

Champions 791

Chapter 791: Two Away Goals

“George Wood dribbles the ball and breaks through! He breaks into the penalty area! Against Samuel’s and César’s defense... He shoots! Oh, but the football hit the goalpost... Wait a minute! Matías Fernández! He shakes off Burdisso’s defense, shoots high in the air sideways and —GOOOOOOOOAL!!”

The football hit hard into the net. César only just flew to the spot but to no avail...

Fernández, who scored the goal, looked very excited as he ran toward the corner flag. He pulled his jersey and roared. He was finally able to relieve his frustration.

Although it was him who scored the goal, the man who got the most attention was George Wood. The television coverage cut to a close-up of Wood immediately after the goal, which even led some viewers to mistake George Wood was the one to score the goal...

Fernández helped Nottingham Forest to score and take the lead again. But the thrilling part of the goal was not his makeup shot, but that George Wood’s previous consecutive bypasses to shoot at the goal. It was a pity he was unlucky. The football hit the goalpost. Otherwise it would have become one of the memorable goals in his career!” The commentator gave high praise to George Wood.

Even Tony Twain below felt it was a great pity about Wood’s failure to score. Then he remembered that he should applaud Fernández’s shot...

Who was the happiest person to see Wood perform like this? It was not the excited commentator nor Tony Twain who held his head in his hands in disbelief at what he saw. It was not even the Nottingham Forest fans but Albertini, sitting in the box above the pitch.

When Demetrio saw Wood dribble the ball past several people in the midfield, he had already risen from his seat. When Wood shot at the goal at last, he could not help but shout “goal” in advance, but unfortunately ... the football hit the goalpost in the end.

But that was not the most important thing. Albertini was very happy he saw a different George Wood from whom he had seen before. It could even be said that he was even more outstanding than the George Wood he had imagined before.

Albertini wanted Wood to become a defensive midfielder who could control the entire team’s pace of offense and defense, just like AC Milan’s Pirlo. But judging by his performance in this game, he was getting closer to the combination of Kaka and Pirlo...

He could use the passes to dispatch the team and also had his own ability to dribble the ball forward to break through at the same time. It was just formidable...

Watching the game with Albertini was his good friend, AC Milan’s iconic figure and retired Paulo Maldini. He laughed when he saw Albertini this excited, “It looks like your feelings for Nottingham Forest run really deep.”

“Other than AC Milan, it’s them.” Albertini continued to clap and said, “After all, I also got the... oh.”

He had wanted to say he had won a Champions League title there, which was something he never dared to think about. Suddenly he realized that the championship title was snatched from this man next to him.

Maldini did not care, "It's okay. The championship title belonged to the side that played better. I feel sorry instead... that last summer, Galliani did not bring Wood to San Siro."

Albertini laughed, "He's going to become Paulo Maldini of Nottingham Forest."

He finally ended the applause of several minutes and sat down again. The game on the field had also started again.

Maldini shook his head and was not convinced, "Nottingham Forest is not AC Milan."

Albertini also seemed to think that his good friend had a point. He said, "To put it another way, if Tony continues to stay at Nottingham Forest, then I think George will stay there too."

"I was thinking... Galliani had set his heart on getting Wood, but he'd never thought of this method—poach Tony Twain along with George Wood together."

To hear Maldini say so, Albertini laughed, "Don't you know the personal feud between Tony and Galliani?"

"I heard a little. But I think... This kind of thing is of little importance in some respect. If AC Milan can offer better pay and other conditions than at Nottingham Forest, I think even the unpleasant thing between Tony Twain and Galliani should disappear?"

Albertini continued to laugh and shook his head as well, "You don't know Tony, Paulo. He is sometimes very emotional. His personal feelings represent everything. In addition, AC Milan cannot give him anything else other than a higher salary. As for him... As far as I can see, he's not particularly a fan of money."

Maldini disagreed, "At the very least we can give him a higher transfer budget. I know he not only has no money to buy players at Nottingham Forest, but also needs to sell players to make money for the club. Have you ever seen such a Champions League manager? I would have quit my job long ago if I have to work in that kind of place..."

"Paulo, do you think Galliani and President Berlusconi will allow Tony to buy the players he wants to buy, and not get involved like obedient kids?"

That remark stumped Maldini. He really did not consider the matter while Demetrio was absolutely right... At AC Milan, the real decision on which player to buy could lie with Galliani, the expert negotiator, Braidà, or possibly his father Cesare Maldini. There was even a big chance that it could be Berlusconi. But it would not be the manager.

When he saw that his good friend did not speak, Albertini patted him on the shoulder and said, "Even though there's not much money at Nottingham Forest, Tony can do what he wants and lives like a king. At AC Milan, he can earn a lot of money, wear the golden crown, look like the king, but he cannot decide on many things. The distinction is decisive. So, don't think about this impossible thing, Paulo. We all don't want President Berlusconi to leave his post. Just enjoy watching the game."

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The game had already progressed another ten minutes while Albertini and Maldini discussed in the box why Twain and Wood could not come to AC Milan.

Mourinho was furious at the goal concede. He left his seat for these ten minutes and stood on the sidelines to supervise and direct the game with a serious face.

He knew how good Nottingham Forest's counterattack was. He was certain that his players were aware of it too. In that case, what was the problem?

The problem laid with George Wood.

He had not been in the English Premier League for a few year and Wood got better... Mourinho had never seen this outstanding show of dribbling the ball to bypass a few players before in the Premier League. He suddenly plugged in ahead and did an out of character individua breakthrough. He did not pass the ball, resulting in the collapse of Inter Milan's entire line of defense. Everyone's attention was on Wood and neglected the other Forest players. And they eventually lost the goal...

Did Inter Milan concede to Nottingham Forest in terms of overall strategy or George Wood's individual play?

This was really a difficult question to understand.

Therefore, what was Mourinho angry about? Of course, he was furious that he conceded two goals at home! What did it mean to let Tony Twain obtained two away goals? That meant that they were halfway into the top eight!

But what was the use of anger now? The opponent had already scored the goals. His team could only find ways to score a few more goals and minimize their away goal advantage.

However,..... was Inter Milan really confident of scoring more goals with twenty minutes left in the game against Nottingham Forest's die-hard counterattack style?

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Tony Twain crossed his legs in the technical area. He was enjoying the situation now.

The voices of the Inter Milan fans in the stands behind them became softer. It looked like the Inter Milan fans had been hit hard by Nottingham Forest's second goal...

The score of 1:2 and the Forest team's two away goals were like a huge boulder, pressing on the hearts of those people. When they wanted to open their mouths to shout something for the team, they would feel short of breath and tightness in their chests.

What they did not understand the most was why Nottingham Forest suddenly became unrecognizable with a change in the manager. They had not seen it with their previous games. It was reasonable to say that the players' strength of the current Nottingham Forest team should be not as good as compared to the previous team which they had played against.

How did they break out with such amazing energy when Twain took over?

Could it be possible the man who always liked to provoke a war of words before a game and was derided by the media as a clown, had a mysterious aura?

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The television commentator, who knew Tony Twain well, had already declared that the game had entered a dreary stage.

“Nottingham Forest is in the lead for the away game and even scored two goals. Who can give me a reason that Tony Twain will not defend? And once Nottingham Forest is determined to hold fast, there are not many teams in the world that can breach its goal. Maybe Inter Milan can be one? I do not know. But I’m sure of one thing—Inter Milan must work very, very hard to score goals. Even so, even if they beat Nottingham Forest by 3:2, Tony Twain will also leave Meazza with a smile...”

With such a conundrum placed in front of the Inter Milan supporters, it did not make them feel good. It was no wonder that the voices at the Meazza Stadium became much smaller.

The Inter Milan players launched a fierce attack on the Nottingham Forest goal with fury in their eyes, as if they had collectively taken the same medicine. They attacked wave after wave, each stronger than before.

George Wood did not have a chance to show his offensive talent again. Even Ibišević quickly became the third center back and frequently used his physical superiority to break the siege in front of the goal.

Mourinho brought on Adriano to replace Giuseppe Rossi, which had been inundated by the Nottingham Forest players. Meanwhile, he also repeatedly waved on the sidelines to signal for the team to press on continuously. At this point, he did not care if there were a lot of gaps behind the team, because Nottingham Forest simply could not fight back!

Adriano came on and won some a few chances for the team. However, there were too many people in the Nottingham Forest penalty area...

Inter Milan had also reduced their own offensive space to the lowest level as they besieged the Forest team. It was really not conducive for them to shoot and score goals. As the game wore on, more Inter Milan players began to try long shots.

The voices of the Inter Milan fans suddenly grew louder when the game was ten minutes away from injury stoppage time. Although the score was still 1:2, they were not willing to give up. Even if there was little time left, they had to fight until the last minute. Now their highest wish had changed from “a victory” to “an equalizer.”

Even with this wish, Tony Twain did not want them to make it happen. He replaced Fernández with Cohen, who was better defensively, and then used Woodgate to bring off Şahin. He was now playing the 5-4-1 formation with three center backs. It was abundantly clear that they were going to cling fast to defense.

Until the injury stoppage time, Inter Milan still did not break the Nottingham Forest goal. Just when it looked like the game was about to end in this way, a sudden change took place in the game!

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After Ibrahimović received the ball, Adriano and Quaresma, as well as his other teammates in better positions, raised their hands to ask him for the ball. But he did not pass. He chose to force a breakthrough and cut inside.

Just moments after he crossed the line of the penalty area, he was tripped by Tiago!

Meanwhile, a shrill booing rang out at the Meazza Stadium.

Everyone nervously turned to look at the referee. One gesture from him at this moment might just determine the fate of both teams...

“He points to the penalty spot!! My God! Inter Milan has a narrow escape!!”

The Inter Milan players might have just complained that Ibrahimović acted alone again at the crucial moment, but now they were all cheering the Swede and embracing him.

Whereas Tiago, who had been indicating to the referee starting from just now to show that he did not foul, and that Ibrahimović did a dive, was angry. He rushed up to hold the referee’s hand and tell him that it was a dive!

It was not only Tiago who was angry. The rest of the Forest players were also angry. They rushed to the referee and surrounded him.

No one could understand why the referee would make such a decision. Putting aside whether Ibrahimović dived, no one could determine such a matter without a slow-motion replay. After all, it happened so fast. But they all clearly saw that the physical contact between Tiago and Ibrahimović was outside the penalty area...

Even if Tiago had fouled, it should be a free kick, not a penalty kick!

The players were furious on the pitch, while Twain held back the fourth official to express his displeasure, “How can this f**king be a penalty kick?”

“Please mind your language, Mr. Twain.”

“Then please get the referee to pay attention to his eyes! A last-minute penalty kick! He’s got some balls!!”

Dunn saw that Twain was getting more agitated the more he rebuked. For fear that the fourth official was going to tell on him to the referee and then be directly kicked out of the game, he hurriedly gave Kerslake a look and the two men rushed up to drag Twain against his will back to the technical area.

Twain was still scolding, “He’s got some balls! Takes special guts! His balls are exceptionally big!”

“This is a pretty controversial penalty. One must know that it takes courage to give the trailing team a penalty kick nearing the end of the game...It takes guts. The referee must have some hard evidence but let’s take a look at the slow-motion replay... Oh no, it’s outside the penalty area! This is a miscalculation!”

What was the point of the commentator saying that? Once the referee decided on a penalty, he would not change it easily.

He stood at the penalty spot with a serious face and waved his hands to disperse the Forest players who surrounded him. The Inter Milan fans were already shouting slogans in praise in the stands.

Twain snorted, “Forget it! Even if they were to equalize, we still have two away goals!” He decided not to argue with the fourth official. Otherwise the gains would not make up for the losses if he were to argue till he was forced to be in the grandstand... No, there was basically no “gain” at all. It would all be “lost.”

The Forest players on the pitch saw that no matter how they begged, the referee would not change his penalty decision. Not only that, Tiago who fouled and Woodgate, who protested the loudest, were given the yellow cards respectively.

They could only choose to accept the result and withdraw from the penalty area.

Mourinho was delighted that his team was lucky enough to get a penalty kick in the final minute. But he did not show it too much. He and Twain had the same idea at this time—even if they scored the goal, they would only equalize the score. The fact that Nottingham Forest already had two away goals could not be changed like this penalty kick.

Ibrahimović himself carried out the penalty kick. Amidst the Nottingham Forest fans’ boos and the Inter Milan fans’ cheers, he equalized the score at 2:2.

The Inter Milan players embraced excitedly to celebrate the new lease of life after the goal. The Nottingham Forest players were still holding the referee back, wanting to say whether the penalty kick should have been awarded. But this time their tone was much better with no worries about getting a yellow card. Because it was no longer possible to change the score.

Everyone at Inter Milan were celebrating, with the exception of Mourinho.

Twain found Mourinho looking at his side, so he spread out his hands and shrugged at his other man to deliberately taunt the other side. Sure enough, Mourinho soon averted his eyes.

When Twain saw Mourinho like this, he also forgot that the other team had just used the penalty kick to equalize the score. He just grinned.

In any case, he maintained his personal unbeaten record against Mourinho. As long as the record was kept, he could remain strong against Mourinho. If Mourinho wanted to reverse the situation, he would be knocked over by him, and never be allowed to bring about the reversal.

The game ended in a raucous environment, with Nottingham Forest still complaining about the referee’s last-minute “bold penalty” as they left the Meazza Stadium, while the Inter Milan fans expressed concern about the fate of the team’s second leg.

As for the reporters? After finishing the interviews in the mixed zone, they all hurried to the scene of the post-match press conference, looking forward to a good show there—it was Mourinho’s first face-to-face press conference with Tony Twain since Mourinho left England. It would simply be outrageous if there were no explosive content!

Chapter 792: The Post Match Spat

The reporters gathered in the mixed zone had dispersed, with no players waiting there for the reporters. The focus was no longer on them by this time.

In the press room at the San Siro Stadium, a rather special press conference was being held.

The Inter Milan manager, Mourinho sat on the left-hand side while the Nottingham Forest manager, Tony Twain sat on the right-hand side. The English media had not seen this scene for more than three years, so they appeared to be a little excited. But the Italian media thought it was just a normal press conference.

Twain and Mourinho soon showed them what kind of press conference it was...

A practical reporter from <La Gazzetta dello Sport> raised his hand and asked Mourinho to give his opinion on the game.

Mourinho snorted, "We were unlucky to have not been able to win. I'm not happy with the two goal concedes, but that's the way football is. You can only accept the result..."

Then he said some nonsense which was tantamount to saying nothing.

The same reporter threw the question at Twain, who laughed and said, "Mourinho said they were unlucky? I think they were lucky instead. Otherwise we should have taken three points from here, and not just one. The game is over, so I don't want to evaluate the referee's work anymore..." In fact, he did not want to give himself any more trouble. "But I think Mr. Mourinho really should thank God for letting them get the one point."

A tense situation had already emerged.

Twain took the initiative to provoke, and Mourinho could not resist.

The press conference continued.

Asked by an English reporter this time, he was clearly more aware about the story between Twain and Mourinho than his Italian counterparts. He said, "Mr. Mourinho. You never seemed to have beaten Tony Twain whenever you led the team. It was no exception this time. Do you think this matter has become a vicious circle?"

Mourinho had answered many such questions during his years in England. He was long tired of such questions. So, he decided not to answer.

The atmosphere suddenly became a little awkward. Next to him, Twain raised his hand and saved the situation with a smile, "I can answer your question, Mr. Reporter."

