

Godfather Of Champions

Chapter 8: In The Name Of Victory

The locker room atmosphere at that very moment was so good that Walker could not bear to remind everyone that they had to play immediately. Since the team had slipped into League One, the team morale had been steadily declining, and many people even believed they should be in the lower level league and had no confidence for the future. David Platt did not change this despondent morale, Paul Hart also did not. Who would have thought that the originally glum and low-key substitute manager could turn things around?

Looking at the players' faces trembling with excitement and the fire in their eyes, Des Walker realized that Twain being struck in the back of his head was not necessarily a bad thing, at least God had given them a decent manager.

"Okay! We play now!" Tang En stood at the door and clapped, urging the players to get out there. The first to pass by his side was Jack Lester who had a poor performance in the first half. He was probably still upset by his first half performance and had intended to go out with his head hung low, but was caught off guard by a slap on his back.

"Raise your head, all of you lift your heads up!" His voice rang out again in the locker room. "We haven't lost yet, why do you have your heads down? Don't let those East Londoners think we're scared of them!"

With a roar, all the players unconsciously raised their heads and walked out of the locker room with their chests puffed out.

Once the last player had left the locker room, Tang En turned to see Walker still standing behind him, his tense face showing a glimmer of smile.

Walker looked at the sweat on his forehead and also smiled. "Tony, you really gave me a good show."

Tang En grinned, "Let's go, Des. Whatever the result is going to be, it still has to pass the trial of the match."

When they returned into the technical area, both teams' players were already on the field, waiting for the kickoff. Tang En looked at the stands. What disappointed him was that the halftime had just passed, and the stands were already empty, he did not know

whether they had not returned to their seats yet, or if they were too disappointed with the Forest team and did not want to watch. If you all left early, I bet you'll regret it!

And then behind him came the sounds of abuse like the first half. Tang En did not even turn his head, he did not wish to acknowledge them now. Not until after the start of the match, would he then look at them again. Walker seemed to want to argue with them and was pressed down by Tang En on the bench.

“Ignore them, just watch the ball. The match is going to start soon.”

The starting lineup of the match was arranged by Des Walker, basically it was the team's main force, no injuries or illnesses. This lineup was not considered weak in League One, but it did not play well in the last few matches and a lot had to do with their low spirits. With the rumored change of their manager, each player's future hanging in the balance, and the shadow of a financial crisis, how were the players expected to be the right frame of mind to play well, and how would the football managers be able to delve into tactics?

Tang En had just rekindled their fighting spirit and confidence buried in their hearts. Their opponent is a Premier League team? Well, it's more exhilarating to play such a team, and we can prove our ability even more by beating a Premier League team! Whether it was a player making noise for a transfer, or someone who planned to be in this low-level league, everyone is ignited with a fighting spirit at this very moment—to beat West Ham United for himself! No matter what our purpose or our past differences may be, our goal is the same this time, and that is to win this match, for victory!

Michael Dawson observed the West Ham United players behind the defensive line and found that his manager had incredible foresight. Their opponents were inattentive, their eyes were unfocused, and their stance was sloppy. They were completely unaware of what terrible beasts their opponents had become.

He knew that he would win this match today!

The referee blew the whistle and the second half began. In the press box, John Motson drank some water, cleared his throat, turned on the microphone, and began his commentary.

“This is the first match of the English FA Cup third round in the 02-03 season, with visiting team West Ham United leading 3:0 over the home team Nottingham Forest in the first half. What will we see in the second half of the match... Oh, foul!” He had not even finished saying his prepared lines before he had to change them midway.

The main referee had just blown the whistle to start play, and he had to whistle again. This time it was because a Forest team player had committed a foul. Andy Reid had pushed the West Ham United team captain Joe Cole during a tackle.

Tang En knew Joe Cole's particular style of play and future stardom. England's most intuitive player with the most gorgeous footwork in recent years would not reach the height of everyone's expectations. Besides his style of play was not in keeping with the English football tradition. His easily injured body was also an important reason that prevented him from advancing further.

Modern football had very high physical fitness requirements, It required a player with the combined skills of Maradona and Pelé. If a player had a glass-like body, it was basically equal to having no chance of any glory and achievement. Generally speaking, it was this way for Joe Cole. His footwork was outstanding, yet he was easily injured.

Wonderkid, let me teach you how to face brutal defense here. Tang En said in his heart. If you can pass this round, you will be the world's superstar, but if you fail... then you should resign to your fate!

