

## Champions 911

### Chapter 911: Twain's Trouble

The new season had just started. Nottingham Forest played three league games, winning two and drawing in one, so it was not that bad. Although they replaced two head coaches, the foundation Tony Twain left behind was very sturdy so even after experiencing a huge change in the summer, the team was still maintaining its high standards.

After seeing how the Nottingham Forest was faring, the media also changed their mindset towards Nottingham Forest. Previously they were not optimistic about Nottingham Forest since they had experienced a whole typhoon with tremendous amounts of internal and external issues. Experts had analysed that Nottingham Forest's goal this season was to qualify for next season's European fixture, not even for the Champions League or the Confederations Cup, or even to try to defend their championships.

Now they believe that Nottingham Forest would remain a strong contender for the title as long as Flores could stabilize the team.

Nottingham Forest did well and the happiest man was Evan Doughty. As the league progressed, the slurs he received were disappearing. Although there were still fans displaying banners in the audience stands which scolded him every game, that was only a limited few and he chose to ignore those.

He began to visualize the scene of the team successfully winning the championships by the end of the season. By then everyone would have completely forgotten Tony Twain, and would start praising him being the most successful chairperson in the club's history, being able to match up to Real Madrid's Bernabeu.

The 30-year-old Ibišević had been sold to Serie A newcomer Sejana, with Nottingham Forest reaping a fee of 20 million pounds from the deal. It must be said that that Alan Adams was an expert in negotiating. The 30-year-old Ibišević was blown up by Alan as a huge character playing in the golden years of the strikers, being efficient and stable in scoring, and even had a number of cup-winning experience which was very essential as the triple crown team's main striker, and only selling at 20 million pounds, it would be really profitable for you!

Just like that, Nottingham Forest sent away the last player who would leave the team this summer. Aaron Mitchell was thoroughly focused upon as he became the team's leading scorer. Although everyone had predicted Gareth Bale, George Wood, Fernando Gago, Akinfeev would transfer, however there was no transfer news for them. Still, the media believed that this was only temporary due to the disagreement in financial terms which hindered them from leaving and this did not mean that they would not leave by summer next year. As long as the results of Nottingham Forest were not satisfactory this season, then it was only certain that those people would leave eventually.

Nottingham Forest had only bought four men this summer and had not actually done much of the purge. That was thanks to the two-time head coach Martin O'Neill and Flores being aware and persistent – under such circumstances, there was nothing more effective than keeping the squad formation stable.

Thiago Silva, Michael Dawson and Mario Balotelli, as well as a Belgian attacking forward, Eden Hazard.

The scale of the transfers was not great, and this was also amongst the issues that they were entangled with being “who was actually responsible behind the current state of the team”. No one was responsible for the team’s preparations for the new season, and no one had a practical plan to be implemented. Even for Flores who had taken over when the new season was almost going to start. Arranging an actual formation with the cards he had was enough of a headache so he did not even bother to think about things like transfers.

Nottingham Forest was in fourth place after the three rounds. They were about to leave for Monaco for the European Super Cup. As winners of last season’s European Champions Cup, they will compete with last season’s Confederations Cup winners, Alkmaar of the Netherlands, for the king of Europe.

Before that, through one of the major news in the England team, Tony Twain had announced his second roster for the country team.

Not far off from the media’s predictions, the vast majority of the 25-person list were old faces.

Not many of the fringe figures in the first friendly were on the list. It was the first official game Twain led the England team to play so he was even more cautious than most people thought.

In the previous draw, England were placed in Group 3 which was also called Group C. The other six teams in their group were the Nordic powerhouses Denmark, Wales, Ireland, Serbia, Macedonia and Armenia. To be honest this group was not the strongest group in terms of potential, and perhaps only Denmark and Serbia could pose a threat to England. But in Twain’s mind, the more foreign teams were the more dangerous ones. This was the same as playing against a club – you would make more mistakes when playing against a team whom you had never played against before.

Against a rival like Macedonia, Twain admitted he did not know anything about them. So, during this period of time, the days in which he did go to the Premier League to watch the games, he would be working with his coaching staff desperately to gather information about Macedonia, then analyze tactics and study countermeasures against them.