Mourinho knew that no good words were to be expected from a scoundrel like Twain, so he gave Twain a cool glance.

"Well, it's like this. Mr. Mourinho and I never cared about this kind of record." Surprisingly, Twain's first words were to help Mourinho. "Because it does not illustrate any issue. After all, I have nineteen opponents in the league tournament. Even if I could obtain a complete victory every time I encounter Mourinho's team, it was only six points. Was six points enough? Not at all. So, I'm more concerned with the championship title than the unbeaten record against Mourinho."

At this point, everything was still normal.

But then Twain changed his tune.

“But while I don’t particularly value the unbeaten record against Mourinho, I don’t want to lose for no reason. No manager wants to lose. So, I don’t regard Mourinho’s team alone, but treat it as any opponent and try to win. Therefore, the result is... what you’ve seen!”

Twain smugly laughed in the end.

Everyone understood. Twain had gotten what he wanted and still bragged!

His way of handling it was too annoying!

Mourinho very much wanted to silence Twain because he could not refute the matter. What could he say? If he were to say, “I don’t really care about that shit record. I only care about the results,” but the result was that he did not defeat Tony Twain in the game once again. It also led to a stalemate on their promotion path to the Champions League. Or he could say, “Although we haven’t won this time, I promise to win the next time!” It was a little too meaningless. It lacked class to say words like they would definitely win the next time. It was like the promises which a crazy-eyed gambler said when he found someone to borrow money from. Mourinho absolutely could not say such a thing.

With a dark expression, Mourinho wanted to turn and leave abruptly, but he could not. Because his boss, Moratti had already warned him more than once that this was Italy, and not England. He must pay attention to his image, which was also the image of Inter Milan.

The next question was slightly more normal, which was to ask the managers to comment on the performance of the players in the game. Mourinho praised Quaresma’s goal and performance. His words, which were disseminated through the media, would surely delight Quaresma. On the other hand, Twain praised the team. He did not praise anyone alone, even though George Wood played brilliantly in the game. However,...Twain was undoubtedly the reincarnation of a mad dog. He could also create an explosive situation with such a question.

“... I don’t praise any player alone, not because they did not do well. Instead, they played so brilliantly that I couldn’t just praise a few players individually. If I really wanted to name them, I would have to list all the names of the Forest players that played. I’m very pleased with the team’s performance tonight. Even though the game was a draw, we scored two away goals. It was the result of everyone working together. Inter Milan, by contrast, only had a few players that performed normally...” The unspoken implication was should Mourinho have praised Quaresma alone? Because he had no other player to praise except him.

Mourinho was not a fool, but he could only pretend to be dumb at this point. Because he actually lost to Twain. A draw at home was a loss.

The result made him feel sullen. What was even more dour was that he might have faced the result of a home defeat had it not been for the referee’s last-minute extra favor.

Pierce Brosnan stood up and asked Twain if the away draw with Inter Milan could be considered a revenge for when Inter Milan eliminated the Forest team two seasons ago.

Twain shook his head to correct Brosnan's question, "First of all, we did not force a tie with Inter Milan. It was the home side that forced us into a draw. Secondly, I don't think this can be considered a revenge. It's just a draw. We still haven't play one more game. After that game is over, I might be able to answer according to what you asked."

Mourinho finally found a chance to fight back, "Don't speak too soon, Mr. Twain. I don't think you can win against Inter Milan when you get back to your home ground. Since you can score two goals at our home ground, why can't Inter Milan score at least two goals at your home ground?"

Twain gave a laugh, "Well said, Mr. Mourinho. It doesn't really matter what we say here right now. I think football is played with the legs and not with glib talk. I'm looking forward to the game."

"I'm looking forward to it too." Mourinho responded with a cold face.

What seemed to be specifically asked to embarrass him, this time an English reporter asked, "Since the home side conceded two goals, the situation is grim for the team's promotion. What do you think of the current situation, Mr. Mourinho?"

"I admit the competition is going to be tough. But I'm confident. We've eliminated them once, and it's no exception this time."

Twain pursed his lips. But he did not say, "that's because I wasn't there."

It was pleasurable to win against Mourinho in the war of words. But it could in turn hurt the feelings of the coaches such as Dunn and Kerlake. Because that indirectly meant that his aides were incompetent...

The press conference eventually ended in an awkward and tepid atmosphere. Mourinho did not even shake hands with Tony Twain and hurried away from the scene. However, Twain still smiled and posed for the photojournalists present to take a few more photos.

To be able to score two away goals and compel Mourinho to yield at the press conference, both matters made him feel good.

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Despite Twain's failure to name George Wood in his post-match press conference, Wood's outstanding performance in the game had also attracted a lot of attention. Nottingham Forest's rivals were scared to discover that the silly boy who used to defend the entire field like a headless chicken had grown into a powerful offensive weapon in the Nottingham Forest lineup.

"He can freeze the other team's midfield core one-on-one. He does not have to worry about attendance rate due to his excellent physicality and never-been-injured abnormal physique. He can shoot world class long shots to score, and now he can even start dribbling the ball from the backfield to bypass a few players to send the ball all the way to the other side's penalty area ... What more can you ask? Tony Twain has been focusing on developing Wood's offensive ability since the start of the season. He intends to develop George Wood as the double core of the team—Wood has been a spiritual core before, and now he has signs of moving closer to becoming a tactical core. He can make interceptions directly in the midfield and then deliver the shells to his teammates. In some cases, he can even dribble the ball himself to break through and create opportunities. Such a midfielder is what every manager dream of."

The media's appraisal was good. Now that George Wood was in perfect form and his physical fitness was also on the rise, his status in the national team was increasingly important. Although Lampard had not announced his retirement from the national team, he was no longer likely to rock George Wood's dominant position.

The players who partnered Wood were sometimes Gerrard, Barry, or Joe Cole. Only Wood's position was immovable. Capello liked this boy with a serious attitude. The only headache was that Wood received more yellow cards. Although he did not get red cards, it was still frustrating to be suspended due to the accumulated yellow cards.

Nottingham Forest was warmly welcomed by many fans since they returned to England. They scored two away goals and the public unanimously thought highly of them. Nottingham's local media even could not wait and started looking at the clash between the Forest team and Barcelona. Poor Mourinho was tossed aside...

Even the Forest players were pleased with the result during an interview and were optimistic about the team's prospects of a promotion.

Some people even spoke out about their next opponent, Barcelona, in the interview. For people who did not know what happened must have thought that the game that had just ended was the second leg between Nottingham Forest and Inter Milan...

That kind of optimism continued into the league tournament, with Nottingham Forest's 3:0 home win over Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League. For a time, the media touted Nottingham Forest as an invincible warship.

Subsequently they came with this kind of thinking in their encounter with Bolton Wanderers in the 28th round of the Premier League. It was played at Nottingham Forest home ground. Everyone thought that with the Forest team in top form, it would be easy to defeat Bolton Wanderers, which was ranked sixteenth in the league.

But...

The twenty-one-year-old young player, Nathan Woolfe magically scored his second goal in the game and helped his team to defeat the mighty Nottingham Forest. The score for that game was 1:2, with the home team's score in front and the away team behind.

At the end of the game, Twain sat in the chair in the technical area and did not express any anger. He did not throw his suit jacket nor kick a water bottle. He did not even swear incessantly. He just got up and expressionlessly shook hands with the Bolton Wanderers manager, Phil Brown.

Some people thought that Twain did not even take a stand due to his anger. The Nottingham Forest players also thought so. To have lost to a weak team like Bolton Wanderers which was on the edge of relegation zone at home, wouldn't such a result be enough to make the boss angry? So, they hurriedly thanked the fans in the stadium and hurried into the locker room. Everyone waited in trepidation to shoulder for the boss' fury.

But what happened next came as a surprise to them.

Twain smiled and told them they "lose well."

“Do you know why I say that? I’m definitely not making an ironic remark, so you don’t have to worry about me scolding you next. I’m also not muddled and speaking nonsense from being angry. I’m clear-minded. I remembered your previous performances. I’m not reminding you because I just don’t think it’s persuasive enough to say those words when your spirits are high. But it’s different now.” He spread his hands and continued, “You just lost a game, and you lost a weak team like Bolton Wanderers. I think it will be very persuasive to say it now. No one will whisper in their hearts, ‘The boss is always an alarmist.’ Now I’ll tell you—if you continue to use this mentality to play against Inter Milan, you will lose everything including your underwear!”

“Am I being an alarmist? Just look at the game that has just ended. I bet you must have thought before the game that it would be effortless to beat such an opponent like Bolton Wanderers, which was about to fall into the relegation zone, right?”

No one made a sound, but everyone knew in their hearts that the boss was right... Few people could take an interest in the placed last fourth team, especially when a major Champions League match was about to begin.

“We have lost to a team like Bolton Wanderers because we momentarily underestimated our opponent. Do you think Inter Milan can’t even be compared to Bolton Wanderers? So, this game came just in time. If you must lose a game because you underestimated your opponent due to your pride, I would rather lose a regular league game than the Champions League. So, I can laugh now because I know I’m not going to lose the Champions League game. Will I?”

“No, boss.” Someone answered him.

“This is what you said.” Twain pointed to the players and said, “A man must keep his word. If you lose, then you’re not men.”

Chapter 793: Relive the Past Experience

Despite Twain’s remark that “the players are not men if they lose”, he was still worried. He might appear to be confident, in fact, his inner pressure was no less than anyone else. One must know that the pressure on the players if they lost the game, would only last from the pitch to their home, while the pressure on the manager could last for days. Therefore, he could not be negligent.

In addition to using words to motivate the players, he must think of other ways.

The Inter Milan team had already arrived in Nottingham. Mourinho joked in an interview at London’s Heathrow airport that he did not think he was competing in an away game because he was very familiar with many things in England. Mourinho’s face looked relaxed and smiling in the television frame. He appeared to have a card up his sleeve. And he did not care that the reporters mentioned Nottingham Forest’s two away goals in front of him.

“I think it’s a good thing for us. Yes, Nottingham Forest has two away goals. At the same time, they only have two away goals while we’re not the same. Our away game hasn’t started yet. Why can’t we score three goals at the City Ground stadium?”

Looking at his tone and demeanor, it made people doubt that it was him and not Tony Twain who had the advantage of the away goals...

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"It's psychological warfare." Twain's snorted, "Mourinho lacks new ideas. He has taken a step backwards from staying in Italy for too long. He used to be like a sharp-toothed kitten."

Twain did not have to worry that the walls had ears in his office or that the paparazzi would put miniature cameras and microphones in his domain, so he could sneer at Mourinho without fear.

Kerslake guffawed when he heard Twain's analogy. He neither liked nor disliked Mourinho himself, but he clearly did not like "Mourinho the enemy."

After commenting on his opponent, Twain looked at his assistant, Dunn.

"Dunn, have you prepared the thing?"

Dunn nodded and handed a disc to Twain. Twain did not put it on the CD-ROM, but repeatedly played with it in his hand. The disc's surface reflected his face, somewhat blurry.

"I've decided to let them watch it twenty minutes before the game." He spun the disc around with his index finger.

"What's that?" Kerslake was a little curious.

"Something not nice for us." Twain glance at Dunn. In fact, it was not really a good thing for Dunn. It was probably the biggest defeat he faced since he took charge of coaching Nottingham Forest alone. He wanted to give Dunn some face and did not want to say it too obviously.

"It was the Champions League quarterfinal series of the 2008-09 season, Nottingham Forest's home game against Inter Milan." Dunn himself introduced it.

"Ah, that game..." Kerslake was no longer curious. That game was a painful memory. If he could, he really did not want to think about it again. "Tony, you... Why do you want them to watch that?"

"Let them revive the old dream." Twain shrugged.

"That was a nightmare..." Kerslake cried.

"Revisiting a beautiful old dream will only deprive them of the motivation to move forward. I don't think the stimulus is enough."

Kerslake knew that Twain was someone who kept his word. His lips quivered a little and he stopped speaking. He just cast a sympathetic glance at Dunn. After all, Dunn personally directed that game... He suddenly realized in a flash what it meant to "do whatever it takes to win."

Dunn had no objection and said, "Tony had discussed it with me, and I agreed. I also think it's a good idea."

Dunn personally cut, edited and burnt the CD-ROM, in order to meet Twain's requirements. To make the video more impactful, he needed to watch the game many times and select the best scenes to edit and

put together. For Dunn, it was like looking in the mirror at his own worst moments to repeatedly watch the scenes and place his own shortcomings under the microscope to analyze them. No one liked this kind of feeling.

But Dunn must do this kind of job for the team's requirements.

Kerslake felt it was a hard job to be Tony's assistant, but fortunately it was Dunn and not him...

"That's it, guys. Let's give Mourinho a lively welcome party!"

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On the day of the match, throngs of crowds milled around the City Ground stadium, with a large number of fans walking along the banks of River Trent to the City Ground stadium. A lot of fans were already in the stands, including Nottingham's most die-hard fan group, John, Bill and the others from the Forest Bar.

They arrived in the stadium ahead of time and were busy hanging the banners.

"Welcome back to England, welcome to the City Ground stadium, José!"

The first sentence appeared as if Mourinho and them were really friendly, but the following sentence exposed the hostile relationship between both rivals: "You won't win this time too!"

The Inter Milan fans were certainly not to be outdone. They also had their way to fight back.

A group of Inter Milan fans hung a banner with the score below the stands. The score of 2:0 and 3:0 were written on it, of which 2:0 was the score at Inter Milan's home ground, and 3:0 was the record they wrote in the City Ground stadium.

Since Nottingham Forest entered Tony Twain's era, no team had ever scored three goals at the City Ground stadium and kept Nottingham Forest from scoring. Mourinho did it.

The matter would not have been worth a mention, but due to Tony Twain's repeated provocations, the Inter Milan fans simply wrote in bleeding colors to provoke the Nottingham Forest fans as a counter response to their constant provocations.

These two games, especially the score at the home ground, were indeed a "painful memory" for the Nottingham Forest fans.

They had let the opponent scored five goals for the home and away matches and failed to score even one goal. In that game at the City Ground stadium, the Forest players bottled up their energy and wanted to teach Inter Milan a lesson when they got back to the home side. No one expected Inter Milan caught hold of the Forest team's over eagerness to press for an attacking goal and successfully snuck an attack when the game started. After leading by three goals, Inter Milan played more comfortably, and Nottingham Forest played increasingly anxious. The whole team counted on their acting manager, Dunn to be able to step up and try hard to save a desperate crisis. Dunn could only look on helplessly at the field and completely did not know what to do. He usually prepared a full head of football technical and tactical knowledge. But at this moment, he could not even apply it in the slightest bit.

In the end, the team played more and more chaotically. Inter Milan took the opportunity to score consecutive goals and utterly crushed the Nottingham Forest players' fighting spirit with 3:0. Then the game went into garbage time.

After the game, the local media in Nottingham angrily stated that, judging by the performance of the game, if Inter Milan had scored another goal, the Nottingham Forest players would have to collectively hold their hands up and kneel for mercy.

Even the Forest fans, who almost never booed their own team in the stands, could not help but hiss too.

After that game, countless Nottingham Forest fans gathered in all the major bars to talk about the same issue—

What would it look like if Tony was still there?

Now they had a chance to find out the answer.

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The buses for both teams' players arrived in the stadium for the pre-match warm-up. But the Nottingham Forest players came earlier. About only a quarter of the crowd sat in the stands when they entered the stadium to warm up, while the Inter Milan players had just left the hotel where they stayed at.

