.

It was not just Nottingham Forest that was optimistic about his future. Wenger's Arsenal had been at the forefront in search of young talent from around the world and had long been interested in Nkoulou.

The two clubs made their moves at the time this summer. Nottingham Forest had a slight edge due to its previous contact with Nkoulou.

Monaco knew that they would not be able to keep a player like Nkoulou in the small team. Therefore, rather than force him to stay, it was better to sell for a good price early. Nkoulou had also expressed his desire to play in Europe's top leagues and the France Ligue 1 was no longer able to satisfy him.

They compared Nottingham Forest's offer to Arsenal's and decided to raise the price of Nkoulou to twelve million pounds.

Arsenal turned down their return asking price. It was crazy that a player who was only twenty years old and had not proved himself in a European major competition to be able to sell for twelve million pounds

in Wenger's view. After all, Nkoulou was not the kind of player with a special talent like Messi, Bojan, and Wilshere. It was absolutely not worth twelve million for such a player.

Tony Twain also rejected the offer. But he sent another offer over—eight million pounds.

Monaco thought it was too low and they asked for eleven million pounds in return.

In return, the Forest team made a bid of nine million. This time, it was Allan Adams who personally flew to Monaco with the offer.

After a round of negotiations, Monaco agreed to sell Nkoulou for nine and half million pounds.

It was not known how Arsenal heard the news. They also put in an offer of nine and a half million to steal Nkoulou away.

Twain was furious about the news, which he thought Monaco had deliberately leaked out in order to keep the price higher. But unexpectedly Arsenal was also very clever and offered nine and a half million, not a cent more.

Twain's fear was that Nkoulou would choose Arsenal over himself. Since Nottingham Forest's promotion to the Premier League, he had competed against Arsenal on a number of occasions in the transfer market and spoiled things for Wenger. But Wenger had also robbed a lot of players he had his eye on.

But this time, he beat Wenger.

Nkoulou was more familiar with and knew Nottingham Forest better. Not to mention it was not the first time Nottingham Forest had come to him. He almost became a member of the Forest team at the time. Emotionally, he preferred Nottingham Forest and not Arsenal, which was known throughout the world for placing young players in important positions.

Nkoulou was a sentimental man, and Tony Twain heavily played the emotional card. He eventually managed to get Nkoulou to sign the contract.

The club then announced that the twenty-year-old right back, Nicolas Nkoulou had transferred to Nottingham Forest for a fee of nine and a half million pounds and signed a five-year deal.

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While signing new players, Nottingham Forest also sold their players to other teams. After all, one way to control costs was to control the salary budget. If there were too many First Team players, paying salaries alone was a big burden for the club.

Sun Jihai was the first to leave the team. Twain had already given him a heads up before the end of the season that the Forest team would not renew his contract even when his contract expired. He wanted to hurry up and find his next team before his one-year contract expired.

Sun Jihai was an understanding person. He also knew that he did not have the strength to stay on in such a championship title-oriented team. He would love to stay in the English Premier League, but the reality was brutal. Until July, all the Premier League clubs rumored to be interested in him were still stuck at the rumor stage.

The agent told him that there were now two paths ahead for him. One was to return to China to play football and enjoy life in retirement for the last two years. The second was to lower his expectations, go to the English Football League Championship to play for two more seasons, and then retire.

Sun Jihai did not intend to return to China. He even refused the invitation from his former owner, Dalian which trained and developed him. He chose to go to the English Football League Championship and signed a two-year deal with Sheffield United. He would turn thirty-five when his contract with Sheffield United expired. He would be offered a one-year contract extension if he remained in a good form and ensured a steady number of appearances.

Sheffield United paid the Forest team a transfer fee of one million pounds in order to get Sun Jihai. Although Sun Jihai was already thirty-two years old, he was still a “championship level player” who had been with the team to win two UEFA Champions League titles and one league championship title. He was the Asian player with the most top European honors in Asia. Park Ji-sung at Manchester United was second.

Chimbonda had thought that Nkoulou’s arrival would lead to his departure. Although he had just renewed his contract with the Forest team, it was only one way to prevent the players from leaving on a free transfer of players after their contracts expired. Twain came to him first one day after training to talk with him alone and dispelled the doubts in his mind.

Twain told Chimbonda that regardless, he was a member of Nottingham Forest during the contract period and that the team needed his experience and defensive ability. Nkoulou was still young in any case and just a rotating player.