West Ham United was awarded a free kick. Andy Reid's foul still did not raise the alarm for them. No matter how they looked at it, it was only a common foul. The truth was, for a young famous star player like Joe Cole, being violated on the field was practically commonplace, nothing to it. Anyways they were three goals ahead.

The free kick went out and soon the ball went to a Forest player. Defoe carelessly stopped the ball with his foot and directly kicked it to his opponent. With regard to this lapse, neither Glenn Roeder the manager on the sideline nor the West Ham United players on the field took it to heart. They thought they had already won. Roeder also expressed his congratulations to the team ahead of time during halftime. After taking a look at the Forest player who took the ball, that childlike juvenile midfielder, Roeder turned his head back to the technical area, ready to discuss the 11 days of Premier League with his aides. They were going to play against Newcastle on home ground, and this was a tricky team. Newcastle was ranked fourth in the league, and they were the last.

When Tang En saw Dawson got the ball, he knew it was a chance. Because of this offense, most of the West Ham United players had not returned to their side, they were just leisurely walking on the field. They needed to be taught a lesson.

He got up from the technical area and walked down.

Motson in the press box saw the scene, "Manager Tony Twain just got up and walked down. This is the first time he has appeared on the sideline in this match, is there anything worth looking forward to for the Forest team in the second half? But I still hope he will be careful of his own players and not be knocked down again! Ha ha!"

Dawson also noticed that Twain had appeared on the sideline. He glanced over and saw that Twain had drawn an arc in front of his chest with his right forefinger. A long pass?

In fact, he had already seen that the West Ham United formation was very messy. There were numerous loopholes in their defense. Jack Lester was the forward nearest to the front. But he was like a sleepwalker in the first half. Could he be trusted?

Dawson gritted his teeth and kicked the ball forward.

Tang En watched the football fly, shining brightly under the afternoon sun, straight behind the West Ham defense line.

The man who appeared there was—Jack Lester!

Tang En clenched his fists. “Shoot! Son of a bitch!” he yelled. But Lester was still outside the penalty area... Tang En saw that the opposing goalkeeper, David James, was standing a bit forward, perhaps he did not expect the Forest team’s offense would cross into their penalty area line so quickly.

Tang En saw it, did Lester see it?

This 26-year-old forward from Sheffield only had the football in his eyes. He saw the West Ham United Czech Republic defender, Tomáš Řepka, leap high, but he did not head the ball from Dawson. He missed!

The football flew toward Lester, he lifted his chest and propelled it beautifully. Amidst the cheering of the Forest fans, he seemed to hear a voice shouting, “Shoot!”

He did not have time to look at the opposition goalkeeper’s position, and he just kicked and shot, launching straight into the air within the penalty area!

The biggest beneficiary of West Ham’s frantic attack in the first half was their goalkeeper James, who did not even break a sweat. It even allowed him to show off in the locker room. Now he realized he was the unluckiest man because of the first half...

Because when he tried to save the goal, he found himself unable to stretch out due to the lack of warm-up.

The football flew past his hand, and it went into the goal behind him!

“Jack Lester ... What a great goal!!” Motson jumped up from his seat. When Dawson passed the ball with his kick, he did not expect to see such a beautiful goal.

The City Ground was suddenly ignited by Lester’s goal, and all the red-clad fans jumped from their seats. Waving their arms, this time it was really the Sherwood Forest, which was more spectacular than the 27,000 middle fingers!

After scoring the goal, Lester saw the football inside the goal, then jerked around and sprinted towards the technical area. He wanted to thank someone for this goal. That

person was... Tony Twain who was waving his arms and shouting on the sideline! It was him who rekindled his fighting spirit and confidence. It was him who told him that he had to raise his head, straighten up and face up to everything. He was sure that the word 'shoot' was definitely shouted by Twain.

At that moment, the sound of abuse behind the technical area vanished. The players and the managers were only able to hear one sound, "Forest! Forest! Nottingham Forest!!" The City Ground, which could accommodate up to 32,000 people, had finally regained its status as the Forest team's home ground.

Tang En grabbed hold of this chance to teach the Forest team players who had gathered around him to celebrate the goal, "Take a look at this stand! This is our home ground! Do you see it? These are our fans! Play it well! Now back to the field to continue to teach those Londoners!"

After sending away the motivated players, he returned to the technical area, Des Walker stood up and high-fived him in celebration. "Beautifully done, Tony!"

"It wasn't me. It was Lester and Dawson who did it beautifully." Tang En was modest all of a sudden.

"You've all done beautifully!" Walker said with a laugh.