When the Inter Milan players arrived at the stadium at a regular time to carry out the warm-up, they found that the Nottingham Forest players were getting ready to leave.

This surprised some people because, as was customary, everyone came out together to warm up at the same time. So why did the Nottingham Forest players finish the warm-up so early? With more than half an hour to go before the game starts, what were they doing in the locker room now? Take a bath and a nap after?

The Nottingham Forest players brushed past the Inter Milan players; they did not care about the puzzled looks from the Inter Milan players.

All this, of course, was arranged by the boss. He asked the team to make use the home team's advantage to come into the City Ground stadium early, start warming up, and then return to the locker room. He had a mysterious and exciting thing to show everyone...

Everyone was guessing what it meant for the boss to suddenly rack his brains to show a "film" half an hour before the game to everyone. Who was still in the mindset to watch a film at this time?

Twain smiled and did not speak. After everyone entered the locker room, he switched off the lights, turned on the DVD projector and television.

After a brief black screen, a sound rang out in the small space of the locker room:

"Ibrahimović!! Ibrahimović!! A beautiful turn to shoot! Just three minutes into the game, Inter Milan obtained an incredible lead! Now Inter Milan is already 3:0 ahead of Nottingham Forest! Poor Nottingham Forest... Of course, they want to bring down Inter Milan at home, but they did not expect to concede another goal. It's not easy to play this game..."

Many of the Forest players in the locker room changed faces. They might have made a lot of guesses, but no one expected the boss to show them this ... The players who had experienced that game would not easily forget the humiliation—the home fans actually booed the team they originally supported team. They clearly had the drive but could not execute it. They could only run back and forth behind the opponent. The pace of the game was controlled by Inter Milan right from the beginning. They did not even have the power to fight back.

He did not even have to worry about the Forest players who had not played the game. Dunn's excellent clip was enough to give them an immersive experience of that 0:3 game.

Three minutes into the opening, Ibrahimović scored a goal.

Then it was followed by another goal at the start of the second half. By this time, Inter Milan already had a 4:0 lead over Nottingham Forest and even had scored two away goals. Nottingham Forest needed to score at least five goals in the remaining forty minutes if they wanted to qualify and not let their opponents continue to score. It was an impossible task for a team like the Forest team.

Eventually, there were fans in the stands who could not stand the ordeal and emitted shrill boos. Finally, the sporadic boos joined together, and became an unstoppable mainstream voice. The commentator's voice sounded even more piercing amid the booing, "Even since Tony Twain became the manager of this time, there had never been anything like it in a game. The fans, labelled as the most loyal fans in the Premier League, actually boo their home team... I don't even know what to say... The Nottingham Forest players' performance are really terrible!"

The players who had played in that game seemed to go back to that day and relive the scene, which made them all bow their heads and not want to watch the television screen. If possible, they even wanted to cover their ears. The booing was so shrill that it was as if there were needles poking at their hearts.

Whereas the players who joined the team later understood when they watched the game—to Nottingham Forest, which was the defending champion at the time, it was a heavy blow for Nottingham Forest, which was once successful, fearless and thought that the whole world was in their hands...

this time? Samuel! In the chaos in front of the goal, Samuel got the ball. There was no Nottingham Forest player around him! It's incredible! ... 3:0! Inter Milan is ahead of Nottingham Forest by 5:0! The game ends in twenty minutes, but I'd say... looking at the performance of the Nottingham Forest players, the game has now entered garbage time ahead of schedule."

No one could stare indifferently at the screen after hearing that, except for Tony Twain.

The coaches, including Dunn and Kerslake, averted their eyes from the television screen. They also did not want to relive the nightmare.

Twain was the devil for forcing them to recall such a cruel game. And he was still smiling—the light from the television screen shone on Twain's face. That expression should be a smile!

After the video clip of the game finished playing, Twain did not turn on the lights immediately. Instead, he told everyone in the dark with his hoarse voice why he did this.

In this kind of environment, his voice sounded as if it came from the depths of hell. It was hoarse, sometimes low, sometimes sharp, and uncomfortable to listen to.

“Is anyone still speculating as to why I’m showing you something like this? I know that game is definitely not a ‘good memory’ for some people. I just hope you know that we can laugh at some failures and they will pass. Some failures we absolutely cannot forget! What do you do if the enemy wants to humiliate you? Obediently climb through under his pants?! No! That’s not our style! You should use your head to knock their testicles above when you climb under his pants! Knock him to the ground and stamp with your feet! Stamp! Crush! Until his balls burst! If you don’t want this game to happen again to you, if you don’t want your own supporters to switch sides and cheer for your opponent, if you don’t want the enemy to mock you as a bunch of sissies after they beat you, then remember to win this game! We lost by 0:3! It’s like being pinned under and gang-raped by eleven strong men, too powerless to fight back! Do you like to be gang-raped? I don’t like it! I feel sick!”

Twain finished saying that before he turned on the lights in the locker room.

The light was restored instantly which many people had not adjusted to yet. They covered their faces and squinted their eyes to hide in the shadows.

“How does it feel to be back to reality?” Tony Twain’s tone and emphasis did a one hundred and eighty degree turn when he opened his mouth again, completely without the previous sternness and rebuke. His squinted eyes and smiling face looked really harmless. But anyone who knew him was aware that this version of Tony Twain was more dangerous. “A lot of you must be relieved—fortunately it was only a dream, right? But dreams and reality are closely linked. Now that Inter Milan is at our door, is this still a dream? If you’re not careful, the nightmare just now will come back! I don’t want to hear the boos from the home fans on my own pitch. I’ll never want that in my lifetime ever! You know what to do, don’t you?”

“Yes, boss!” Was there any fool who would say “I don’t know?”

“That’s great.” Twain put his hands together and said, “Remember the feeling you had in the dark just now. Never forget, guys! That’s the most valuable asset of your career...”

Chapter 794: Poor Quaresma

During the handshake, Inter Milan’s players got the feeling that Nottingham Forest’s players emanated a killing intent that was even stronger than before.

They were perplexed.

Nottingham Forest is the team going into this match with an advantage! Why are they acting in such an aggressive manner? We are the ones who should be giving off a killing intent!

The stadiums in England are generally smaller in size. The City Ground Stadium can only hold a maximum of 30,000 spectators, but to the Italians however, the noise that is produced from such a small stadium could not be underestimated.

The smaller the stadium, the closer the audience gets to the football pitch. Every single sound that they make will easily concentrate and be distinctly picked up on the pitch.

At stadiums like the San Siro Stadium where the stands are situated further and higher away from the pitch, the players are unable to see the fans from where they stand on the pitch, and they feel less stressed as a result. However, at traditional British stadiums such as the City Ground Stadium, not only can players hear every single swear word that the fans shout clearly, they can even see the hairs in the nostrils of the fans who stand right behind the goalpost when they shoot for goal. The kind of stress that comes with playing at smaller stadiums was not something that the players can experience at large stadiums.

Forest fans exerted enormous pressure on the Inter Milan players from the start of the match. They made use of boos, chastisements and all sorts of gestures to disturb the Inter Milan fans. The atmosphere in the stadium made Mourinho furrow his brows.

Mourinho decided to start Quaresma in the match again given his outstanding performance previously. He hoped that Quaresma would be able to make use of his personal skills and abilities to trouble Nottingham Forest's defense.

There was theoretically nothing wrong with his decision to play Quaresma. Choosing to rely on a player's individual performance when you have to face off against a team that is strong at defense might sometimes lead to unexpected results.

Quaresma was laughed and booed at by the Nottingham Forest fans after he got the ball out of bounds when trying to stop it at his feet. The mockeries from the fans happened so close to him that it made him tense up, and he started performing poorly afterwards.

As a result, Mourinho could not pin his hopes on Quaresma being able to bring about any drastic change to the team's offense anymore...

The Forest fans spared no pains in going against Inter Milan. The moment Inter Milan makes a tiny mistake, there would be overwhelming laughter and boos from the Forest fans.

On the other hand, every single time a Nottingham Forest player touches the ball, there would be thunderous applause from the Forest fans.

This is the home advantage...

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Quaresma was an inconsistent player. In the previous match between the two teams, he was able to put in a brilliant performance and even score a world-class goal. In this match however, he has been performing poorly.

There was a time in the match where Quaresma failed to get past Baines at the flank, and he chose to raise his foot and shoot for goal forcibly. However, his outside of foot shot flew right past the end line and was miles away from the goalpost.

His blind shot at goal made Ibrahimović very upset as he had been waiting in the middle of the pitch for him to pass the ball over. Ibrahimović flailed his arms about vigorously to let Quaresma know that he

should have passed the ball over to him instead of shooting for goal, but Quaresma hung his head in frustration over the mistake that he just made, and did not pay any attention to the Swedish forward.

Quaresma tried to make his way into Forest's penalty box a while later, but he was intercepted by George Wood who came at him with a tackle. The ball did not roll out of bounds, but Quaresma rolled off the pitch.

Quaresma, who was on the ground, signaled to the referee that Wood had just committed a foul, but the referee showed no interest in his claims. The referee did not blow on his whistle, and that indicated that the referee did not think Wood had committed a foul on Quaresma.

Quaresma was furious with the referee's decision. He jumped up from the ground and began flailing his arms about as he complained to the referee incessantly about his decision. He completely ignored how Wood had started going on the attack right as he was complaining to the referee.

His behavior upset Mourinho. Mourinho stood right behind Quaresma and hollered at the player who was from Portugal just like him, "What are you f*cking doing, Ricardo? Get back in the match!"

Quaresma became much more well-behaved after he got scolded at by his manager. However, it did not take long for him to start 'misbehaving' again.

Quaresma was not in a good form for the match, but he was very worked up for some reason. He would raise his hand and signal to the referee that the other party has committed a foul the moment there is a little bit of physical contact. He would blame the opponent for playing petty tricks when he lost the ball, and he would also claim that the other party collided with him when he failed to get past them.

It was not just during offense that he acted with this much agitation. He acted the same way during defense well. People were worried that he would be shown two yellow cards and get sent off the pitch before the first half ended.

Those people clearly worried too much.

Quaresma did not receive a single yellow card in the match, though he was still taken off the pitch...

Wood did not pass the ball straight away after he snatched it from Quaresma's feet. Instead, he observed the situation on the pitch, and came to the decision that he should bring the ball forward himself.

His decision came as good news to Quaresma, who had been held back by Wood. It meant that he had the chance to snatch the ball back from Wood and catch Forest off guard!

Without hesitation, Quaresma moved beside Wood and tried to snatch the ball back while tugging onto his shirt.

Just when he had stuck his leg out, Wood galvanized into action and he dragged Quaresma with him as he made a turn.

Thereafter...

Quaresma led out a cry in pain and he released his hand that had been holding onto Wood's shirt. His face went white as he laid on the ground with a hand over his right knee.

He did not look like he was putting on an act...

Wood glanced at Quaresma who was on the floor. He hesitated a little but still decided to kick the ball out of bounds.

Everyone was unprepared for the incident since it occurred so suddenly. The commentator went into a short daze before he said, "Quaresma is injured... How did he get injured?"

A replay of the incident began to air on the television screen.

Quaresma had tugged on Wood's shirt in hopes of lessening his pace, which would then bring about a chance for him to snatch the ball away from Wood.

It was a good plan, but who would have known how fearsome Wood's strength and energy was?

Quaresma had his right leg as a support, and right at the moment when he stuck his leg out to snatch the ball away, Wood suddenly galvanized into action. The force behind Wood's actions caused every other part of Quaresma's body, barring his right leg, to turn forward. His right leg was not able to turn with the rest of the body because it had been acting as a pivot for his body. As a result, it created an utterly bizarre scene: Quaresma's body had already made a 360 degree turn, but his right leg still maintained its original position...

Everyone knew what the scene signified.

There wasn't a single person whose knee would be in good shape after making a turn that was not humanly possible.

And that was also why Quaresma has fallen to the ground yelling in pain with a hand over his knee.

"Oh god..." The commentator's voice did not sound like he normally did. He was frightened by the scene that he had just viewed. The moment where Quaresma's knee got twisted and became deformed was shown before everyone in slow motion. The scene was real and brutal. Not everyone could act normally after seeing such a scene.

"I think that Quaresma's knee has suffered a very bad sprain. He's definitely unable to continue playing in this match." The commentator showed reservation in expressing his real thoughts.

Maybe Quaresma will be unable to continue playing for the rest of the season.

Inter Milan's medical staff rushed to Quaresma's side without waiting for the referee to gesture for them to get on the pitch. The spot in which Quaresma laid at was very near to Inter Milan's bench after all.

They removed Quaresma's hand that he had clasped over his knee. When Inter Milan's head doctor Franco Combi saw Quaresma's right leg, he could not help but draw a deep breath.

His calf laid in an absolutely abnormal manner next to his thigh. It did not look like Quaresma's calf at all, because a normal person's leg would not be joined together in the same way that his was. It was proof that Quaresma had fractured his knee joint.

Nevertheless, Combi still had to comfort Quaresma who was in a lot of pain, "It's okay, it's okay. It's not a big deal..."

He had already gestured Mourinho to bring on a substitute for Quaresma.

"I... I can't feel... My... My... Right leg..." Quaresma was in tears as he laid on the ground. The doctor might have tried to console him all this while, but he knew what had happened to him. There was nothing more agonizing than a broken leg to a professional footballer.

Quaresma, who had been as lively as a rabbit just a while ago, was now lying lifelessly on the ground. His right calf was twisted to the side. The sweat that had been secreted due to the pain and the tears that gushed out from his eyes blended into one. It was impossible to separate them from each other.

Even the Nottingham Forest players had looks of pity on their faces upon seeing the scene.

The boos that were targeted at Inter Milan gradually stopped, and the City Ground Stadium that could hold 30,000 spectators suddenly quietened down.

A stretcher had been sent onto the pitch. Four medical staff gingerly placed Quaresma onto the stretcher. Combi then covered his right leg with a towel before the stretcher was lifted off the pitch.

Quaresma's injury might not have been caused by a foul from Wood, but Wood was still inextricably linked to it.

Wood stood by Quaresma's side ever since he fell to the ground. He only walked up to Quaresma when he had been lifted up in the stretcher, and he gently patted him on the shoulder.

He had never been injured before, but that did not mean he did not understand how it felt to be injured. He has been feeling guilty all this time for causing Eastwood to suffer a serious injury due to his reckless actions. He hopes to avoid getting injured as much as possible, unless he is really left with no other choice.

Quaresma felt someone pat him on the shoulder, but he assumed it was from his team mate and did not pay any heed to it. He had covered his face with both of his hands and was feeling tormented over the fact that he was injured. He was not in the mood to care about anything else.

Quaresma was definitely not going to be able to get back on the pitch for the remainder of the match. He needed to be sent to a local hospital in Nottingham for immediate treatment straight away. He would only take a plane back to Milan after the match has ended.

His injury messed up Mourinho's plans completely. Mancini has not recovered from his injury and Mourinho did not even bring him along to England. Now that Quaresma was severely injured, Mourinho was left with no other choice but to bring on the 32 year-old Dejan Stanković as a substitute for Quaresma.

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Twain crossed his leg after seeing Stanković get on the pitch. It was a sign that he was very relaxed at the moment.

“It’s a shame that Quaresma suffered such a serious injury and I do feel sorry for him, but this is a chance that has been given to us. Inter Milan’s players must still be reeling in shock from what just happened, and bringing on another player so suddenly will lead to some confusion and chaos on their side as well. If we can grasp this chance, we can close out the match.” Twain told the two assistant managers beside him.