The shift in Twain’s attitude toward Chimbonda stemmed from last season. The team had been in poor form, but Chimbonda’s performance was impressive. His steady play as a right back was the team’s guarantee of a fourth-place finish in the league tournament. With Rafinha having some injuries last season and low attendance, they depended on Chimbonda alone most of the time. The older Chimbonda’s level had fallen not as fast as Twain thought, and he remained at a high-level last season.

Perhaps because of the right mentality, Chimbonda made Twain sit up and take notice again.

People said a friend in need was a friend indeed. During the team’s most difficult 07-08 and 08-09 seasons, Chimbonda helped the team with his steady play. Now it was time for the team to repay Chimbonda. The team offered him a new contract last winter, and this summer, Twain told him he could play here with confidence till his retirement—when that contract expired, Chimbonda could no longer physically play even if he wanted to.

Twain was planning a long-term goal—he wanted to develop as much as possible the players’ sense of belonging and loyalty to the team. Unless it was someone he wanted to get rid of, he wanted these players to still have feelings for the team even when they were older. Like the other big teams, they had a unique culture to retain their own players.

Twain hoped that in a few years’ time, Nottingham Forest would produce a Paulo Maldini, Ryan Giggs, Gerrard...

In addition to Sun Jihai, Martin Petrov was the second Forest player to leave in the summer.

Twain paid ten million euros plus an exchange of players to bring in Ibišević, and the player who was traded was Martin Petrov.

Hoffenheim was interested in Petrov and Nottingham Forest was interested in Ibišević. The two sides found common ground in this regard. In fact, this was the main content of the talks during the meeting between Twain and Rotthaus.

Martin Petrov was mentally prepared to leave the Forest team and going to Hoffenheim was not bad for him. Hoffenheim had now shed their “newly promoted team” label and become a mid-level team in the Bundesliga. Playing for that kind of team was not insulting for him. Moreover, the Hoffenheim boss had the money to meet his demands in terms of pay package.

After the agreement between the clubs was reached and the player had also reached an agreement with the team, the deal was successfully settled.

As precisely stated before, Nicolás Millán and Víctor Moses were loaned out by the club to two newly promoted Premier League teams, Southampton and Norwich City.

Twain hoped they could rely on their strength to work hard, gain valuable experience and receive training in unfamiliar teams to grow into the players he needed.

Like them, there was also Adriano Moke. He was loaned out by the club to another Premier League club, Blackburn Rovers. Since selling Bentley, Blackburn Rovers had been looking for another player on the right wing. They were interested in the technically excellent Moke. On the principle that Twain wanted the young man to receive more training and experience more competitions, so he agreed to Blackburn Rovers’ request to loan Moke.

Whereas Moke himself was no longer that proud and arrogant youth who was disgusted that he was loaned out and had to play in the reserve team. He also believed that a loan to play in tournaments at the moment was the best move to improve his level. He agreed to play for Blackburn Rovers for a season.

This was basically what happened this summer. Twain did not carry out a purge on the lineup because there was no need. His players did a great job last season. Otherwise he would not have the chance to return to Europe in a year’s time. The players brought in were just to complement a few positions which were slightly lacking in strength such as the two wingers and a striker. The preservation of the overall structure of the team was the main reason why Twain was filled with confidence for the new season. He was most familiar with this group of players. He understood the characteristics of each of them and knew how to use them well.

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Another good news that was no less happy than the signing of the new players was that van Nistelrooy was finally back on the pitch after a long recovery from surgery!

In the 15th round of the league tournament on November 29th, 2008, the Dutchman was injured in the Nottingham Forest’s home game victory of 3:1 over West Bromwich Albion. He took a full year to recover from the surgery, rather than the eight months previously reported in the media. He did not return to the team until January 2010 but spent most of his time struggling with a knee injury and was

not nimble throughout. Twain did not dare to send him back on the field, not even in the reserves. He was afraid that his body could no longer stand up to the strain.

Born on July 1st, 1976, he just turned thirty-four years old.

A year and seven months after he left the team with an injury, he was finally ready to play again. He made an appearance as a substitute in the Forest team's friendly match against the Scottish Premiership elite team, Celtic.

Twain gave him thirty minutes to play. Although he did not score, Twain and all the coaching staff were not concerned about van Nistelrooy's performance, but his knee. After the game, Fleming did a medical examination of van Nistelrooy and found that there was nothing wrong with the operated knee, so everyone slightly put their minds at ease.