It was England’s first game in this European Championship qualifier and Twain really cared about this. He wanted the team to win the opener so that the games that came after would be easier to play. Another factor that was not as superstitious was that Macedonia was not a strong team, so if England was not able to win Macedonia on home ground they would then lose a chance to get points.

None of the 26-man roster signed by Twain was from a non-Premier League team.

Arsenal had two players in the squad who both came from midfield —Theo Walcott and Jack Wilshere.

Aston Villa also had two players selected— goalkeeper Stuart Taylor and right-back Glen Johnson.

Blackburn had only one person, the veteran goalkeeper Paul Robinson.

Chelsea had three players, the middle full back John Terry, the midfielder Joe Cole and the midfielder James Milner.

Manchester City had three, the midfielder Gareth Barry, center-back Curtis Davies, and full back Steven Taylor.

Manchester United had three as well, center-back Rio Ferdinand, forward striker Wayne Rooney, midfielder Michael Carrick.

Two from Liverpool, the midfielder Steven Gerrard and Nigel Reo-Coker.

One person from Middlebrough, midfield winger Stewart Twaining.

A lone person from Leeds United, Fabian Delph, a professional midfielder.

Three from Everton, full back being Joleon Lescott, left back Leighton Baines and striker James Vaughan.

Next up is Nottingham Forest, which had the largest number of national teams players, with five of them selected. Left back Joe Mattock, midfielder David Bentley, center striker Aaron Mitchell, Gabriel Agbonlahor, as well as their team captain, the defensive midfielder George Wood.

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“Tony Twain had fulfilled what he said at his inaugural press conference, ‘If the Nottingham Forest players are doing well, why not just choose them?’ Looking at such a big roster we once again realize the fact that Tony Twain had only coached in Nottingham Forest before becoming the head coach of the England team. He was most familiar with this team...”

This was how the media commented on the huge roster list.

In terms of quality selection, the only ones with a strong “Tony Twain’s style” was the five Nottingham Forest players.

“The Nottingham Forest players were not been affected by that chaotic summer and would take on important responsibilities in the New England team. ”

“Tony Twain’s cronyism is likely to provoke discontent from other clubs.”

“What do they mean by being discontented?” Twain swore by habit as he threw the newspapers which was talking bad about him. “The head coaches would be more than happy if I don’t take their players. Did you see Benitez’s look on his face when you saw me calling up Gerrard, who had just returned from injury? He looked like I snatched his wife from him. ”

Walker was laughing at the side.

It was the twenty-ninth of August that day. Registered soccer players had one by one flown in from all over the world to London for the games. Everyone else had arrived except for the five players from Nottingham Forest who would only be reporting for this after their matches at the UEFA Super Cup.

Twain and Walker were waiting in front of the television for the match to start.

Being in a different position, Twain realised that his mindset and attitude had taken a turn for the better. In the past, under such circumstances, he would have hated that the national team recruited new players before major matches. This is because that would influence the thinking of the players who would constantly worry about getting hurt during their matches that would deem them incompetent when the time for the real game came. As for the coach of the Club, if his players had that kind of

attitude, it could possibly cost his chance at the championship, hence he tries his best to avoid such situations.

However, the times have changed. Nowadays, he aligned his thinking with his players and prioritised their well-being. He constantly fretted over the players injuring themselves during trainings and competitions at the Club or that they had exhausted their fighting spirit during training such that they have little to none left when they begin their training with the national team.

Nonetheless this change in attitude did not mean that Nottingham Forest was giving up on the championship title. For Nottingham Forest, defeat was unthinkable.

Since Alkmaar was not a formidable team, it should be effortless for Nottingham Forest to emerge victorious in that match. For Twaine, who acknowledged that victory clearly belonged with Nottingham Forest, he simply hoped that Flores would leave him with some dignity by swapping the main players of the team during the match.

The television started the streaming of the match with the name lists of the players on both teams.

On Nottingham Forest's end, there was Akinfeev as goalkeeper, Michael Dawson and Thiago Silva as the center backs, Gareth Bell as left back and Rafinha as right back. As for the midfielders, they were George Wood, Fernando Gago, Matthias Fernandez and David Bentley while the strikers were Aaron Mitchell and Agbonlahor.

Besides Joe Matok who was missing from the starting lineup, everyone else was present.