“David, tell the players to strengthen their offense. This is a good chance to get a goal.”

Kerslake did as he was told. He had a loud voice that did not pale in comparison to Tony Twain’s, and more importantly, his voice was not as hoarse as Twain’s. When he shouts at the top of his voice, even people who are situated very far away from him can hear him, which is why Kerslake is generally the one who will relay Twain’s instructions to the team during the match, unless there are important things that Twain must convey personally.

As Kerslake stood by the side of the pitch, he made use of his loud voice and hand gestures to tell the Nottingham Forest players, “Don’t let the fact that an opposing player sustained an injury get you down! This is a very good chance for us to score a goal!”

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If anyone had thought that the atmosphere in the stadium would ease up a little and become much better for the away team to perform in after seeing how Nottingham Forest’s fans showed kindness and respect towards Quaresma when he was injured, then they were utterly mistaken.

Laughter and boos directed at the Inter Milan players rang out from the stands once again a while after the match restarted.

There was not even a shred of sympathy on the Forest fans...

As fans, they draw a clear line between ‘work’ and ‘personal affairs’. Keeping quiet when Quaresma was injured was out of personal feelings, but now that they are in a match, it was back to ‘business’ for them.

Twain wanted his team to strengthen their offense and fight for a goal, but Mourinho did not make any further mistakes. He quickly saw through Twain’s plan, and immediately got his team to make their formation more compact and pay more attention to defense. They were not going to give Nottingham Forest any chance to score a goal.

The Inter Milan players put in a good performance. Nottingham Forest attacked Inter Milan vigorously, but they lacked the finishing blow. Ibišević was tightly marked by Inter Milan’s defenders, and Mourinho chose to let his players get rough on Şahin as a way to curb his attacks. Both flanks were also well-defended, and the players were also asked to keep a close eye on George Wood and Tiago.

All in all, Inter Milan did not give Forest even the slightest chance to score.

The match reached a stalemate. Both teams spent most of their time battling it out in the midfield and had very few chances at goal. It was quite boring to watch.

However, things were different for this game as compared to their previous match against Inter Milan. It would be good if the team could score goals, but Twain would not feel irritated if the match continued

to stay as a stalemate since they have two away goals. Nottingham Forest would still progress to the next round even if the score stayed 0:0 at the end of the match.

Hence, Twain's core tactic for this home game was to 'defend and counterattack'.

It was a tactic that has made countless of their opponents gnash their teeth in anger, and it will always make a grand appearance every time Twain needed a result. It represented Tony Twain's 'conservative football' and 'result football'.

George Wood and Tiago were both playing as the defensive midfielders and their main role was to defend. Cohen and Fernández play as the side midfielders, but they were not attacking midfielders. They had to defend while going forward to attack. Leighton Baines and Rafinha play as the full backs, but unlike the previous match against Inter Milan, they did not need to go forward and join in the attack as frequently. Their main job was to defend.

As for Ibišević and Şahin, they were asked to snatch the ball back despite being more attack-oriented players. Ibišević also has to return to the penalty box during set pieces to help in the defense and head the ball away for his team.

Netherlands' football is to either go all out in offense or defense. Tony Twain's football is to go all out in defense and only half in offense. It is easy to see why others say he only cares about results...

Inter Milan had no way of breaking through Nottingham Forest's sturdy defense after losing Quaresma.

The key to breaking the deadlock during a battle between two top teams in football could lie in the manager's ability to make changes based on the situation on the pitch, the players' individual performances, one counterattack, one set piece or one mistake from the opponent.

Sadly, none of the aforementioned factors happened up to the end of the first half. Both managers wanted a more solid performance from their team, and they sought to make the least number of mistakes while they waited for the other party to make an error. The players for both teams were not able to shine due to the restrictions present in the tactics that their managers have chosen.

When the first half ended, Mourinho's face had gone dark, whereas Twain carried a smile on his face.

If things continue in the way that they have in the first half, then Nottingham Forest would definitely progress to the next round!

Chapter 795: The Chip Shot

At half-time Twain praised the team's overall performance and asked the team to continue playing like that. Mourinho, on the other hand, was not as relaxed; he was concerned about Quaresma's injury and how to crack Nottingham Forest's defensive counter-attack tactics. Other than improving their offense, what else was there to do?

Inter Milan was a bit demoralised. Quaresma suffered such a serious injury because the situation was disadvantageous — the news from Comby confirmed that Quaresma would miss all of the games this season and that it was not clear when he would return next season.

But Mourinho's spun this into a morale boost for the team. He used Quaresma's broken leg to inspire the players in the team, telling them that there was no way back and that he would have to roll back to Milan if they did not work hard enough, also that Quaresma's injury would be pointless.

And like Tony Twain, Mourinho was also a demagogue who was able to spur others. He excelled in these things. Those Inter Milan players who were uninspired were motivated by his words like wolves.

And just like that, they were back on the court. Inter Milan's attack was clearly strengthened after the start of the second half, and they were taking a siege at the Akinfeev's goal without thinking about their defense. That being the case, Nottingham Forest was naturally happy to fight back defensively.

But César played well, he consecutively blocked two shots from Nottingham Forest. With him at the back protecting the goal, Inter Milan's attacking players were relieved.

Twain was furious that the team had missed two chances. He was acutely aware that the second half was different from the first half. In the first half, it was a mess that only alleviated with Quaresma's injury. There was something ominous about the second half and they could not help but be wary.

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Ibišević was in the thick of the game and had to take on too many defensive tasks, also he was not fast enough to fight back. Twain decided to replace him immediately, loath to delay. What if Inter Milan scored in this period of time?

Since they wanted to counterattack, of course a striker who is speedy would be ideal. One option would be the experienced striker Eastwood and the other the faster Agbonlahor. Eastwood was not slow, but he was certainly not as fast as Agbonlahor. However, he was more capable of grasping opportunities in front of the goal mouth with several ways of shooting methods. The advantage of Agbonlahor was much simpler; that is, speed. He moved like the wind and it was almost a guarantee that he could break through the defensive line easily and face the goalkeeper directly.

But what then, after facing the goalkeeper? Agbonlahor's shooting was not superb so it was possible to lose in a one-on-one with the goalkeeper, and César was in good form and might have made some incredible saves. If Agbonlahor repeatedly wasted his opportunities, it would only strengthen Inter Milan's confidence and reduce Nottingham Forest's resolve to fight back quickly.

After weighing his options, Twain opted for the slightly slower but technically better pure striker, Eastwood. After calling Eastwood to him, Twain looked at him and laughed, "When I need help, you're always the first person I think of, Freddy."

"We need to score goals, Chief."

"You're not going to let me down, are you?"

"I was riding Fina this morning as a warm up, Chief." Fina was Eastwood's horse. When Fina was younger, Eastwood used to ride it on the road in the eastern suburbs of London as warm-up. Today, it was very sturdy, and Eastwood's stance in these two seasons was also very outstanding.

"That's assuring. As you said, go up and score goals." Twain patted him on the shoulder and handed the work to Don, who was responsible for explaining the general tactics to him.

Don asked Eastwood to move more widely on the pitch, not to be confined to the middle of the road. He also told Eastwood not to think too much about the defence and to focus on scoring instead. To shoot more, no matter where he was, since more shots would mean more chances of scoring.

Eastwood nodded, then the fourth official held up a sign on the sidelines to signal for his substitution. Ibišević walked off the pitch to complete the handover with Eastwood, and both of them were applauded by Forest's fans. Although there were no goals, Super Ibe was working very hard in defence, and there are several key headers to clear the ball. His selfless character also helped the team's overall defense.

Eastwood came on, and everyone knew it was Twain's "offensive signal". Eastwood was not good at defending, but he was good at scoring goals, and his physicality did not allow him to sprint back and forth from one penalty area to another in the game, let alone physically confront his opponent.

Eastwood ran on the field with his right hand above his head, drawing a circle and eventually pointing to the front. Keep going with the defensive counterattack. All the Forest players could understand it.

Twain made a substitution but Mourinho's side was still standing put. First of all, he still did not know what effect this adjustment of Twain would bring, so it was better to observe first. Secondly, due to Quaresma's accidental injury, he lost a replacement for no reason and only had two cards left which he could only use in the most crucial moment.

He just let the players on the back line pay attention to the offside. One way to deal with defensive counter-attacks was to create an offside, allowing the opposing attacking player to fall into the offside trap frequently, causing the opposing passer to no longer dare to pass the ball straight.

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Nottingham Forest's counter-attacking quality improved after Eastwood came on. The Romani could control the ball under his feet. He was very well-rounded, could break through and shoot from afar. Such a striker could do what that required several talents to do alone. Forest's long and straight pass on the counter-attack had a high error rate, but once successful, Eastwood could face César directly.

Eastwood also did not return to defend, but instead just stood in front of the field and waited for the opportunity. If his teammates made a mistake in passing the ball, he would snatch the ball, but he would let go otherwise and continue to wait for the next chance. He believed in the midfield's ability to intercept and there would not be a lack of chances for him.

The Forest players in the midfield also had great confidence in Eastwood's ability so they did not worry that their passes would not reach anyone. They just had to send the ball forward.

After Wood intercepted a pass from Inter Milan, he passed the ball to Şahin, who continued to pass it straight. This time they succeeded! Samuel had some big direct cuts, but he let the football slip past his feet! Eastwood ran out from behind Andreu and went offside, sloping to catch the ball.

"Freddy Eastwood! A beautiful pass that was not offside!"

But this was not a death sentence for Inter Milan because there was still some distance between the route of the pass and Eastwood. As long as César's timely strike blocking the line and angle, coupled with his continued magical play, then it was not impossible to save the team at a time.

Julio César made his choice. He ran out of the goal to get as close as possible to Eastwood to block his shot. At the same time, he recalled some of Eastwood's technical features. As a striker, he preferred to shoot hard instead of shooting cleverly. That's good, blocking the angle, no matter how much strength, unless he shot past the goalkeeper, he would not score.

Şahin passed the ball straight, Eastwood slotted in, and if he wanted to shoot, he needed to adjust his direction after receiving the ball, which was advantageous for Inter Milan's defense.

César slowed down a little because he thought he could grab the ball in front of Eastwood, and once he got out he would not be able to use his hands, which would greatly limit his play. He intended to let Nottingham Forest's No.11 get the ball first and then block his shot.

"Eastwood was about to reach the ball and now he is right outside the penalty area and César has blocked his angle of the shot. Will he pass the Brazilian goalkeeper?"

"Pass him!" There was a tsunami of mountain calls in the stands, and they all wanted to see Eastwood dribble pass César, send the football beautifully into the empty goalmouth, and admire the desperate expression on the faces of the chasing Inter Milan players. As long as the goal was scored, Inter Milan needed to score at least two goals to secure promotion.

But Eastwood made an action that no one thought he could. Once he received the ball, the Gypsy was facing sideways towards César, he lifted right foot calf...

The football chipped over the top of César, who had already dropped his centre of gravity and prepared to pounce on the ball, and flew straight to the empty door behind him!

"Chip shot! Beautiful! Beautiful!"

César would have been prepared for Eastwood's strong shot, but he did not think the other side would actually do a chip shot. When he jumped from the ground to pounce on the ball he had already been too late as he could only be half-kneeling on the ground, turning his head shockingly to look at the ball that was still in the air.

Eastwood, who had completed the chip shot, ran to the other side and was ready to celebrate the goal with open arms. He knew that the ball could not be stopped by anyone, not even the crossbar posts.

César watched the football fall into the net, and finally fell to the ground on one side, a chill was sent into his heart. The graceful arc seemed to make all the sounds disappear and stopped time, but when the football fell into the goal, the city pitch comes alive like an erupting volcano.

"Wonderful shot! A kick of surprise. César is in good shape, but Eastwood, who hasn't been on the pitch for long, was in better shape than he is! The goal, from passing to running to the last shot, had a clear and easy path. Eastwood's as he is during regular trainings — you don't see any extra movement when he shoots. Neat! "

"Ahha! Don't think that I can only shoot hard shots!" Eastwood, after the goal, flew on the pitch with open arms and gloated.

"You're still chewing gum? Aren't you afraid of swallowing that thing!" Teammates flocked to him.

"Hey, if you don't pat me on the head, I won't!"

“Hahahaha-”

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Unlike the Nottingham Forest players who were basking in their excitement, the Inter Milan players were extremely frustrated. Nevermind that they could not score against Nottingham Forest despite the siege, but to have Nottingham Forest score against them? How were they to continue the game now? Now they had to make sure they did not lose the ball again and scored at least two more goals to qualify. Even if they end with 1:1 draw, they would be eliminated because of the lack of away goals.

Mourinho, as manager, stood rooted and was a little helpless. Technically, the loss started with Samuel's shoveling error, but he could not blame anyone. Because of how he played, Nottingham Forest's goal was going to come sooner or later. He had hoped to score before the other side, thus changing the stance of his play and taking the initiative of the game in his own hands.

Now it was all gone!

Was he really going to lost to Tony Twain?

Mourinho clenched his fist, he was not satisfied. Why was it so difficult to win a game from him!

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Mourinho then replaced Cambiasso with Adriano and Mario Balotelli replaced Samuel, who made the mistake. He seemed to be doing an all-in like a madman. Twain, on the other hand, substituted Şahin with Woodgate, so the technique was re-stousteing, five full and three center backs as defense. As the game passed, his odds of winning increased. As long as Inter Milan did not score two goals in the last minute, Forest would advance even if they accidentally scored a goal. He really went all out with the exploiting...

In the final moments of the game, Forest gave Inter Milan three free-kicks in a row on the edge of the penalty area due to their exaggerated defense moves. This made Twain very nervous. He could no longer sit as he stood from the coach's seat to step up to the side of the field, nervously watching the game.

He knew Balotelli was a free-kick ersty, and the division from Mihajlovic was not to be underestimated. He did not want to make himself the victim of a genius boy rising; he was more willing to be the devil who killed this genius boy.

Balotelli's first free-kick hit the post and flew out of bounds, leaving the Forest fans in the stands in a cold sweat. Mourinho was as nervous as he was on the sidelines, staring at Balotelli while grit his teeth. What he was probably wanting to see the most at this moment was Balotelli's "two goals to fame" drama.

The second free kick, Balotelli kicked the ball against the wall. The sly Nottingham Forest player took full advantage of the opportunity, being knocked to the ground by the football's smouldering, as Eastwood, groaning in pain on the ground, was unwilling to get up.

Inter Milan wanted to continue their attack, but was hasty as they kicked the football at the feet of forest players. Barnes kicked the football into the stands with a big kick as the team doctor entered the field, wanting to drag the time.

Mourinho quipped on the pitch, "I bet if Barnes did not kick the ball out and decided to take the ball back for a counter-attack, Eastwood would jump up and take part in the attack."

He was not wrong at all. Nottingham Forest just did not have much sportsmanship. Eastwood's affair took five minutes and it did not take long after for Inter Milan to get another free-kick after the match resumed.

There were still three minutes to go before the additional injury time, and eight minutes left, even if the injury stoppage time was five minutes. To score two goals in eight minutes was not easy for Inter Milan's players. Not to mention their opponents, Nottingham Forests, excelled in defense.

This third free-kick was a testament to how anxious Inter Milan's players are at the moment. Balotelli kicked the ball straight into the air, being 108,000 miles away from the goalmouth.