In a rather good mood, Twain even joked with the reporters who interviewed him the day after the game, "Our fourth signing of the summer has been confirmed!"

When the reporters asked in surprise about who the fourth Forest player was, Twain laughed and solved the mystery, "Ruud van Nistelrooy!"

Van Nistelrooy was in the starting lineup in a subsequent match against the League One team, Walsall and scored a penalty shot, which made the Forest fans cheered and celebrated.

From the looks of it, things were developing in the right direction.

Twain often joked with van Nistelrooy during training, as if it was not a relationship between a manager and a player.

The newly joined Forest players were a little surprised, but the old players would laugh and tell them, "It's normal since Boss is that kind of guy."

But in fact, they only got half of it right.

Twain was so close to van Nistelrooy because half of it was he had a better relationship with van Nistelrooy than the other players. The Forest team now had a lot of players, but for Tony Twain, there were not many players he could recall from his memories in his two lives.

Hierro, Albertini, Beckham, van der Sar, Ayala whom he considered were gone. Only van Nistelrooy was still in the team now.

It was as if his old friends around him had originally planned to travel together, but after traveling on the road for some time, he was focused on enjoying the scenery along the way. When he thought of the friends around him, he turned to look back but instead found that there was only one person left next to him.

It was an emotion that was hard to explain to others. It was not that a relationship which was on I paid for you, so you came to play for me.

Van Nistelrooy had two years left on his contract with Nottingham Forest and Twain hoped that van Nistelrooy would be offered another year extension after his contract expired. He would be thirty-seven years old by then.

Then when he retired at Nottingham Forest, Twain must offer van Nistelrooy the best farewell match, just as he had promised Albertini at that time.

He did not want that day to come, but he looked forward to its arrival as well.

Chapter 749: Leaving the Life of Football

After the training session, Van Nistelrooy did not go to the parking lot after showering in the changing room, as there might be hardcore fans waiting for his signature. He went straight to the head coach's office and knocked on the door.

After training, the players could take a bath, change their clothes and go home, but the coaches often gathered and handed over the report of today's training to Twain so he could understand the situation of the team firsthand.

Now, as Twain was looking at the reports, he heard a knock at the door and thought it was Dunn. He said without looking up, "The door isn't locked, just come in."

Van Nistelrooy pushed the door and said, "Sir."

Twain looked up and found it was van Nistelrooy, and he was a little surprised: "What's the matter, Ruud?"

Van Nistelrooy nodded, "Well, there is something I've been thinking about for a long time. I think it's better to tell it to you, sir. "

Twain put down his training report. "My contract with the club doesn't expire until June 30, 2012, right?"

Twain nodded. " Yes. If your performance is stable, I'm going to extend your contract for another year..."

Van Nistelrooy shook his head, "No, sir. I have decided to retire after this season."

Twain startled in his seat. He thought he misheard Twain, sitting in a chair, could feel his body moved on its own as he thought he had misheard: "Sorry? "

"I said, I'm going to retire after this season, sir." Van Nistelrooy had no choice but to repeat himself.

Twain felt like he would like to ask loudly once again, not because he misheard but out of a mix of disappointment, anger and shock which induced his impulse. But he abandoned the idea and stood up.

"Today isn't April Fool's Day, Ruud." He smiled with a little reluctance.

"I'm not kidding, sir."

"Your body is recovering well and I can't figure out why you'd want to resign in advance.

"It only looks good on the surface, sir. And retiring at thirty-five isn't early. "

"If your injury hasn't healed, I can continue to let you heal. I'm not in a hurry, you do not have to worry..."

Van Nistelrooy laughed, "This is exactly what I'm worried about, sir. I'm a professional footballer, not a guy sitting on the bench or in the stands, on the injury list, drawing a salary without playing any games. I've been out for a whole season and a half, and if I were to continue to be absent, it's better for me to announce my retirement now."

"Hey, Ruud." Twain's tone was a little harsher. "We're allowing you to miss more than a season of games now so you can play longer in the future."

"Sir, why would a 34-year-old striker want to play longer?" "

Van Nistelrooy's rebuttal stunned Twain.

Yes, at thirty-four, it was basically a season-by-season situation where you could either get injured or retire at any time. Why would he want to ask van Nistelrooy to play till he was thirty-six or thirty-seven?

"Hey, Ruud. If I say I don't want you to retire and that I wanted you to keep kicking, would you believe it?" "

Van Nistelrooy smiled and didn't answer, obviously he did not believe it. It was just not something a head coach would say.