Twain's only wish then was for none of them to get injured or to encounter any physical problems that would hinder their performance.

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This UEFA Super Cup eventually ended in the victory of Nottingham Forest. For the match with Alkmaar, Nottingham Forest had swiftly taken control of the midfield soon after the initial taunts by Alkmaar. With firm and unparalleled control over the midfield by George Wood and Gago, Nottingham Forest began their counterattack on Alkmaar.

Their skillful gameplay had proven them worthy of the title of Triple Crown from the last season.

Continuous attacks by Nottingham Forest had threatened Alkmaar's goal post. The aggressive strategy that Nottingham Forest cleverly used against Alkmaar paid off at the thirty-seventh minute mark.

Mitchell proficiently headed the ball passed to him by Agbonlahor and managed to get the ball into their opponent's goal post.

Upon seeing the goal by Nottingham Forest, Walker felt extremely delighted. He was glad to see that both of the players were in good condition from their stellar performance.

"They are capable of being the super striker duo in the national team. Agbonlahor and Mitchell show reasonable chemistry with each other..." he suggested.

However, Twain shook his head, "Managing the national team is no simple task, Des. Just look at me. I had only recruited some players from Nottingham Forest and in no time, the media had picked it up and

started their criticisms. If I take the risk of putting Rooney, who is perfectly fit, on the reserved team, I would be inviting trouble for myself with the Manchester reporters. I have to strike a balance among the parties. I definitely wouldn't want for my team to form cliques like "Team Forest", "Team Manchester", "Team Liverpool", "Team Chelsea", "Team Gunners"... all of these unpleasant cliques."

Walker rolled his eyes at Twain, "In that case, why did you tell the reporters that you would use them on your team if they performed outstandingly?"

"That was only one way of appeasing the reporters. Besides, that was also to convey a message to the players that I only acknowledge their performance and not their person in themselves. Simply a way to manage the team. In reality, I wouldn't be as rigid. There are many ambivalent situations that don't allow for simple solutions. Alright, let's not talk about this anymore. Let's continue watching the match..."

After Nottingham Forest had taken the lead, Alkmaar attempted to counterattack only to find themselves leaving much room for their opponents to use against them. Nottingham Forest seized the opportunity once again and more or less guaranteed their victory by the time the first half came to an end.

The rest of the match seemed meaningless to watch. Flores had respected Twain enough to replace Bentley and Mitchell, both English national players, into the second half of the match. As the captain, George Wood had faithfully played till the end. Twain had nothing to complain about that. Wood was a beast and the warrior of the future. With his physical fitness, Wood could easily play the entirety of the match.

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When Nottingham Forest lost the Community Shield, everyone was concerned that a team like that would not be able to last in the new season and would lose every game that came their way. It was then that Flores led the team to championship at the Super Cup. That was great news for the team which assured the players and inspired the fighting spirit in them.

Evan Doughty was smiling brightly on the podium. This was probably the happiest he had been in the past three months. George Wood raised the Super Cup trophy high up in the air as he was embraced by all his teammates surrounding him. Everyone reached their hands for the trophy.

The commentator excitedly announced, "Nottingham Forest has successfully clinched the championship! They are the King of Kings in Europe this year! After experiencing a hell of a summer, they had regained their footing. This is also Flores' first win with the team he has coached. It seems like Flores is confident in leading the team in continuing the legacy of Tony Twain! Perhaps it won't be long before he can successfully replace the place of Tony Twain in the hearts of the fans..."

Walker stole a glance at Twain at the side.

Twain's expression remained unchanged. He realised Twain was looking at him and stared at Twain, "Stop looking. Be prepared to face the biggest problem."

“The biggest problem?” Walker froze. He had not heard of such a thing, what problems could there be? Did something go wrong? Was it something to do with Nottingham Forest? Don’t those players belong to Twain? How could there be a problem?”

Twain did not explain. He continued to stare at the television screen. In fact, he had only just been triggered as well. Observing George Wood’s face, Twain suddenly remembered — the second time he had gone to Crimson Stadium, he was cheered on by the fans and was respectfully greeted by the players yet Twain did not have anything to say about it. He was in front of the team and was the first to march out from the underpass yet he did not even lift his head.