The six-minute injury lay-off did not bring good luck to Inter, who were frantically besieging Forest's goal and even goalkeeper Julio César rushed up to play as a kicker in the corner. It did not help.

City's stadium was instantly covered in loud cheers when the referee blew the final whistle. They finally got the revenge for the previous season and using the best way to eliminate Inter Milan.

At the end of the game, Nottingham Forest fans sang self-made songs in the stands to mock Mourinho,

"You'll never win Tony! You'll never win Tony! What a poor man! If Tony appears in your dreams, it would be a nightmare for you! If you open your eyes, Tony would appear in front of your eyes to smile at you, to smile at you!"

In the midst of the noise, Mourinho came over to shake hands with Twain.

"Did you step on dog sh*t today?" He asked.

"Why do you ask?"

"You had such good luck."

Twain laughed. "As long as I win, the reason doesn't matter." Twain did not care if his luck was good. "I only care about the results."

In fact, when Mourinho was in Chelsea, he had been a little shameless, but when Tony Twain, such an extremely shameless person came into the picture, he lost. Hence, it was normal facing Twain with a consecutive loss record.

Chapter 796: Before A Big Game

Eastwood's shot became a topic of great relish among the Forest fans after the game. It was even featured on the opening reel of ESPN's highlights and broadcasted repeatedly. It was a really terrific

goal, like a work of art. The commentators joked that it was not humiliating for Mourinho to be wiped out under such a goal.

While Nottingham Forest eliminated Inter Milan with a score of 3:2, Barcelona also easily defeated Eindhoven by 2:0 and advanced to the final eight. The two high-profile teams finally met.

Although it would be almost a month before the two teams actually encounter each other, the media and fans were already eagerly counting down.

So far this season, Nottingham Forest had been hovering between the third and fifth places in the league tournament. It would take a lot of effort on their part to win the league title, while also praying that the top teams in the table would make consecutive mistakes. It was too low a probability. So, those people familiar with Tony Twain thought Twain would focus the strength on the Champions League while retaining a top-four spot in the league tournament.

Barcelona's situation was slightly better than Nottingham Forest. They currently occupied the top spot in the league tournament, with the second-placed Real Madrid four points away from them. At the same time in the Copa del Rey, they also reached the final. It looked like it was going to be another successful season—they were likely to achieve the great accomplishment of a Treble, even though Real Madrid was eyeing covetously in the league tournament, the Copa del Rey final was against Sevilla, which was recovering and wanted to use the Copa del Rey as a chance to re-emerge, and their Champions League opponent encountered was the toughest...

It was right to say that they had a bright future, and also reasonable to say that their future was uncertain.

With half a month to go before the game, Guardiola was asked by the reporters about the match against Nottingham Forest. He did not want to answer the question, so he said, "I'm only thinking about the next league game and derby against RCD Espanyol now. The Champions League is still half a month away."

Unlike him, Twain spoke to the media early on about the game, "Who will be the eventual winner? Do you still need to ask the question? It's obviously us! Barcelona is unlucky. Their competition schedule is not good for them during this period. This is our chance... Want me to comment on the Derbi barceloní the night after tomorrow? I hear it's a bigger game than El Clásico? I hope a few players in their team will be injured in that game..."

The remark caused a stir in the Catalan media. <Mundo Deportivo> angrily denounced Twain as a "stadium fascist" and he actually said the despicable words of wanting his opponent to have their players injured in the game.

<Sport> derided Twain's remarks as a "declaration of a coward." Why? Because "he can only pray that we have injured players in Barcelona so that his team can win. How sad and pathetic it is!"

A number of other tabloids published their own comments about Twain in their articles. In their published caricatures, Twain became a monster with a human face and a bull's body. He had long horns on his head and a tail behind his buttocks. A strip of a moustache above his lips made him look like Hitler.

But Twain did not talk nonsense. At least Guardiola had the worry—what if his players were really injured in the Derbi barceloní against RCD Espanyol? What was he going to do? Messi was currently in great form and playing very well. He had scored consecutive goals and assists. He had long been a player who needed the special attention of his opponents in the games. Since it was the Derbi barceloní, it was almost inconceivable that RCD Espanyol would not send anyone to mark Messi. The use of lethal tactics against Messi in the games now seemed to become an “unwritten rule” in La Liga. In any team encounters against Barcelona, Messi would always be the player with the most violations against him after the game.

Cruyff had on more than one occasion called on the Royal Spanish Football Federation to introduce a rule: to protect the players with artistic talent and punish the lethal tactics that targeted a particular player. Although he did not mention Messi by name, anyone with a normal IQ knew he was speaking for Messi.

The Royal Spanish Football Federation could not change the rules for a player, and FIFA had long created a regulation to crack down on the “tackle from behind.” So, nothing could be changed.

Messi had already suffered an injury in the first half of the season and took a month and a half off to rest before returning. In fact, he had been injured for almost every season over the years. As one of the best offensive star players on the planet, he was naturally contradictory to the defenders. All defenders would never feel “tender, protective feelings” when they faced Messi. They would only shovel him to the ground again and again, forcing him to lose the ball and thus bringing Barcelona’s offense to a standstill.

Twain was definitely not cursing the Barcelona players. He was just telling the truth—the current situation was such. One could say that the players who were technically good suffered from others’ jealousy, or that the defensive players were killing the beauty of football. It was an indisputable fact that they were more likely to be injured.

Therefore, Twain’s words caused Guardiola a certain amount of complications... There was no doubt that the match against RCD Espanyol would be intense. Messi would certainly be the core of his team and be heavily marked by the opponent, which would even use lethal tactics. If Messi were to be injured in the game and missed the next few games, would the loss not be even greater?

He mulled over it, and in the Derbi barceloní a day later, Messi’s name was not on the starting list.

Some media exclaimed that Twain’s mouth was really powerful and could actually make the Barcelona manager changed his mind ...

It was not as simple as not having Messi. The entire Barcelona team also practiced a little restraint when they played in that game against RCD Espanyol. As they played in the away game, they were clearly not as proactive as the home team, RCD Espanyol. The commentator said that Guardiola had instilled in them the idea of not getting hurt in the game when he touched on this point.

Regardless of how careful Guardiola was, Twain was right in that Barcelona’s competition schedule during this period was against them:

After Derbi barceloní with RCD Espanyol, the next round of the league tournament was against the fourth-placed Valencia, followed by the internationally highly anticipated “war of the century”, the “El

Clásico” —Barcelona’s away game against Real Madrid. After they finished playing in the game, it would be time to play in the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinals. They would wait at home for Nottingham Forest to come challenge. Then after playing this game, it was the league’s home game against Sevilla, followed by the away challenge against Nottingham Forest.

It looked like Twain really had a deep understanding of his opponent and even completely knew the other side’s schedule. In the face of such a difficult competition schedule, Barcelona still wanted to break through in all the tournaments. It was indeed difficult. After the league tournament was played till mid-April, everyone would be exhausted and lacked strength to continue by then. But this was the final sprint. A single slip might cause long lasting trouble.

Barcelona would not be willing to lose the Champions League title, nor would they want to give up the league tournament. The four-point gap was not enough for them to keep out Real Madrid, not to mention that they still had a chance to directly play against Real Madrid.

On the other hand, Nottingham Forest’s competition agenda was much easier. They only had one stronger opponent before the game against Barcelona, and that was Chelsea.

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The result of the Derbi barceloní was a 2:2 draw between the two sides. In this game, the referee showed nine yellow cards and one red card. RCD Espanyol’s center back, Sergio Sánchez was sent off with a red card for knocking over Iniesta. The latter lasted for fifteen minutes after he was sent off for a red card and was immediately replaced with Yaya Touré by Guardiola.

Twain’s jinx became true. After Iniesta was replaced, the center back, Gabriel Milito was forced off the field with a twisted ankle from a scuffle.

The Barcelona fans should be really happy that the game was a 2:2 draw because toward the end, Barcelona only had nine players to play—Milito was injured with eight minutes to go before the end of the game and Guardiola had used up all the substitutions.

The only good news was that Guardiola was right not to arrange for Messi to be in the starting lineup. In fact, by the end of the game, when Barcelona was facing a bad situation, Guardiola also did not let Messi play. After seeing RCD Espanyol’s exuberant fighting spirit and rough actions, only a fool would let Messi go up and take the risk.

After the game, the media went to interview Twain and asked him what he thought of the game. Twain used a tone which set the Catalan’s media teeth on edge, “This result showed that I absolutely did not maliciously curse the team, because I was telling the truth. I don’t believe that no one would get hurt and no one would not be sent off, playing a game like the Derbi barceloní. So similarly, I don’t believe there won’t be any bit of friction in playing in a game like El Clásico...”

The last remark revealed his sinister and despicable nature—RCD Espanyol was not enough. He continued to expect Real Madrid to cause trouble for Barcelona.

Of course, Twain’s comments had caught Barcelona’s attention. Guardiola did not say anything as always, but his players could not sit still.

The big mouth, Eto'o was the first to fire at Tony Twain, "Some people just lack basic respect. I really don't know how this guy became the manager of a professional football club."

Xavi also expressed his displeasure, "I don't think it's appropriate to promote injuries in players. Quaresma's injury was a tragedy. Don't tell me Mr. Twain wants to see such a tragedy unfold every day?"

In fact, the Barcelona players were clever and eloquent... Twain could only choose to shut up with response to Barcelona.

But the person caught in the middle who had it the hardest was Piqué. As a Barcelona player, Piqué's affection for Nottingham Forest and Twain ran deep. Without his previous boss and Nottingham Forest, Piqué did not know how long he would have to endure before he could be in Barcelona's First Team squad and become the current center back. He could be considered to "save his country through a roundabout way" ...

The war of words with Barcelona was first provoked by Twain. As for Piqué, who had played for his team, he certainly knew what the boss had in mind—it was not that he hated Barcelona. It was completely a necessary means to victory and nothing more. But in the eyes of his Barcelona teammates, this man had a deep hatred of Barcelona.

When the reporters came up to ask him as the man in the Barcelona team who knew Tony Twain the best, Piqué could only use "I refuse to comment" to dodge it.

He did not want to say bad things about his mentor, but he could not help an outsider either, so he chose to be silent.

Twain could afford to pay such attention to Barcelona. Unlike Barcelona, which was struggling to compete and try to win multiple titles, his team played well enough to finish in the top four of the league tournament for now. He long since given up the FA Cup and EFL Cup. Now he had a lot of time to slowly play with Guardiola.

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After a draw with RCD Espanyol and two players injured, the Catalan media could not help but panic. In fact, the media were like this and like to create a ruckus. Knowing that Nottingham Forest's next league opponent was Chelsea, one by one, they began to trumpet Rijkaard's great achievements previously at Barcelona. Since they had previously referred to Guardiola's Barcelona as "the second dream team", they had to say that Rijkaard was the "founder of the second dream team", just like AC Milan's Sacchi and Capello.

They looked back at Rijkaard's experience in Barcelona and, of course, automatically blocked the bad things, saying nothing but merit. Everyone sang high praises of him and wish him all the best and success at Chelsea.

Looking at these attitudes, it could not be seen that when Rijkaard was in trouble, it was them who threw him under the bus.

Rijkaard was a smart and calm man who reacted coolly to the sudden collective crazy praises from the Catalan media. Everyone who left Barcelona did not seem to have a good impression of the local Catalan media...

When asked about the subject by the reporters, he simply said in a very bland tone, "I am the manager of Chelsea now. Of course, I will try to defeat Nottingham Forest, but it will not be for Barcelona."

But a defeat of Nottingham Forest would not be beneficial for Barcelona. Twain did not seek to win the league title, so he could afford to lose a game or two. The Catalan media must have hoped that what Twain had "cursed" them with would happen to him—a number of players would leave the field with injuries in a bitter clash with Chelsea.

Twain did not give them that opportunity.

In the previous years when the two teams met, a war of words would inevitably happen, thus inciting explosive scenes during the game. Plus, Twain and Rijkaard had an old feud. The media speculated that the game might not be exciting, but it would certainly be intense. But what happened instead? Twain did not take the initiative to provoke a war of words, and Rijkaard, who was upset by the team's factional locker room, was not in the mood to argue with outsiders.

Twain swapped the entire starting lineup for the game and rotated all the players expected by the media to be in the Champions League starting lineup to be on the bench and in the stands.

The game eventually ended with a 1:1 draw with Chelsea. Nottingham Forest was still in the fourth place in the league. It had little impact.

Compared to the Derbi barceloní, the game was civilized—there was no red card, only four yellow cards, and no one was injured. The media also guessed only half right. The game was really not exciting, but it was not intense either. It was dull for ninety minutes, with a scored goal for each side. The game, which was highly anticipated to be "an explosive duel" before, ended like it was an errand to be dealt with.

After the game, Twain wrote in four of his media columns mocking the Catalan media for "wasting their energies in vain." The war of words between the two sides escalated further.

Although there was still more than a week to go before the real match day, the smoke had already spread, blown by the wind from England to Barcelona.

Chapter 797: Heavyweight Skirmish

After they played the game with Chelsea, there was still one more league game before Nottingham Forest would fly to Barcelona in Spain for the Champions League quarterfinals.

Their opponent was not strong. It was only Blackburn Rovers. Tony Twain rotated the team again. Only half of the players who would play against Barcelona, were in the game. In the end, Nottingham Forest easily beat Blackburn Rovers, which was not on the same level at all, by 3:1.

Nottingham Forest's game was played on Saturday afternoon. It was considered a slightly earlier game in this round of the Premier League. After the game, Twain handed the team to Kerslake and rushed straight to London with Dunn. They had to catch the evening flight to Madrid, Spain.

They were not traveling to Spain for a holiday nor for an elopement. They were going there just to watch El Clásico live the next night at the Bernabéu and collect first-hand information at the nearest distance.

The team would not leave for Barcelona until Sunday afternoon. By that time, Twain and Dunn would be waiting in their booked hotel for a long time.

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It was now six hours before the evening's game. They were already here early. It did not make sense to stay in the hotel. It was better to go out and explore. They could enjoy the atmosphere of a different country while relaxing their tight nerves.

Spain was not like England. Visitors wove through the sun-filled streets. Twain saw a lot of football fans from all over the world. He even saw East Asian faces. He did not know whether they were Chinese or Japanese. Some of them looked like ordinary tourists, wearing sun hats and sunglasses with cameras hanging in front of their chests. But some people paraded ostentatiously about town, wearing the jerseys of Barcelona and Real Madrid.

Fortunately, this was not Glasgow. There was need to worry about being stabbed to death by the other side's hardline fans...

There were also the media from all over the world doing random interviews with those football fans in the streets.

This scene was absolutely nonexistent in Nottingham. No matter how good Nottingham Forest was, the gap between a big city and a small town was not so easy to close. That was why most people still did not think of Nottingham Forest as a "powerhouse" —the so-called "powerhouses" were not located in small cities.

Inter Milan and AC Milan were in Milan, Italy's second-largest city. Juventus was in Turin, the city of car industry. Not to mention Barcelona and Real Madrid. Manchester United was in the heavily industrial city of Manchester, while Liverpool was a famous port and tourist city on a large scale. There was also Munich, home to Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga. Hoffenheim was also good in the Bundesliga, but no one would see them as "a powerhouse." Even they themselves did not think so.

There was no large market without a big city, which in turn lacked more attention. It was all linked. Nottingham Forest completed its revival under Evan Doughty's administration but there was still a long way to go to create even greater glory.

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"It's the first time I've been to the stadium to watch El Clásico..." Twain and Dunn stood outside the Bernabéu stadium, looking up at the huge white building.