Twain laughed too, treating it as a joke.

"I think your experience can aid the team."

Van Nistelrooy believed this explanation, but he shook his head. "I'm not the only one who has experience. The Gypsies are good. Before moving to Nottingham Forest, I just wanted to prove to Ferguson how bad it was to let me go, but I never thought we would be champions in the future. Now I don't want to prove anything to anyone, I've got everything I needed to,; my career is perfect. To be honest, sir, I don't have the motivation to keep playing. And you hate people who don't have the motivation to play, right?" "

Van Nistelrooy stood in front of Tony Twain with a crooked smile under the afternoon sun. Twain opened his mouth as if there was something he wanted to say.

"I don't need to use honor to push myself. I don't think it's wise to stay with Nottingham Forest without a sense of honor. It's better to retire and give up the opportunity and my position to the younger players."

"Did you make this decision because I bought Ibišević?" "

"No. I thought it over as I was lying in my hospital bed in the United States. Don't you think it's a way to help the club ease its financial burden?" He laughed.

Twain could not smile as he looked at Van Nistelrooy with a serious face.

"Anyway, I've decided, sir. I'm not going to play another season. I want to spend more time with my family in the future. Sir, you're also married, can't you understand where I'm coming from? Whether it's football or not, the point of doing anything is all about making money, and the point of making all that money is so I can spend time with my family family. I felt like I've reached this last stage."

Van Nistelrooy had a smile on his face throughout.

Twain knew he couldn't convince the Dutchman. Retiring was one of the most important decisions of a professional footballer's life, and his ability to say it out meant he had thought about it for a long time. This consideration was not easily influenced by others. He sighed, a little disheartened..

"I think I'm a failure, Rudd. Whether it's you, or Demi, or David, I've tried persuading all of you but I've never succeeded. You never let me do what I want."

Van Nistelrooy smiled and did not respond to Twain's words. He knew that Twain had already agreed, but this stubborn man did not want to accept so easily.

"Can I ask you what do you plan to do after you retire?" "

"Go home, back to Holland to spend time with my wife and children. "

When Twain heard him say so, he suddenly had a feeling of being a "landowner". He laughed, " If the weather is good then, you would lie in the yard under the sun? "

"Maybe I'll plant some flowers, teach my children to play football, go shopping with my wife, travel around..." Van Nistelrooy laughed as well. Life as a retiree seemed very attractive to him=. He could finally stop thinking about training, playing matches, how to stay in shape every day, thinking about the game, thinking about how to stay in shape, thinking about ruthlessly fighting with someone for ninety minutes... about the premier league's current record of the most goals and the second-most goals in Champions League history, these auras will be away from him, and he would not care.

" It's an enviable life..."

Twain sighed, put away the report on the table, and walked up to Van, "Let's go home. "

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Watching Van Nistelrooy driving out of Wilford, Twain was still leaning on the Mercedes Jeep that Shania had given him. Today's weather is good, the Nottingham's vicinity was vibrant, although it was still hot, but it is better than constant raining day till night.

He suddenly wanted to bask in the blazing sun.

He never thought about what he would do after leaving football. Not to think about training and the opponent of the next round as the first thing to do every day, most of the day just sitting in the sun doing sunbathing and playing with the kids till the evening.

He felt that he would be very old when that day comes.

The phone in his pocket rang.

"Hey, Uncle Tony!" Shania's voice popped up just as Twain received a call on his phone.

"Ha, Shania. "

"Is it two training sessions today? "

"Well, no. What's wrong? "

"I was waiting for you until the lunch got cold!" Shania was very angry.

Twain then raised his wrist to look at the watch, discovering that it was already one.

"Ah, I'm sorry, Shania! I was dealing with things and being so busy I've forgotten, I'll come out right away..." Twain said, while he was holding the phone and hurriedly driving towards the door.

Van was right, he is also a man with a family, he could understand this want to be with his family.

"I am hanging up, Shania. I promise..."

Shania interrupted him: "Slow down, don't be hastily until you run into something bad. I'm just a little worried that you haven't come back yet. Now, I'm okay, you drive slowly."

Twain opened his mouth but said nothing.

See you later, Uncle Tony." Shania was visibly in a better mood, as she gave a little kiss on the phone and hung up.

Twain was still holding his cell phone and keeps his same stance as he got onto the car.

Why play football?

In order to make money.

Then why make money?

In order to be able to have time with family.