Twain was unsure of Wood’s intentions or how he thought of himself.

How was he going to face George when they are both in the national team?

This was probably the biggest problem...

### **Chapter 912: National Team Call Up Completed**

Nottingham Forest did not have a direct flight to Birmingham Airport, and they landed in London Heathrow airport instead. There were not many players who came back along with the team as most of players who were called up to play for their country split up with the team at Monaco.

Only the five players who were part of the England squad returned to England with the team. They then split up with the team in London and went to Colney in North London. The place that was usually the training ground for Arsenal was now the exclusive training ground of the national team.

When they went their different ways at the airport, Flores suddenly felt a need to expand his influence in the changing room as he looked at the five players gathered together. In the changing room now, the players were still discussing about Tony Twain more instead of himself. This made him a little jealous.

Therefore, he walked over, gave Bentley a pat on his shoulder and said using his less than fluent English, “Kids, don’t get hurt.”

This sentence that was full of concern did not receive the proper response. The England players who were chatting amongst themselves turned to look at their manager without saying anything.

Even Wood looked at Flores expressionlessly, bordering on being rude.

Joe Mattock, the most inexperienced player in the national team there, broke the awkward atmosphere, “We’ll take care of ourselves boss.”

After that, the group of them turned around and started talking amongst themselves again.

Flores felt very awkward and did not feel good standing there anymore. If they were discussing about a private topic... People might think that he was eavesdropping by standing there and it would be detrimental to him managing the players. Every player had their own little secret that they did not want the manager to know.

Resentfully, he left and returned to his own place.

Kerslake saw everything. In his heart, he really pitied Flores. That was because even he unintentionally compared Flores with Tony Twain at that moment. He was thinking in his mind that if that had been Tony, the group of players would happily include him in their discussions and joked without holding back, attracting the glances of everyone around them.

That was what Forest used to look like.

Now, it was just a distant memory. The Forest team seemed to be in harmony on the surface because of the decent results. The players also said that Flores was a good manager when interviewed as the negative news of the team reduced a lot compared to three months ago.

However, testing times would never come when things were going well. Once there are problems with the team's results, Flores and the team will be under a massive amount of stress. Those restless media and fans would gladly summon Tony Twain again and reminisce about the glorious times.

As Tony Twain sculpted himself to be the King of the team, it also became a Damascus sword pointed at the team.

How ironic.

To fully rid Forest of Tony Twain's influence, it would need to take more than one season...

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When Flores returned to his seat, the players continued their discussion. They were indeed discussing about Twain. Other than Wood, the others were all excited and looking forward to being reunited with Twain—After more than three months, they could finally play under boss again!

"I'm going to give boss a hug!" Aaron Mitchell announced excitedly. Just like how Pepe did in the changing room previously. He still regretted letting Pepe hog all the limelight last time, "As an apology! As my apology to him for ever doubting him!"

"Okay Aaron. You don't have to be so loud. Are you trying to let the whole world know that you wronged boss?" Bentley thought that Mitchell was like a kid sometimes.

Mitchell lowered his voice and mumbled, "I'm going to give boss a hug anyway."

"Come to think of it..." Bentley said while stroking his chin, "When boss was still around, I didn't think much about hearing him speak in the changing room. But it has only been three months and I'm suddenly missing him inside the changing room..."

"Hey, do you think the boss will give us special care?" Joe Mattock asked all of a sudden, stunning everyone.

Mattock was someone on the peripheral of the national team, behind the pecking order of Ashley Cole, Leighton Barnes and Lescott, who could also play in the left-back position. If not for the fact that Ashley Cole had not recovered from his injuries, he might not even make it into the call-up list. Mattock felt that he was chosen because he was a "Forest player". It was a good thing to be called up, but if he was only called up for this reason... There might be a heavy burden on him.

“I don’t think so. Boss is not a manager who will give special treatment to people,” Bentley refuted Mattock’s thinking, “Besides, if he gave us special treatment, how badly do you think the outside media will criticize him?”

Agbonlahor shrugged, “I’m not so sure. Boss is an unique person who doesn’t care about what the media says, he even likes going against them. I think that boss is someone who wears his heart on his sleeves. If we perform well, I think we have a very good chance to be in the starting lineup!”