"When I was still a football fan, I looked forward to coming to Europe to watch the famous derbies like the Derby della Madonnina, the Manchester derby, the Merseyside derby, the North London derby, El Clásico... Unfortunately, I couldn't afford it." When Twain and Dunn were alone, he did not shy away from talking about who he was formerly. "Now that I can afford it, I'm only able to fulfill the wish after so many years..."

“I thought you really wanted to spy on the enemy.”

“Ha, of course I’m here to spy on the enemy. But it’s normal to have some personal selfish motives...”

“If you were a football fan, which team would you cheer for?” Dunn also asked a question that had nothing to do with his job.

Twain touched his nose and thought for a moment, “Barcelona... I think. Maybe it is.”

“Why the slight hesitation?”

“Because I wasn’t sure what my mentality was at the time. I have been a manager for so many years. I had long forgotten what it was like to purely be a fan... Why did I support Barcelona? Because they played beautifully. But the only thing I think about when I watch the games now is whether I can win, even if I’m not a manager.” He viewed a game the same way even when he was a guest pundit on the BBC.

Dunn smiled, “Occupational hazard?”

“Maybe.”

“In fact, your current style of football is nice watch. The rhythm is very fast, and the game is very intense.”

“Someone thinks I’m whitewashing it, ha!” Twain thought it was funny when he said it.

Dunn laughed too, because he knew what Twain was like. It was not his style to win public support for doing this kind of thing.

In the game against Barcelona, Twain would stick to his defensive counterattack tactics without any surprises. He would try for a draw and score away goals. Then he would go back to the home side and seek a chance for a fatal blow.

To go directly against the team that was best in offense in the world, that manager must be crazy.

Standing in front of the home ground of Spain’s most prestigious club, Twain looked up at the high-up name as a fan. Everyone loved beauty and was willing to pursue good things. Football was no exception. Beautiful football always won applause and cheers from the bottom of people’s hearts. If Twain were a fan, he would pay sublime tribute to the teams which played beautifully but lost the game and maintain the necessary respect. Even if he was not a supporter of that team.

However, he was now a coach who could only rely on the pursuit of victory to prove his worth and maintain his position as a manager.

Suddenly a voice came from behind. Twain and Dunn could not understand it at all, so they ignored it. It was not until the voice rang out again that they realized it was directed at them.

At the same time, the owner of the voice already went around in front of them. She was a professionally dressed beauty, holding a microphone and followed by a cameraman with a camera on him.

It turned out to be an interview. Twain and Dunn looked at each other and saw surprise in each other's eyes—they came to Spain without informing any media. Why were they found out here by the Spanish media? But they discovered they were mistaken in the next second.

"Tony Twain!" The female reporter screamed out first.

Twain and Dunn glanced at each other again—it turned out to be sheer dumb luck...

They originally thought that in Spain, a place so unfamiliar that even if they had been kidnapped, they would not be able to find anyone for the ransom, they simply did not need to wear any sunglasses or be in disguise. They did not expect the dedicated reporters to be out so early to produce the program that they would run into them among so many people...

Twain's first reaction was to cough and lower his head to say, "You've got the wrong person, Miss."

"How can it be?" The female reporter looked very excited, and said the rhetorical question with a laugh, "For the past month, the Catalan media has been plastered with all kinds of photos of you. I have collected a lot of them myself. How can I be mistaken?"

She was so happy not because she was a big fan of Tony Twain and eager to have a one-night stand or something with Twain. But it was because she was lucky enough to get the best news that no one else could get.

"It looks like you are part of the Catalan media too. Don't you really want to give me a slap now?" Twain finally admitted his identity with reluctance. He knew he could not escape today. It would be better to admit it in this way.

"Although I'm not a lady, I'm not going to hit anyone casually, Mr. Twain."

"Oh, is that so? I read the remarks in the Catalan media. You guys are eager to tear me apart. To give you an exclusive story, I'm already thinking about whether to hire a professional bodyguard to protect me while I direct the game at the Camp Nou. If I were to be knocked out from a weapon of mass destruction like a pig's head, would the game be suspended for a rematch? Will the home game at Camp Nou be cancelled?"

The Catalan reporter did not know whether to laugh or cry at by Twain's remarks. She began to think that maybe it was not an enviable job to interview Tony Twain...

"Can we not talk about those things? Mr. Twain, I'm curious as to why you're here. Yesterday you were at the Premier League's technical area, directing the game..."

"Don't tell me you think I'm here to buy toilet paper?" Twain asked instead.

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"This is the latest news from our reporter outside the Bernabéu stadium. Let's take a look at whom Miss Savier met!" The "breaking news" was plugged in the pre-match special on the television station, TVC. The footage turned from the studio to the outdoors.

In the square at the Bernabéu Stadium, Tony Twain faced sideways at the television camera and opposite him was the beautiful reporter.

“What am I doing here? Don’t tell me you think I’m here to buy toilet paper? Of course, I’m here to watch the game.”

“Are you here to watch your opponent for the next game?”

“That’s right.”

“I can see that you take the next game very seriously. So, what do you hope to be the outcome for tonight’s war of the century?”

Twain gave an answer that surprised the reporter, “That Barcelona wins.”

The footage cut back and the host smiled, “It’s an unexpected answer. After Tony Twain wages a month-long war of words with us, is it him expressing goodwill?”

The interlude ended with the host’s hilarious laughter.

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While waiting in line to check their tickets to enter, Dunn still could not figure out why Twain would answer in that way.

“I thought you would say ‘I want Barcelona to lose’ even if you didn’t say, ‘I want Barcelona to have a few more injured players.’ Why are you acting abnormally...”?

Twain smiled, “We have to play defensive counterattack, so we naturally have to dial down our attitude. That’s how Barcelona will be willing to press out. Although it does not matter what tactics we play and Barcelona will still stick to the offense, they certainly want us to attack them. We are not going to do what they want. A lower stance and playing defensive counterattack will be for our best.”

Having said that, he smacked his lips again and said, “If someone like me goes to Barcelona to coach, I will probably be sacked after the first game, right? Ha!”

Dunn laughed when he thought about what kind of treatment someone like Tony Twain would receive if he were to stand at Camp Nou’s technical area, “You’ll probably be the first coach in Barcelona’s history to be booed by his own team’s fans every game.”

“That’s too bad. I hate the method of booing one’s own team. But I’m looking forward to hearing the boos at Wednesday’s game.” Twain opened his arms as if to hug the boos. He added, “The fiercer they boo, the more afraid they are!”

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The clash between Barcelona and Real Madrid appeared lackluster against the backdrop of the Champions League quarterfinals. This disappointed Twain—the war of the century he most wanted to see should be like this: the referee should crazily issue cards like a dealer in a Las Vegas casino, the players of both teams should repeatedly collide on the field like twenty-two bulls in heat, and then a few core players would be in a heated collision. Maybe it would not necessarily be intense. The process was not important. What mattered was the result—for them to be injured and leave the pitch. The latest news from the hospital the next day would be that these people would all be injured for a month, just missing the two games against the Forest team.

Unfortunately, Guardiola was not a fool. The war of the century was a game that could not be lost the most in the season, but he was not willing to give up the Champions League. What heartened him was the rival, Real Madrid also reached the top eight of the Champions League and they did not want to use up too much energy in the war of the century.

The two sides tacitly played a slow-paced “war of the century” on the pitch, much to Twain’s dissatisfaction. He booed in the stands like an ordinary fan, “Such a game should really refund the ticket price and the TV broadcast fee! Practically deceiving the spectators! It’s so fake!!”

There were plenty of spectators who shared his views at the Bernabéu. It was clear how much the fans and the coaches disagreed—the fans who paid to buy tickets to watch the game might only care about this game in a season, whereas the manager of a team could not do that. Otherwise, he would be fired.

Ribéry missed the game due to his injury. So, Twain did not see a showdown between his two former players. Piqué’s performance was adequate without any bright spots. Maybe he was conserving his energy for the game against Nottingham Forest?

When Real Madrid temporarily took a 2:1 lead over Barcelona with twenty minutes left in the game, the Barcelona players were in no hurry to equalize. Messi tried his best to score, but it was difficult for him to achieve anything without support against the backdrop of a slow pace throughout the team. Guardiola did not whistle until ten minutes left in the game to signal to his team to increase the pace of the attack and try to equalize the score.

It was already too late.

For Barcelona, which had been slow for eighty minutes, it was easier said than done for them to suddenly speed up. Only Messi was able to keep up with the pace, but he was replaced by Guardiola five minutes ago—he wanted to protect Messi and keep his strength.

In this way, Barcelona lost the game by a score of 1:2 to Real Madrid. Both sides obtained a victory respectively in the “war of the century” this season which gave them a draw.

Twain was extremely disappointed when he left Bernabéu with Dunn because he did not see some of the key players in Barcelona’s squad injured. He complained that Guardiola treated Messi like a vacuum pack for fear that he would suffer the slightest injury.

From this point on, Guardiola had already won a chip even though the two men had yet to officially fight.

For the Catalan young manager, losing to Real Madrid in the league tournament and equalizing were not too important. The games which already ended were not worth the discussion. No one on the team was injured in this game and that was the greatest victory.

In the post-match press conference, Guardiola looked a little distracted. Perhaps he was already imagining Tony Twain’s expression when he saw the scene.

We’ll use the strongest lineup to deal with you. Hope you won’t be too surprised, Mr. Twain.

Chapter 798: An Army Burning with Righteous Indignation

The area which Guardiola was most careful about these days was not on the training ground, but on the team doctor's side. Iniesta and Milito were injured in the game against RCD Espanyol, with Iniesta slightly injured. The team doctor said at the time that he was likely to play against Nottingham Forest. So, after playing in the war of the century with Real Madrid, he began to care about this issue for fear of a relapse.

Iniesta was now the team's midfield core. He and Xavi managed things well in the midfield for Barcelona's offense. Barcelona was considered to be the team that played most beautifully on the planet at the moment, and it was to the credit to the both of them.

Guardiola did not want to lose that player when it came to deal with the aggressive Nottingham Forest.

Aside from Gabriel Milito's slightly more serious injury, he did want to come up with the strongest lineup to deal with a tiger like Tony Twain.

Two days before the game, the good news finally came. After a detailed physical examination of Iniesta by the team doctors, they confirmed that he recovered well and was in good form. He could play in the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinals.

Guardiola could finally heaved a sigh of relief.

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Despite the life-and-death battle between the two teams, there was already tension between the two managers. But the relationship between the players was not as bad as what the outsiders thought. As a Barcelona player who had played for Nottingham Forest for many years, Piqué still had a good relationship with a few people even though many of his former teammates had left Nottingham Forest, such as Bale and Lennon, as well as his former center back partner, Pepe at Nottingham Forest.

Fortunately, Twain got used to it a few months early. Otherwise he really would not know how he would feel when he saw Real Madrid's future main center back and the future Barcelona's main center back joking together and acting like brothers...

Of course, there were also some media that used this relationship as speculation. When the Nottingham Forest team arrived in Barcelona, Pepe was asked such a question in the interview. Pepe did not mince words to say he and Piqué were good friends, "... We had a good understanding on the pitch, and I enjoyed that time. Of course, I currently work well with Kompany, Woodgate and other teammates... But I thought it was normal that he left. After all, he came out of La Masia... You ask what happens when it comes to the game? I certainly will not hold back. Friendship is friendship and the game is the game ..."

Piqué also responded to Pepe's words, "... Yes, I still remember my time at Nottingham Forest. But I'm clear-headed and know what the game is. You don't have to doubt my loyalty to Barcelona. Otherwise I wouldn't have chosen to leave Nottingham Forest then. Maybe I'll treat them out to a meal after the game, but until then I just want to beat them."

He was also asked by the reporters how it felt to work with Twain. Piqué was slightly upset by the recent Catalan media's aggressive and strong comments about Twain, which were already sufficient to

constitute personal attacks and slanders—leaving aside his loyalty to the team and the manager, Guardiola did not hold the same place as Tony Twain in Piqué’s mind.

So, he decided to put aside his previous “no comment” attitude and say something nice about Twain, “Tony Twain is a charismatic manager. He seems to have a magical aura that captivates you. There are a lot of criticism of his style in England, but his players always stand with him.”

The Catalan media were not happy with the answer. They wanted to hear the voices of the Barcelona players joined in opposition to the same adversary, rather than such an “anomaly.” Then someone asked, “But every player who left Nottingham Forest did not seem to have anything good to say about him...”

Piqué laughed, “Am I not one?”

“What about Guardiola?”

It was a trap, and Piqué carefully went around, “They are both very good managers. I have the privilege of playing for them and won the Champions League titles.” Piqué won two Champions League titles under Tony Twain and under Guardiola, he lifted the championship cup for the third time last season. Therefore, when it came the experience of getting the Champions League title, he might have more than many of his current teammates.

Piqué was probably the only player in the Barcelona team who had goodwill toward Nottingham Forest and Tony Twain. The other players did not speak as nicely during the interview.

“There is no doubt that we will win.”

“I want a victory.”

“We’re the defending champions!”

...

And so on. Declarations like this made people think that Barcelona was full of confidence.

What did the master of psychological warfare, Tony Twain think of this?

“The louder the clamor is at this time, the more nonsense being said, the more they prove that they lack confidence, and must use this false bravado to boost some confidence in themselves. As for me? I never talk nonsense before a game.” He casually dismissed Barcelona’s angry attacks even though a number of Catalan media derided him as giving himself a slap in the face, “If he ‘never talks nonsense before a game’, then maybe it’s the end of the world.” Some Barcelona fans in China even lashed out at Twain’s “thick skin is as thick as the Great Wall.” On the internet, they even traded insults with those they labeled as “country bumpkin upstarts”, the rising emergence of a large number of Nottingham Forest fans following the rise of the Forest team.

That was what Twain said, and that was what he did. Since the team’s arrival in Barcelona, he refused to accept interviews of unidentified origin. If the outsiders wanted to know what the manager was doing, they could only find out through Pierce Brosnan’s <Nottingham Evening Post>. Still, he gave pitifully little information to the “royal correspondent.”

He was focused on preparing for the game and intended to wage a big war at Camp Nou.

The media complained that “Tony Twain’s secretive time” had returned and did not know why he liked closed door training so much. But what made the media even more miserable was that even though Tony Twain drove them away like they were flies, they did really scabbled madly for him like flies to a cake. To put it bluntly—they were really lowly.

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On April 16th, after a month of repeated hype, both sides engaged in numerous wars of words, mixed with Derbi barceloní, El Clásico, Nottingham Forest’s heavyweight games against Chelsea and other teams, this high-profile clash that would leave both sides shattered was finally on the verge.

By this time, all the noise seemed to disappear. Whether it was the Forest team’s side or Barcelona’s side, no one jumped out and spat at each other. If they still clung to the outcome of war of words at this time, then they could not be considered as qualified professional players.

On the day of the game, there was only ninety minutes in the game to decide which team could finally be able to hold their heads up high and which team could only hung their heads in dejected and go home with the tails in between their legs. If they did not want to be trampled in the mud and be humiliated after the game, then they had to put all their efforts into the game.

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Tony Twain was in the luxurious away team locker room at Camp Nou, giving the players one last reminder and special instruction.