But in order to make money, there is no time to spend with family.

Then...

Players can play until the age of thirty-four or five and choose to retire, and they have most of their lives to spend with their loved ones. What about a head coach? Ferguson is 70 years old and still in his position as Manchester United manager...

Former Liverpool manager John Houlier was only home twice a year, once on his wife's birthday and once on Christmas during his busiest period. He stayed at the hotel most of his time with the team.

England's head coach is the world's highest-paid coaching position and also the "perfume" in the eyes of many but in fact many England's head coaches have been avoiding this position. Aside from the extraordinary pressure, it is the fact that being England's head coach is more busy than a club manager – an England manager is almost as busy as a head of state. As a club manager every day there will be some time of his own, if this person is good at time management. But as England manager, he must stick to his job 24 hours a day.

Twain thought he was lucky, and he had helpers like Dunn and Kerlake to help him with matters, so he could share some private moments with Shania. If he is the head coach who must handle everything, there might not even be time to flirt with Shania. But even so, when he's busy, Shania will retreat to a small corner of his life. Even so, he knew that he would sometimes neglect Shania. Especially when taking the team to play away from home, or a week with two matches, in order to conveniently facilitate

the management of the team, and study tactics with his colleagues and work, he would stay in a hotel. Even if he was in Nottingham.

It would be good if Shania was busy outside as well. If Shania returns to Nottingham, waiting for her would be only a big house in black paint and desertedness.

These times he will be full of guilt, but only guilt. He could not leave his job to spend time with his wife, and he could not even make additional phone calls. The players only needed to think about matters on the training ground and in the game, the manager needs to consider ten times more, as long as Twain was free he would be always thinking about things like this, like a machine which functioned forever.

Sometimes even with Shania, he would be absent-minded. It was not rare for Shania to be angry with him about this.

It is impossible for no conflicts in the life of a married couple, Shania and Tony are both very rigid people. But in every quarrel, Twain always gave in to Shania, once Shanai got mad, he would immediately soften down, anyway he just needed to be hard in bed just like during that call.

Because he knew that Shania was a very sensible girl, and she was unhappy because he gave insufficient concern usually — his mind was always on football, and it has been like this since they just met until now. Before their relationship was uncertain, she would be jealous quietly, but now it was openly envy.

Of course he can't leave the job, so he could only take the initiative to admit that he was wrong every time Shania is unhappy. As a gentleman, one should be able to have an open mind, what is the big deal!

Van Nistelrooy's reason for retiring gave him a push today, making him want to have that kind of days as well. Not needing to think or worry about anything, just needing to be with his family, he could even be content under the blazing sun of summer.

He began to think very carefully – when would he choose to retire?

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Shania waited at home Twain to come, and she was going to turn around and take the cold meals into the microwave to heat up. But she was hugged by Twain from behind instead.

“Hey, Uncle Tony?” Shania was able to feel Twain's nose coming and going around in her back, and she was a little surprised by Twain's sudden gesture of affection.

“Do you have any plans for the afternoon?” Twain buried his face on Shania's shoulder and asked.

“No, I do not.”

“Do you have anywhere you want to play at?”

“What's wrong with you, Uncle Tony? I'm not angry about what happened just now...” Shania struggled gently, but she felt Twain hugged with greater strength.

“Ruud was retiring, and I advised him to stay but did not succeed. He said he wanted to spend more time with his family. I suddenly felt a little envious of him...” Twain lay behind Shania, sniffing her hair and muttering.

“Where do you want to go?” He asked again.

Shania let him lie on his shoulder and said, “Don’t want to go anywhere.”

Twain rolled his eyes. “You still said you weren’t angry.”

“If you continue to hold me and not let me go and heat up the food then I’ll really get angry!”

Twain hurriedly loosened his hands, but still sniffed with a little affection. “There’s an idiom in China which meant looking at beautiful women would allow one to forget about hunger... actually I’m not hungry.”

“Gynophagia?” Shania frowned.

Twain was in a state of shock.

The word can also be translated literally in English as “beauty dining”, but it is represented in the Chinese idiom “beauty dining” as a whole different scenario.

Chinese idioms say “beauty dining” to praise women or beautiful scenery. But in English the word “Gynophagia” literally means – “eat a woman”, which is not romantic at all, it simply meant eating. This is a kind of fetishism, which often leads to sexual fantasies with violent and rape fantasies.

“ Ah! Uncle Tony, you’re a pervert!” Shania cried.