After celebrating with Walker, Tang En looked up and saw Michael and the rest above the technical area. He was delighted to see that their embarrassed expressions. They wanted to celebrate but were unwilling to look overly happy. Looking at this group of poor people who were at a loss, Tang En laughed.

Michael's face immediately darkened and yelled at him, "Don't be too happy just yet. We're still behind by two goals! If you're capable of turning this defeat into victory for us, I'll buy you a drink tonight!"

Tang En pointed at him and shouted back, "Is that right? You'll buy me a drink?"

"That's what I said!"

"Get ready to pay then!"

Tang En sat back down and said to Walker next to him, "Des, we're going to Burns' bar for drinks tonight, someone's treating."

Walker nodded with a smile.

"The last match between Nottingham Forest and West Ham on home ground was on September 19, 1998. It was the last season in the Premier League for the Forest team, where the home and visiting team made a draw of 0:0." Motson began to explain the

history of the two teams, which was a very typical English explanation. But after that, Motson changed his track and began to rave about the goal that Jack Lester had just scored. “Jack Lester’s first half performance was a big joke, but his goal in the second half could be chosen for the top three of the FA Cup’s best goals! I don’t know what happened in the Forest team’s locker room during halftime, but it’s clear that the Forest team now is completely different from the first half. West Ham United was unstoppable! Maybe Tony Twain said something in the locker room. The Forest team’s spirits are running high, and West Ham is obviously punch-drunk!”

This famous English commentator was right. West Ham was indeed punch-drunk. They did not expect to lose a goal just two minutes into the second half. And the opposing side’s goal was so magnificent, it was enough to make the lethargic fans leap from their seats. Also, it was enough to make them hold their heads in frustration.

A football match was so wonderful. A goal could break the balance on the field and tip the scales of victory.

Lester’s goal ignited the fervor of the Forest fans, it also ignited the enthusiasm of the Forest team. They were more vigorous in their charging, fiercer in their tackles, and quicker to attack.

Tang En knew the strength of the West Ham midfielders. Carrick and Édouard Cissé were very successful in defending the midfield line. If they had played against West Ham in the midfield, they could only return the tempo of the match to their opponent. As far as the current Forest team was concerned, they were certainly not as good as West Ham in terms of technique. There was no reason to play their weaknesses to their opponent’s strengths. To put it bluntly, the modern football match was a mutually restrictive contest. How to destroy each other’s technical and tactical system was the top priority. In any case, they could not allow their opponents to play their best. This was especially important when a weaker team played against a strong team.

Since my midfield control of the match can’t compare to you West Ham, I’m not going to go through the midfield. Seventy percent of the time, the four midfielders in parallel positions, were used for defense—for cutting Joe Cole and Lee Bowyer down like trees. Once either one got the ball, at least one or two of the Forest players would charge up, and it became a chaotic mess. The result would be either a Forest team foul or the players losing the ball. There was no way they could take the ball out of the Forest team’s defensive array.

Mastering the possession of the ball, the Forest team’s attack was very simple, simple enough to be roughly termed as the long pass. Tang En decided to play England’s most traditional and best football style of the past, because the Forest team has a strong striker. So far, Marlon Harewood had not had any play. At 1.86 meter in height, his strong body still had an excellent foot technique. Although Tang En was still not satisfied with his shooting technique, his body on the field still had the force of impact. It was the best way to deal with the distracted West Ham defense line.

West Ham midfielders were completely suppressed by the Forest team. Defoe, who scored two goals in the first half, now appeared to be somewhat superfluous, and veteran Di Canio also lacked movement. Prior to this match, the Italian had some minor injuries, and the 34-year-old veteran would not have been the team's striker if there had been others available. Although Kanouté was sitting on the bench, Roeder was not prepared to let the Malian play. He was here to make up the numbers. Seeing how the striker was doing nothing in the front, and the midfielders and defenders were beginning to be hard-pressed, Roeder was considering whether he should switch players to adjust.

If he switched out Di Canio, who would be a good substitute for him? He swept his gaze across the substitutes' bench. Winger, Trevor Sinclair, attacking midfielder Don Hutchison, center back Gary Breen, plus striker Kanouté, and substitute goalkeeper van der Gouw.

It was a real headache, and he scratched his head.

It was at this time that he heard great cheers coming from the stands!

What was going on?

He hurriedly turned to look at the field.

He saw the Forest team's number 18 striker darting through the defensive line of his parallel position, and Andy Reid's pass was sent just right of his feet. Just like that, they easily broke their offside trap ...