“Iniesta and Xavi are the playmakers in the game. More attention must be paid. Don’t give them too much space and time to get the ball in front of the penalty area. Our flanks should pay attention to the opponent’s full backs, especially on their right which is our left side. Today’s defensive task is quite important. Alves and Messi are both put here. But I don’t ask that you just defend, because that doesn’t work. Fight back at the appropriate time and let Barcelona know that if they dare to press on, we’ll fight back!”

Twain looked stern, and so were his players. No one would take such an opponent lightly, let alone it was the opponent’s home ground.

Using “luxurious” to describe Barcelona’s lineup today was probably not enough. “Terrifying” must be used.

On the tactical board, Twain listed the opponent’s starting lineup which he had just received:

The goalkeeper was Valdés. The center backs were Piqué and Puyol. The right back was Alves and the left back was Lahm, who joined the team from Bayern Munich this summer. The three midfielders were Yaya Touré who were further back, with Iniesta and Xavi in the front to organize the offense. Among the three strikers, Bojan was in the middle, Silva, whom Twain was interested in at one point, was on the left, and Messi was on the right.

The 34-year-old Henry had already left the club. While there were rumors of Eto’o being sold off cheap every season, but ultimately still remained in the squad, only for his main position to be replaced by

Bojan. His speed, which he was so proud of, also gradually grew rusty with age. Other than his mouth, he was not his valiant self of the yesteryear.

This time, Twain had no intention of handing Messi over to Wood, as there were Xavi and Iniesta, the two players in the middle. It was impossible to cede the middle to them. So, the main responsibility of Wood and Tiago would be in the middle to directly defend against the two playmakers in the midfield. Messi was left to Baines, Matías Fernández, and the others to take care of.

At the same time, the defensive pressure on the right side was not small either. Silva was not to be trifled with and Lahm was also a full back who excelled in assists.

Coupled with an agile Bojan, it was really a headache to face such an offensive lineup. The defensive side should handle everything and not be exposed.

If they really had to attack Barcelona head-on, there were probably few teams in the world that could fully withdraw. Twain cleverly chose to play defensive counterattack and placed many players in the middle of the backfield. To be on guard and defend to the end required the cooperation to the team.

“You have to make sure the formation stay in shape and not let them give and go to disrupt. The full backs do not have to withdraw by too much. It will give them the chance to play near the sides. Messi and Silva were great players. We have George and Tiago in the flanks. The range of activity should be appropriately increased, but don’t lose your positions.”

“Guys, this game is very demanding on the defense. But that doesn’t mean we don’t value offense. The aim of the away game is not to prevent defeat, but to score goals and score more goals. You must think of attacking anytime, anywhere during defense. But with defense as priority, we can’t give the offense too much support. This requires you, the attacking players to find your own way. But no matter what you do, you must be resolute. When there’s a chance, you must plug ahead and pass forward! Don’t think about the pointless question of whether the attack will be successful. You only think about getting the football closer to the other side’s goal, and that is success! As long as we can create enough trouble, Barcelona’s offensive momentum will naturally wane. There is no unadulterated offense and defense in this world. We must be more patient than the opponent!”

After he finished talking about the technical tactics required attention, Twain tossed aside the marker pen in his hand. He said, “Okay, guys. Let’s talk about something that’s not so dry. Will you be surprised if I say I’m not sure we can finally win the championship title this season?”

It appeared that most of the players were not surprised. Obviously they also had a certain understanding of their own strength.

“I always give people the impression that I’m arrogant and conceited. But I’m never blindly arrogant. When did I say we’d win the championship and not win? No, not once.” He shook his head. “But I can’t ask you for more this time. Barcelona is currently really strong, and I think it’s even stronger than last season when they won the Champions League title.” Twain said this with an imposing expression on his face.

But someone disagreed. Eastwood smiled and said, “Hey, chief. You’re kidding us, aren’t you? I’ve been with you all these years and never seen you so afraid of a team...”

Twain glared at him and said, "It's not fear. I'm never afraid of an opponent, but I hope you don't develop a blind self-confidence, which will only push us into the dark abyss. To be honest, I haven't thought to advance into any finals this season, so I'm happy to be able to encounter Inter Milan and Barcelona in two rounds in a row—I don't have to wait until the final to meet one of them, which is great! I'm asking you now to play every game as if it were a final. Regardless of how far we can finally go, it's beside the point! Totally beside the point!"

The boss' anomaly today was not to boost morale for everyone before the game. The players really found it incomprehensible that he would say something that demeaned himself and gave high praise to the opponent... But when they saw the serious expression on the boss' face, he was definitely not pretending. So, they also followed suit and wiped the smiles off their faces, leaving only frowns and piercing gazes. They always believed in the boss, and since the boss said so, they would do so as well.

"Play against Barcelona like they are our opponent in the finals, and then play against any opponents after like you would in a final! That's all I ask of you."

The players finally took to the pitch with this sentiment, while Twain and Dunn stayed at the back.

"What's all that about?" Dunn asked.

"Barcelona is really strong, so I've got to scheme a little. An army burning with righteous indignation is bound to win." Twain laughed slyly, "Tell them not to think about what to do in the future, to play the game like it was the finals, to play every game with their utmost efforts, and then when they suddenly want to stop to take a breather, they look up—wow, it's already the finals!"

"So, do you think about winning the title or not?"

"If we're in the finals, why should we do our best to fight for a runner-up spot?" Twain turned to look at his partner. His brown eyes flashed with an elusive glow.

Chapter 799: The Taller Trees in The Woods Are Liable to Get Their Tops Blown Off

It was Twain's third time at Camp Nou, and it felt more intense than the previous two times because the nearly eighty thousand home fans were booing the Forest team with imposing momentum. The last time he was here, he did not receive such a warm welcome. What happened today was all to the Catalan media's credit.

As the Barcelona players walked into the stadium, the fans were still chanting Barcelona's team song, singing at a crescendo. Every one of the eighty thousand people chanted "Barça! Barça! Bar-ça!" Then when they saw the Nottingham Forest players ran onto the pitch, these people uniformly burst into shrill boos like they were one person.

"What a welcoming host." Twain laughed.

While eighty thousand people hissing at the same time was a magnificent sight, it did not affect the Nottingham Forest players. As the annoying Tony Twain's men, they were long used to being booed when they played in away games. The difference was whether it was a lot of or fewer people. The stadium was smaller if there were fewer people, and the noises would reverberate. The more people

the bigger the stadium and the sounds were spread out, so the side with more people would not have any advantage to their number.

The Nottingham Forest players might be weaker than Barcelona in other respects, but in terms of their mental strength, they considered themselves second to none in the world. So, they were calm in the face of the thunderous boos.

George Wood shook hands with Puyol and exchanged the team flags. Then they did the coin toss. He won Puyol and got to pick the side. In fact, Twain had always felt that picking the side was not as important as the kickoff. Therefore, he hoped Wood would lose in the coin toss every time.

After the game started, Barcelona used the kickoff to launch an attack and Nottingham Forest retreated to defend.

“The game has just started, and Nottingham Forest are on the defensive. The pre-match spat was so intense that I thought Tony Twain would pounce to attack at the start of the game.” The television commentator was slightly critical of Twain’s retreating defense.

The commenter next to him laughed, “Barcelona has the ball. If Nottingham Forest wants to attack, how can they attack without the ball under their feet? Nottingham Forest will stick to the defensive counterattack in the game if there are no surprises. Tony Twain is a smart man who knows what the result is to go directly against Barcelona at Camp Nou.”

“But can they really hold on if they cling fast to defense at Camp Nou? I think it will be a matter of time before a goal is scored if they are besieged by Barcelona.” The commentator also had his own opinion on this.

“You’re right. If any team just wants to attack when it is up against Barcelona, then it’s normal for them to concede goals. On the other hand, if they just want to defend, they will also concede their goal sooner or later. So, Tony Twain did not go to the extremes here, and defensive counterattack is his special measure. I think if Barcelona can’t score after a while, the game will be on track for Nottingham Forest.”

Guardiola was aware of this point too. He knew that Tony Twain would play defensive counterattack in the away game, so the key was whether he could keep him from defending successfully. As long as the Forest team lost the possession of the ball first, Tony Twain’s defensive counterattack would collapse.

The crux of the game was not how strong the defense was, but whether the offense was sharp.

One of the best attacking lines in Europe today was facing the best defensive line, and the clash between the spear and the shield was not as exciting as one might think.

Barcelona’s offensive met with a tenacious obstruction from Nottingham Forest outside the thirty meters zone. George Wood’s and Tiago’s defense was solid, especially Wood’s. His tireless running ensured that he would appear where he was most needed. Both Xavi and Iniesta met with a lot of trouble.

Iniesta took the ball and stopped outside to observe and found that there was no suitable chance to pass the ball inside. Just as Messi found the same problem and pulled out to receive in the midfield, Iniesta simply handed the ball to him.

While Iniesta and Xavi were the brains of the team, Messi's popularity was much higher than theirs. As soon as the small statured Argentine received the ball, a huge cheer went up in the stands. Everyone was waiting for his magical performance.

Barcelona's No. 10, known as the king of the new generation of footballers, was last year's European Footballer of the Year, FIFA World Player of the Year, champion of the Champions League and World Cup. When he stood in front of you, it was as if his entire body radiated with light. Even if he did not do anything, he would still be the most eye-catching target on the field. Then he easily bypassed Baines.

The combination of speed and technique was perfect. It was a simple feint and another kick to the ball tricked Baines into stumbling. Such a gap in level was really frustrating—no, that would be the general idea. But for the Nottingham Forest players, they might smugly underestimated the opponents if they were too weak. However, when the opponent was too strong ... they were more excited instead!

Baines was knocked to the ground. Fernández was already blocking in front of Messi as he prepared to cut inside. The quick-to-react and nimble Messi rushed to kick the football to the outside line and flashed past Fernández. When he evaded Fernández's amateur defensive action with his excellent response, he was tangled by Pepe, while Baines had rushed back to defend him from behind at the same time.

The embattled Messi also tried to protect the football, but he fell to ground when he was kicked by Baines who rushed from behind!

Baines kicked the back of Messi's right ankle, and Messi screamed as he fell to the ground. He held his ankle as if he was in agony.

The stands burst into earthshattering hisses. The impetus was enough to scare a man with a weak heart to death.

The Barcelona fans hated all fouls against Messi because it would simply be killing the art of football and destroying their beliefs in football.

The referee's whistle was almost drowned out by the boos. Baines reacted quickly and immediately leaned over to comfort Messi to show goodwill to the referee. But the commentator did not let him go easily, "The game has just begun, and Messi has been attacked by the Nottingham Forest player. This scene is simply too familiar. Recently we often see such a scene. As Barcelona's most famous and powerful player, Messi has reaped numerous honors while he has also been given the attention of the defenders. Baines' foul is enough for him to get a yellow card!"

The referee did not give Baines a card. Perhaps given that the game had just begun, he did not want to affect the intensity of the game that followed. It seemed that the Italian referee was not an "iron-faced judge." Otherwise, he would not be able to evade a yellow card.

The Barcelona fans close to the sidelines were swearing at Baines in Catalan and English, "You bastard! Only a coward kicks another person's ankle!!"

"You English savages! Football hooligans!!"

Baines turned a deaf ear. When he saw that the referee did not issue a card, but only a verbal warning, he turned and ran off after listening.

Messi looked miserable, much to the delight of Twain off the field. He thought Baines had caused Messi to leave the pitch with his kick. But soon he was disappointed—Messi groaned for a while and stood up...

Looking at the way he was moving his ankle, he guessed he was okay.

Twain's mouth twisted and said to Dunn somewhat disappointed, "Just as I thought. How could he scream like that with such a light kick?"

Guardiola was furious that the referee had not shown Baines a yellow card. He protested loudly on the sidelines until he drew the attention of the fourth official. He finally calmed down under the behest of the fourth official.

"I'm wondering if Baines' kick was accidental or Tony Twain's special request before the game..." The commentator said after he saw the scene.

"We'll find out as we continue to watch the game. But I bet it must have been arranged by Twain. He has said that he will use all means and ways to win. So why will he not use the lethal tactics against Messi which are so popular now?" The commentator said.

In fact, they blamed Twain wrongly. He did not instruct the players to use rough fouls and lethal tactics against Messi before the game. He just told the players to keep a close eye on Messi, so the players themselves understood that it was difficult to use the conventional defense tactics to defend against the football genie. The simplest and most effective way was naturally a foul. As for whether to kick the ankle or the knee, whether to knock or pull the person, it was all only a formality.

Of course, the possibility that Baines was resentful after being easily shaken off by Messi and turned around to kick Messi in retaliation could not be ruled out.

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Messi did not cut back on his ball possession rate because he suffered Baines's attack. When the team could not get a breakthrough, he always actively pulled back to ask for the ball. Then in the face of Baines, he would insist on bypassing him one-on-one. Messi's active play put the focus of Barcelona's offensive on the right side. Nottingham Forest's defense on the left was under immense pressure. George Wood, Pepe and the others started to consciously lean towards this side.

At this point, Iniesta, who was in charge of diverting the ball, did not continue to pass the ball to Messi, but shifted to the right side and handed the football to Silva.

Nottingham Forest's right side was emptier as compared to the heavily guarded left side. Silva beautifully stopped the ball to suddenly cut inside and charged into the penalty area!

"Silva! This is Barcelona's chance! He tried to keep going in the penalty area. Rafinha is defending against him, but doesn't dare to make a move lightly... A breakthrough! Success!"

Silva seized the opportunity when Rafinha did not dare to make a move. He pushed the football past him and then lifted his leg to sweep the ball. The football rolled along the turf in front of the goal. Anyone who kicked the ball could hit the goal in this way.

Bojan grabbed the ball in the crowd, but his shot was blocked by Akinfeev, who was in an excellent position and used his body to block!

“Bojan shoots! Oh, that’s a shame! It did not go in!”

Blocked by Akinfeev, the football fell to Iniesta’s feet. He hit a long shot under Wood’s close marking but hit it too high.

In the ensuing period, Barcelona completely suppressed Nottingham Forest. For a period of time, Nottingham Forest could not even pass the football past half of the field, never mind start a counterattack. George Wood’s and Tiago’s job was to keep intercepting the ball again and again.

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Tiago was shown his first yellow card in the game in the 24th minute when he fouled against Messi. At the time, Messi suddenly switched to the middle and directly broke through Tiago. As Tiago turned a little slower, he could only stretch out his hands to drag Messi to the ground as if he were wrestling in order not to let Messi break through successfully.

It would not do to not issue a yellow card with such an obvious foul. The referee gave a yellow card to warn Tiago, but the Barcelona fans were still unwilling to forgive—they felt that the referee on duty for the game was too soft and that many of Nottingham Forest’s fouls were only verbal warnings. For example, George Wood shoved Iniesta from behind. After the ball was intercepted, the referee actually indicated that it was not a foul and the game continued! The thunderous boos came at Wood and the referee at that time.

The Nottingham Forest players grew bold after they realized this and stepped up their defensive moves. It was not until the 24th minute of the game that the referee showed his first yellow card of the game. Tiago did it right under the referee’s nose and it was no excuse that he even used his hands to encircle the waist.... The football match was fast becoming a wrestling match. If he still did not show any cards, perhaps the game would become an unrestricted wrestling competition.

The referee’s yellow card slightly moderated Nottingham Forest’s actions. But within minutes, when they found that Barcelona’s attack became lively as they exercised restraint, they suddenly threw the yellow card warning out of their minds.

Messi was knocked straight out of the field by Baines and hit a billboard when he was dribbling the ball on the side. The scene was visually impactful as if he were dead. Consequently, the boos suddenly grew louder again.