“Nonsense! I’m talking about ‘xiusekecan’ of Oriental culture, not ‘Gynophagia’! They mean two things! Twain was in a hurry to defend. Even when he was married, he sometimes had an unstoppable sexual fantasy about Shania, but in all the fantasies he never fancied that he was going to cut Xenia’s head and then dismember her. . .That’s disgusting!

Shania looked at Uncle Tony, whose face had changed, and laughed slyly: “Uncle Grey Wolf is hungry. She set the food aside and began to unbutton her shirt.

Halfway through, Twain could already see the seductive rounded chest behind a thin shirt, with the sunlight coming in from behind the window and reflecting it in a hazy. It was like two jelly cakes wrapped in a layer of cream, and a gentle touch would cause it to wobble...Shania isn’t wearing a bra today.

He unwittingly swallowed a gasp.

Shania laughs even more when she sees him like this. She put her hands down, like walking on a Cat-shaped stage, walking cat-walking to Twain, who was standing at the kitchen door. She had a sexy and seductive smile which meant trouble as well.

When she walked up to Twain, she relaxed her arms around the neck of Twain and put her face onto him. Her eyes were covered with a layer of water vapor, which was blue, voice being like the honey sprinkled onto the butter cake, being excessively sweet.

“How does the Uncle Grey Wolf who is excessively hungry want to eat me?”

As Twain buried his face, his three last clear thoughts were,

“This type of life, on an afternoon, was too dirty!”

But if I retire now, there would be a lot of such afternoons ...

Oh my God! It is really delicious...

Chapter 750: Integration

After he was finished busy with the sales and purchases, Twain’s work was finally a little easier. The training that followed would mainly be taken care of by the whole coaching unit. He did not have to attend to everything personally.

When he had more free time, he would notice some things he had not noticed before.

For example:

“Strange, the preparations before the start of the season is in full swing and the media from around the world are gathering in Nottingham ... How come I don’t see your secret lover?” Twain asked Dunn the question in a joking manner.

Dunn did not refute this point. He was not that kind of person. He simply said, “She has resigned from the newspapers, so she won’t be here.”

Twain was a little surprised and said, “I thought that was just one of her tricks—she always likes to pull this...”

“It’s for real this time.” Dunn said casually, “Do you know what would happen if those remarks that you made were to appear intact in any of China’s regular media?”

Twain nodded reply, “I am also an authentic Chinese man.”

“In order to be able to publish smoothly, and not to get her father in trouble, she chose to resign, and then published alone. You saw...the consequences.”

“I more than saw it, and I had even experienced it firsthand...” muttered Twain.

In fact, Tang Jing’s actions somewhat threw him under the bus. But both of them were well aware that the effects and impact on Twain could be completely ignored. As an “Englishman”, he could speak freely without any scruples for the consequences, because he did not live in that circle and did not have to rely on that circle to survive.

Tang Jing did this only in hopes to get Twain to help her share the enormous pressure at the time. He succeeded in doing so and bawled the Chinese media out at the press conference. Almost no one paid attention to the instigator, Tang Jing. Then there was the World Cup. Now that the World Cup was over, it was time to settle the scores.

Tang Jing and Twain were completely different. Although she resigned, she still wanted to continue to be in that line of work. It would perhaps be somewhat difficult...it was expected that she would shut out.

He touched his nose and said, “Hey, I kind of miss her all of a sudden...Uhm, you’d better not get me wrong. I just feel that it’s too quiet without that noisy woman around ...”

Dunn did not respond to him. He just quietly finished his own business, and then walked away.

Twain pulled a face at him in the back.

As for Tang Jing’s matter, he really did not think she would actually resign. Now that he thought of it, he felt that it was a shame for the woman who would put on a tough stance at any time in order to make it in the men’s world...

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With less than half a month to go until the start of the new season, Twain had announced the end of Nottingham Forest’s transfer campaign this season.

“I’m happy with every pound that I’ve spent this summer and I think the four players are worth it. They have met my requirements and I personally decided to buy them. I’m optimistic about everything they have here. I made some requests to the club before the season on the transfer funds and I am delighted to have those requests satisfied. I have no other requests after spending the money. Now I’m just waiting for the new season to start. I can assure you that Nottingham Forest will remain a force to be reckoned with in the new season. Of course, given that the media always describe me as an untrustworthy rascal, so you can disbelieve my words. We’ll just have to see when the time comes.”