"Which f*cker missed this?" The gentleman with the elegant demeanor could not help but burst into swearing.

He'd just turned his back on the field and did not see his team captain Joe Cole being successfully tackled by his opponent Gareth Williams because he had dribbled too closely. The direct cross was passed to Andy Reid on the other side of the pitch. With Reid's beautiful one touch pass with his foot, he was running diagonally and moving as one with Marlon Harewood, and just like that they easily ripped off the Premier League team's defense.

Tang En stood up from the technical area and leaned forward to closely watch the attack on the field. People around them also stood up from their seats in succession, getting ready for the moment to celebrate the goal.

Harewood ... I know you're not very good at shooting, but if you can't even get this ball in, I'll send you to the reserves tomorrow! Tang En was gnashing his teeth as he thought to himself.

In the quiet Wilford training ground, the iron carved gate was closed. On the right side of the gate, a cottage door was cracked open a little, and a clear voice rang out from the inside.

“He’s doing it single-handedly! Harewood will not waste this opportunity! He shoots ... and it’s GOAL!!!”

The door of the cottage was flung open, and the gray-haired old man, MacDonald, jumped out of the cottage, stood at the door with his arms held high, and shouted, “Goal!!” His momentum blew up the leaves on the ground.

There were 27,000 Forest fans as excited as he was, watching in the City Ground, and they also shouted, “Goooooooooal!!!! Forest Go! Go! Go!”

The commentator’s voice continued to air on the radio, “This is the Forest team’s second goal in 13 minutes! They’re so magnificent!! West Ham United did not expect the Forest team of the second half to give them such a heavy blow. Their three-ball advantage suddenly turned into them leading by only one goal, they are in jeopardy! Look at the strength of the Forest team! They may just be able to draw a tie!”

MacDonald yelled into the cottage, “Bollocks! We can turn this into a victory!”

That young man made good on his promise, the news of our goals came one after another on the radio. Beautifully done, Tony! Come on, Forest team!

The stands in the City Ground had reached fever pitch, even higher than the last goal. Harewood bolted to the edge of the field to the Forest team’s main stand, where he was adulated by the fans. Behind him, his teammates soon leapt and pressed upon him.

This time on the sidelines, Tang En could not suppress his inner excitement any longer. He jumped high in the air, then he and Des Walker tightly embraced together. There was truly no way to keep calm in those 15 minutes of the second half! This group of people really did it! This switcheroo manager’s tactics really worked! We still have one more goal! I want to turn this into a victory!

“Tony! Tony! You’re so damn fantastic! I love you!” Walker roared wildly into his ear, and at this very moment he was fully convinced by the acting manager.

“I f*cking love you too ...” Tang En did not care that it was normally awkward to say so, he wanted to let his inner feelings out. “... I f*cking love all of you!”

When he saw the stadium had reached fever pitch and Tony Twain’s tight embrace with his assistant manager from the press box, John Motson kept shaking his head, “Unbelievable, unbelievable... This has truly been an unbelievable 15 minutes in the second half! The Forest team in the first half had no fighting spirit. They were a mess, and now they have two goals. It looks like they’re going to eat West Ham United for

breakfast. What kind of magic did the acting manager perform on the players during halftime? What rejuvenated them? I think after this match, there will be countless people watching this space! But... now! Let's get back to the third round of the FA Cup and see if Nottingham Forest can turn this match around! Let us see if this Forest miracle can succeed!"

When the Forest team players returned to the field at the referee's urging, they were ready to play. The excitement in the stands had eased slightly, but it was followed by a singing that was long absent and now it reverberated through the City Ground.

Tang En recognized it. This was what he had heard before the match, but it was soon interrupted by boos and jeers.

"We've got the whole world in our hands! The world is in our hands! We are the best team in England! We're invincible, ever victorious! We are fearless! Because we are the best team! Because the world is in our hands!!"

Those proud lyrics... now the fans could finally sing them out loud with confidence.

Tang En stood on the sidelines, looking around the stands where thousands of arms and scarves swayed. Nottingham fans' loud singing voices banged his eardrums and buzzed in his head. In the past he could only see this scene on the television. Now he was really here in person. This was not a dream! Not a dream!

I love these voices! I love the sound here! I love this exciting scene!

Thank God, you've brought me here to become a manager. Yes, I found my calling! I will not waver, and I will not hesitate again. Because this is where I'm destined to stay!

He opened his arms, tilted his body back, held his head high, closed his eyes, and enjoyed the cheers of jubilation all around him.