This time, the referee took a yellow card out of his pocket and gave it to Baines. When Baines saw that he had gotten a card, he simply stopped pretending to be a nice guy ... He did not pull Messi up. He just turned around and ran away.

In fact, Messi was not injured. He got up himself and spread his hands somewhat helplessly. He had met with such treatment countless times, but he was not used to it. The defenders always looked vicious and could not wait to break the joints in his whole body whenever they saw him.

The series of violations against the Barcelona players had brought down Nottingham Forest’s image to the bottom of the Barcelona fans’ minds. At the beginning of the game, the home fans still maintained

the basic courtesy to the visiting team. But thirty minutes later, as soon as the Nottingham Forest players touched the ball on the pitch, what “welcomed” them was a burst of boos.

Another thing that made the Barcelona fans feel fretful was—it had been thirty minutes since the game started, Barcelona’s attack could be said to be aggressive, and at the most dangerous time, Nottingham Forest’s goal looked like a skiff in a tempest, ready to be capsized at any moment. Despite this, the score on the big screen remained at 0:0 so far.

“Time went by so quickly and before we know it, thirty minutes had already passed in the first half. But Barcelona still did not score. They had numerous chances to shoot in the thirty minutes. It looked like every time they were able to break the goal that Akinfeev guarded, things turned out contrary to what they wanted. Until now, they and Nottingham Forest are still 0:0! It’s indeed embarrassing for the Barcelona fans. The only highlight within the thirty minutes might be that Messi was knocked to the ground again and again, right? I think in the second half, he should change to a new jersey to play. Otherwise, we won’t be able to tell the number on his jersey...”

“But the result of Nottingham Forest’s efforts is clear. Messi is heavily marked, and Iniesta and Xavi have no better way in the face of Nottingham Forest’s heavy forces deployed in the middle. With Messi being so active on his side, Silva’s side looked a little deserted, while Bojan was completely inundated by the Forest team’s strong defenders... Tony Twain is good at defense and Guardiola should consider how to deal with it. Maybe he should make some adjustments? His offense is a little too dependent on Messi. Twain is clearly targeting him on this point by sending people to attack Messi in turn.”

“The aggression against Messi was uncomfortable to watch but from the Nottingham Forest manager’s point of view, he did it very well. It looks like Nottingham Forest intends to bring Messi off. Three players had been shown the yellow cards so far. In fact, I think Guardiola did not have to rush to adjust and he should just wait until the second half. As the Nottingham Forest players get more and more yellow cards from Messi and the others, problems will appear within Nottingham Forest’s defense and it will be Barcelona’s chance when the time comes. Tony Twain will have a chance to pay for his actions...”

Chapter 800: Come out If You Dare

“Problems would naturally arise in Nottingham Forest’s defense as their players receive more and more yellow cards for their fouls on Messi and the other players. Tony Twain will pay the price for his actions...”

The guest commentator had only just finished his words when there was a sudden change to the situation on the pitch.

During one of Barcelona’s attacks, Xavi and Iniesta performed a feint in the midfield that fooled people into thinking that they were going to try and attack down the middle of the pitch. The next moment, they suddenly passed the ball over to Messi who was positioned at the flank.

Their attack was no different from any of the attacks that Barcelona had launched in the past. However, Nottingham Forest messed up its defense this time. Baines had initially wanted to commit a foul on

Messi, but he did not expect Messi to take advantage of him instead and make his way past him with a turn.

Baines' mistake was a little too amateurish. He had rushed up towards Messi like a fool, but Messi easily got past him when he stuck his leg out as though he was nothing but air.

Messi had already made his way into Forest's penalty box before any of the Nottingham Forest defenders had the time to react!

"He has made his way inside!"

None of Nottingham Forest's defenders dared to act recklessly now that Messi has made his way into the penalty box.

Messi has a way to score a goal no matter how small a space he is given, as long as the defenders do not stick a foot out to kick the ball away. He skillfully made his way through the tight space within the penalty box and demonstrated his outstanding ball handling techniques. He got past Pepe with the ball still firmly at his feet.

"He has gotten past Pepe! He continues to control the ball at his feet!"

Kompany did not dare to stick a leg out to stop Messi for fear of giving away a penalty.

George Wood did not share Kompany's reservations. He would never think about the consequences. He would always act first and think later.

Messi sensed danger as he was looking for a chance to shoot. He did not have time to contemplate if he should pass the ball or shoot. He instinctively raised his foot and shot for goal!

Right as Messi kicked the ball away, Wood came at him with a tackle. Fortunately, Messi had jumped up into the air after he shot the ball, and it allowed him to evade Wood's potentially life-threatening tackle...

The entire incident had happened in a flash of an eye. All the spectators saw was Messi raise his foot to shoot for goal, and George Wood coming in at him a short while later.

The goal had happened too close and too suddenly. It did not matter how fast Akinfeev could react. He would still not be able to get to the ball...

The ball flew past Akinfeev's feet and went straight into the corner of the net!

"GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAL!" The Spanish commentator dragged out the word as he roared.

Camp Nou came alive. Everyone began chanting the name of the hero who just scored a goal in unison.

Guardiola, who had been standing nervously by the side of the pitch all this while, jumped up with clenched fists.

He could finally let out a sigh of relief...

All the staff and players sitting at the bench to his side were all locked in an embrace.

Messi's goal had come at just the right time. If it had come later, Barcelona would have gone into halftime with a score of 0:0, and that would have dealt a blow to their team's morale. Messi's goal not only boosted the team's morale, it also ensured that Nottingham Forest would not be able to play their 'defend and counterattack' tactic anymore, and that would shift the game in Barcelona's favor from here on out.

Messi's goal was extremely significant to the team. The team has no reason not to celebrate to their hearts' content.

"F*ck!"

In contrast to the euphoria exhibited by the Barcelona staff and players, Twain was upset and had just shouted an expletive.

"Baines made an idiotic mistake! And those defenders at the back... If you don't dare to stick your foot out, then you jolly well stick close to him! Why are you all just standing there ogling at his performance? Are you all watching a monkey perform tricks? Sh*t! Bunch of bastards!"

No one beside Twain dared to utter a word as he vented his frustrations. They were also feeling dejected over how their team was one goal down. The team was not able to maintain the goalless situation till the end of the first half despite having held on for 40 minutes. How could they not be dispirited?

"Messi's solo performance! Brilliantly done! He has allowed Nottingham Forest to realize one thing... You can't win even if you defend to the death against Barcelona! Messi's the fairy of football, and he's the player who has gotten the closest to the King of football, Diego Maradona! He is always able to find a way to pry open the door that his opponents try to seal on him and bring victory to his team! Messi is in an outstanding form right now! He continues to persevere and fight no matter how tightly his opponents mark him and how much they foul him! Well done!"

The commentator threw every compliment that he could think of at the Argentinian shorty. To him, Nottingham Forest was the 'villain' who was only capable of using fouls to stop Messi. They were a team that was rotten beyond salvation.

Messi, on the other hand, was like a hero who always managed to get back on his feet to fight no matter how heavy a blow he has been dealt with. He was someone who earned everyone's respect.

Tony Twain and his team are just not likeable most of the time...

Contrary to how Barcelona's players were celebrating without restraint on the pitch, Nottingham Forest seemed lifeless and despondent. Baines, who had committed an error, stood rooted at the spot with his head hung low in vexation. Pepe had initially wanted to get back onto his two feet, but he lied back down onto the ground and covered his face with his hands after seeing Messi shoot the ball into the net.

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The Nottingham Forest players appeared dazed when the match restarted. Everyone had been emotionally affected by Messi's goal. They had worked hard for 40 minutes to no avail, because Barcelona still managed to score against them.

With the Forest players being distracted, the remainder of the first half swung in favor of Barcelona. There was a time where they nearly scored again. If not for the fact that Akinfeev was in a good form and had pounced at the shot from Bojan Krkić as though his life depended on it, the first half would have ended with a score of 0:2.

Twain was very upset with how his players performed after the match restarted. He could not stop yelling and flailing his arms about as he stood by the side of the pitch. He was just like a King Kong who was hitting at helicopters at the top of a building.

The players pulled themselves together after hearing his repeated yells. They fought to the end of the first half and did not give Barcelona another decent chance at goal.

At half-time, Guardiola made his way away from the pitch with a contented smile on his face. Twain stayed behind by the side of the pitch and patted any Forest player on the shoulder when they walked past him.

Twain said nothing besides patting his players on the shoulder. The players were well aware that their boss was very unhappy with their performance towards the end of the first half. They had all kept their heads low as they walked briskly back to the locker room.

Twain was the last to make his way into the locker room. However, he did not slam the door shut after him and admonish the players furiously.

“Don’t think about the goal that you have allowed the opponent to score. What good can come of filling your minds with thoughts about it? Can it make the goal disappear? Can it help us score two goals in five minutes and make a comeback?” Twain was upset with the performance that the team put in after the match restarted, and so he focused on criticizing their performance during that period of time.

“The performance that all of you put in after we went one goal down was too awful! That wasn’t a performance that any professional footballer should be putting in. Don’t tell me that all of you are so psychologically weak?”

As a veteran player for Nottingham Forest, Pepe has more guts to say the words that no other player would dare to say to Twain in the locker room. The words are not words that only he could say, but George Wood was reticent and Eastwood did not play in the match, so he did not understand what the players were thinking during the match.

Right now, Pepe was the only one who understood what the players were thinking and also had the courage to voice his opinions.

He raised his hand and indicated that he had something to say.

“What do you want to say, Pepe?”

“Boss, it was you who told us to play the match as though we were playing in the finals. When we thought that we had allowed the other team to score during the finals... We... Uh... Well, as you can see.”

“Can any of you guarantee that you won’t let the opponent score a single goal during the finals?” Twain was not angry. He laughed instead. “The finals is also nothing more than a regular football match. If you

let the opponent score a goal, then you just score one back. There's nothing else that needs to be said. We actually had a chance to get a goal back if all of you were in a better state of mind after Barcelona scored the goal."

Twain was not lying. Barcelona had gotten ahead of themselves after they managed to score a goal. They had pressed high up the pitch hoping to find the opportunity to score another goal, but they had forgotten about how Nottingham Forest had the chance to go on the counterattack due to the large space that they had left behind them.

Unfortunately, the Forest players were unable to get over how they had allowed Barcelona to score a goal, and they even looked battered as they defended against Barcelona's attacks. A counterattack was the last thing on their minds...

"If you can score goals, then the ones who would be dispirited right now would be the ones next door and not us... But, forget it." Twain shook his head. "There's no use crying over spilt milk. Focus on thinking about what you ought to do in the second half. Does anyone here think that we should press forward and attack because we are down by one goal?" Twain started laughing as he finished those words.

"I believe many of you would think that way, including those people next door. They think that being down by one goal is the end of the world, but sadly, that's not the case. We are still going to defend and counterattack in the second half. You guys need to think about it this way. The worst case scenario for us is that we would lose this match, but even then, we would only lose with the score of 0:1. We still have a big chance of winning when we play at home. So, I want all of you to get your act together for the second half. We are going to stick with our plan of defending and counterattacking. Relax, the ones who will falter as the match goes on will be Barcelona. They know that winning by just one goal in their home game is a very risky thing. All you lot need to do is to be even more patient than them and wait for the chance to counterattack. If you do that, you will definitely be able to score a goal. As long as we can score a goal, we can level the score, and we'd be able to seize the initiative in the match. If Barcelona keeps pressing and attacking us, we'd just continue to counterattack! We'd annihilate them at their home ground!"

"There'd be no changes to our tactics. But I want you to be careful not to pick up too many cards in the second half. If I were Guardiola, I'd let Messi, Dani Alves, and perhaps even Xavi and Iniesta attack our left flank. How many of our players have picked up yellow cards?" Twain started counting with his fingers. "Baines, Tiago, Pepe. It's not like you can only defend by committing fouls. What will we do if all of you get a red card? So, be careful with your actions. Of course, if you can commit a foul and somehow escape the referee's eyes, then I'd applaud you!"

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In the second half, Guardiola strengthened his attack down the right flank, just as Twain had predicted.

Dani Alves became even more lively in the second half and kept going forward to join in the attack. During one particular attack, he did not even return to his original position, choosing instead to wait in the front of the pitch for the second chance to attack. Messi kept trying to mess up Forest's defense and exert pressure on Pepe, Baines and others by cutting into the middle from the flank numerous times.

Guardiola chose to ramp up their attacks down the right flank after noticing that Nottingham Forest had no intentions of going on the offense and facing them head on. He was going to let Forest pay the price for choosing to go all out in their defense against Barcelona.

Weren't you out to injure my players? I'd make sure your players pick up a red card and disappear from the pitch first!

The Nottingham Forest players were more reserved with the way they defended due to the warning given to them by their boss at half-time. This allowed Barcelona to get more chances to attack Forest's goalpost.

Fortunately for Forest, Akinfeev was in a good form for the match. He became the busiest person on the pitch in the second half. He had to pounce into the air and also get down onto the ground to block the numerous shots from Barcelona's players.

"Messi shoots! Akinfeev... What a wonderful save!"

"Bojan Krkić's header is easily stopped by Akinfeev. He might only be 1.84m tall, but he has amazing jumping abilities, and is also very accurate in his judgement as to where the ball will fall. It looks like Tony Twain is intent on going away from Camp Nou with a score of 0:1. That's not a bad idea, actually. If Nottingham Forest do manage to go away from this match with that score, then all credit goes to Akinfeev..."

"Is Silva trying to pass the ball into the middle? No! He has actually shot for goal! Brilliant! Akinfeev pounces for the ball and sends it over the crossbar!"

"There goes the corner, and Akinfeev gets the ball!"

Akinfeev did not just perform brilliantly during defense. He was also able to initiate an attack by throwing the ball forward. In fact, Akinfeev throwing the ball forward after saving a shot became one of the main ways for Nottingham Forest to switch from being on the defense to going on the counterattack.

Sadly, Nottingham Forest was unable to commit too many players to the counterattack each time, and their entire offense lacked power as well. Hence, Forest's counterattacks would always lead nowhere and Akinfeev was not able to initiate a successful counterattack for the team.

Despite Akinfeev's outstanding performance however, the Barcelona fans and the commentator continued to believe that Barcelona were the favorites to win the match, because they did not believe that an all-out defense would lead to victory.

Isn't Messi's goal towards the end of the first half enough to prove that such a tactic would not work?

No matter how well the goalkeeper performed, all Nottingham Forest was doing was to play passively and defend. There is no such thing in the world as an impenetrable defense. As time goes on, Akinfeev is bound to commit a mistake that will lead to dire consequences for the team. The match will more or less be decided once Nottingham Forest goes behind by two goals, and Barcelona would become the victor of the match.

This match between Barcelona and Nottingham Forest was beginning to take the shape of a battle between 'attacking football' and 'conservative football'.

The glory belongs to attacking football! The victory belongs to attacking football!

Conservatism will just get buried by attacking football!

Tony Twain, your crude performance will not work at Camp Nou! There is not a single team in this world that has not lost by going all out in its defense against Barcelona!

Come out and face us if you think you have what it takes to win us! Let us fight fair and square!

Twain hid behind his thick and sturdy rampart and yelled at the top of his voice, "Barcelona! Don't get ahead of yourselves! If you think you are so good, then try getting in!"

"Come out if you dare!"

"No way! Only a fool will go out..."

"I'd count to three. If you don't come out, then I'm going in!"

"If you think you have what it takes, then try it!"