He wrote these words in his column,. The hint of hubris was utterly obvious—and he did not want to hide anything.

The whole world knew what Tony Twain wanted.

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Since betting with Twain at the press conference, Carl Spicer always kept the bet on the lips. Now all of England knew he and Tony Twain had a bet with his own hair as the wager.

Spicer was confident that Ibišević was incapable on the one hand and unable to adapt to the style of the English Premier League and Nottingham Forest on the other hand.

One must know that to score twenty goals a season was not a target that could be achieved easily.

Conversely, Tony Twain did not mention the bet again after he determined the wager. But he could tell that his bet with Spicer, and what he said to Ibišević afterwards, was indeed effective.

Ibišević was trying his best to integrate with the new environment. He was not at all as reticent as the Bundesliga player everyone thought. On the contrary, he was very lively.

He would use his fluent American English and joke with his British teammates. He could also chat in French with the Frenchman, Chimbona, Nkoulou and the Belgian, Kompany. At the same time, he also used his fluent German and chatted with Şahin who used to play in Dortmund, lived in Germany for many years, and had a German passport, about life in Germany. In addition, Bosnia and Serbia were once part of the former Yugoslavia, so he was able to communicate with Žigić in his native language.

Besides, he was a real linguistic genius, and it did not take long for him to say hello in the still unfamiliar Portuguese language to his teammates from Brazil and Portugal.

Having no problems in terms of languages, he was very quick to integrate into the team. The best thing about coming to Nottingham Forest was that no one here was interested in his poor figures last season and did not make things awkward for him as the reporters did.

Tony Twain trusted him and had the intention of developing him to be the main force during training. He paid back with his good performance in the friendly matches. He scored two goals in three friendlies and had a selfless assist.

But it did not prove anything no matter how well he performed in the friendlies. To get England's harsh media to change their minds about him, he must score goals in the official tournament, and a lot of goals at that.

He learnt a lesson from the mistakes of his predecessor, Žigić. Although Twain highly regarded this tall man and he played a big role on-field whenever the team needed to attack by storm and cling fast to defense, he was always termed by the media readily as "inferior parallel import."

The only measure of a striker's qualification was his goalscoring rate. Žigić had eleven assists last season. Once he played, the Forest team's creation of header shots in the front field would not be sidelined, but they only resulted in nine goals, which were naturally not enough for the picky media. There were also media which protested unfairness for Žigić and thought that Twain had used the tall man wrongly. But as long as the tall man did not object, Twain would continue to use him in this way.

Ibišević desperately tried to fit into the team. He was aware that no position needed more support from his teammates than the striker. Moreover, he was not the kind of striker who could dribble the ball across more than half the pitch alone and then bypass the opposing goalkeeper to take the ball into the empty goal.

Bentley's integration into the team was the fastest. First of all, he was English, and had no problems with the food, weather or language. Secondly, he was the player that Twain brought in based on the tactical needs of the team. Such a player often did not have any adaptation period in terms of the tactics. Twain understood Bentley's characteristics. Since he decided to buy him, he was certainly in line with the team's tactical needs.

The only thing that worried Twain was the "World Cup Syndrome." Bentley had done well since his transfer to the Forest team. But Twain believed he was only carrying on his performance in South Africa from this summer. The better he played in the friendlies; the more worried Twain was about his form after the league tournament officially began.

As the fourth player the team had signed this summer, Nkoulou conformed with the norms of the team. In the right back position, he would face competition from Rafinha and Chimbonda. Although Chimbonda was old, he was experienced and defensively stable. His defense on the right was reassuring as long as he was not required to plug in to assist. Rafinha's strength was plugging in from the back to attack on the side. In Twain's tactics of the two wingers in full strength, a full back who could assist, had always been heavily used by him. Rafinha was on the right and Gareth Bale was on the left.

The young Nkoulou might still have to work his way up from the substitutes' bench. Twain had promised the Cameroonian youngster him that he would have a great future if he continued to persist and integrate with the team.

Fernández was now the slowest to integrate out of the four players signed to the team this summer. As a South American player, the differences in languages and the totally different styles in the Spanish football and English football were still considered fine. The most painful things for him were the weather and food in England.

Most of the time, the skies would be as gloomy as it was in today's training, and then it would start to drizzle. He finally understood why the opening line of the English conversation was always about the weather. Then there was the terrible local cuisine, which he was not used to eating.

These two points affected his performance on the training field and the friendly matches. He was still staying in a hotel room since he had not found a suitable place to live in. How could he focus on playing football, living like this? Unfortunately, his compatriot, Nicolás Millán had been loaned out. Otherwise he could have helped his senior from Colo-Colo adjust to life in England. As the only Chilean in the team right now, Fernández was indeed a little lonely...

The fans might have to wait a while to see Fernández, who was once awarded the South American Footballer of the Year.

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Whether or not these players managed to fit in with the team, time was passing day by day and getting closer to the start of the new season.

Nottingham Forest, who finished fourth in the league tournament last season before the start of the new season, had a life-and-death battle to cope with even though they did not have a FA Community Shield game to play.

It was the Champions League qualifier.

Nottingham Forest was not eligible to go straight into the official competition since they finished fourth in the league tournament. They must play in the Champions League qualifying round first and pass the test to be one of the official thirty-two teams in the Champions League.

Nottingham Forest's qualifying opponent had been confirmed as the Red Star Belgrade team from Serbia.

There were two games, home and away. Only by eliminating Red Star Belgrade, would Tony Twain be qualified to say his team was really back in Europe.

On August 11th, the Champions League qualifying rounds kicked off.

Nottingham Forest would play Red Star at home.

Despite being a qualifying event, the City Ground stadium, which could only hold up to thirty thousand spectators was full. As the rare team in English football's history that had fewer league titles than the Champions League championship titles, the Forest fans seemed to have a tradition of thinking that the Champions League was the most important title. The tradition was similar to that of Real Madrid.

Between the league tournament and the Champions League, both teams would simultaneously choose the Champions League.

But Real Madrid's reason for this choice was probably because the league title was so common for them. Whereas the Nottingham Forest fans made this choice only because they thought they had a tradition of winning the Champions League title as compared to the league tournament...

The City Ground stadium was small, but the fervent fans caused a lot of trouble for the Red Star team here.

The Forest fans found an emotional outlet after bottling it up for a year. They gave vent to their frustrations suppressed for a year. There was the constant singing and shouting in the stands. They did not stop at all from the start to the end of the game.

The Red Star team was very unaccustomed to the away atmosphere and Tony Twain's team was like a fish back in the water here.

Nine minutes into the game that just started, Eastwood, who was in the starting lineup, helped the team scored an opening record with a long shot from outside the penalty area.

Following which, in the 32nd minute, Žigić's header sent the City Ground stadium into a frenzy.

The first half was entirely controlled by Nottingham Forest and the Red Star team was powerless.

In the second half, Twain began to give the new players who joined the team in the summer a chance to make their debuts.

In the 55th minute, he brought Matías Fernández on to replace Chris Cohen. Fernández won the applause of the fans with a beautiful bypass as soon as he made his appearance.

But it was only one of the few flashpoints for him in the game.

Then, in the 69th minute, Twain replaced Lennon with Bentley.

Less than four minutes into Bentley's play, he used a pass from the side and accurately sent the ball to the feet of Şahin, who plugged in from the back.

The Turkish talented midfielder faced the Red Star goalkeeper and fired calmly into the top corner. The football flew into the Red Star goal for the third time.

The goal completely snuffed out the Red Star players' desire to win.

Next, amid the home fans' thunderous singing, Gareth Bale locked in the score at 4:0 with a free kick!

Nottingham Forest won big at home. After the game, the English media stated that Tony Twain had set foot in Europe about three-quarters of the way.

"Just like the Invasion of Normandy sixty-six years ago. Tony Twain's troops successfully seized the beachhead as they aimed for Berlin (this season's UEFA Champions League final was held in Berlin)!"

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Appendix:

Nottingham Forest First Team squad list for the 2010-2011 season (26 players):

Goalkeepers: Igor Akinfeev (1), Dale Roberts (12), Shane Redmond (25).

Defenders: Leighton Baines (22), Gareth Bale (2), Pascal Chimbonda (3), Jonathan Woodgate (5), Vincent Kompany (4), Pepe (6), Wes Morgan (30), Rafinha (14), Joe Mattock (33), Nicolas Nkoulou (21).

Midfielders: George Wood (13), John Bostock (23), Aaron Lennon (17), Tiago Mendes (31), Nuri Şahin (15), Chris Cohen (20), David Bentley (7), Matías Fernández (8).

Strikers: Freddy Eastwood (11), Nikola Žigić (9), Ruud van Nistelrooy (10), Gabriel Agbonlahor (18), Vedad Ibišević (19).