George Wood did not want to join in the discussion as he thought this topic was boring. However, he was still pulled into it by the child-like Mitchell.

“George, what do you think?”

For a moment, the discussion stopped, and everyone turned to look at him.

Wood was able to show a long face and act as though he was unwilling to talk to anyone towards his agent, the media, even to that man. However, it was not possible for him to do that to his teammate, his comrade in arms.

“I...I agree with David,” Wood pointed at Bentley as he kicked the ball back.

Everyone knew that Wood was not a talkative person and they did not pester him anymore since he already gave his opinion.

The group chatted for a little while longer before preparing to board the car.

Mitchell was still lost in the discussion. He sighed and said, “Reuniting with boss in the national team, I’ve never even thought about it before...”

What he said touched on the fact that Twain was no longer with Forest and all of a sudden, they were no longer in the mood to continue chatting.

And they stayed silent all the way on the journey to Colney.

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Colney training base was in Hertfordshire, only a 45 minutes journey from Arsenal’s Emirates Stadium by car. This was now the training base for the England national team. The Arsenal first team had three training grounds which were all used by the national team now. Those first team players who were not called up to their respective national teams would train with the reserve team without worrying about causing any trouble for the reserve team. For a team like Arsenal, even their substitutes in the first team were national team players. So, there were only a few players left behind, probably only the ones who were injured.

This training base had an area of 143 hectares, out of which, 45 hectares were covered by woods. The environment was very pleasant with no skyscrapers around, unobstructed views, fresh air and it was so quiet it felt like a hidden utopia. Training in a place like this was a luxury. Compared to Colney, Nottingham Forest’s Wilford training grounds was a much stingier place. It was no wonder that Even Doughty planned to build a new training base. It looked like he was planning to reach the “big club” status in terms of equipment and facilities.



Colney was the best training base in England. If the training base that Evan Doughty had in mind was built, Colney would have to settle for second place. As for now, there was no other training bases that could displace it from its position.

Ten standard sized pitches, each installed with underground drainage system and an automatic spraying system. Two of the pitches were even installed with underground heating system so that outdoor training could still take place even when it was snowing.

That was why the English Football Association picked Colney as England's designated training base.

When Wood's gang of five arrived at Colney, the England team had just ended their morning training and the players were going back to the changing room. Only a few players were stopped by the media for interviews outside.

Their arrivals attracted the attention of the media. If it was not because they were interviewing other players, they would have rushed towards them.

At this moment, Des Walker appeared between the two parties and took them away.

"Tony wants to see you guys," he told Wood.

Bentley whistled from behind. They knew that he meant Wood when he said that he wanted to meet them.

"Leave your stuff in the hostel and come over."

Wood did not ask silly questions like "where's the hostel" or "where is he", this was not his first time participating in the national team's training. He dragged his luggage and signaled for his teammates to go with him.

The reporters went after them and only stopped after taking dozens of pictures.

"The national team is all here now. Hey, I have insider news..." The reporters gathered to talk after finishing their interviews.

The others became interested after hearing him say that as this reporter was from The Sun.

"Things are not well between George Wood and Tony Twain!" The reporter said with a mysterious tone. He was not afraid that these people would take this piece of news and publish it as their own insider story as The Sun had already decided to publish this on their papers tomorrow. They specially waited for Wood to arrive at the national team for better effect.

"Eh? Is that true?"

"Surely not? Didn't they say that they were like father and son?"

"Wood was found and trained by Twain himself, and there are even rumors of some weird relationship between Twain and his mother..."

The reporters were all shocked.

That reporter was very satisfied with their reactions.

“Why is it impossible? Italy’s Cassano treated Capello as his father too, didn’t he? In the end? Didn’t they turn against each other too?” The reporter from The Sun gave a clap, “Who knows, the relationship between Wood and Twain might be a timebomb in the national team. Now that Wood is becoming more and more impactful in the team, he is basically the forecast of the team’s results. If his form is good, the team’s result will be good; If he’s in a bad form... Capello is a good example.”

The reporter from The Sun laughed.

Everyone understood why he was acting like that. Twain and The Sun were at loggerheads and they would grab any opportunity to make things difficult for each other.

The reporters thought about the relationship between them and some of them immediately thought that this was a deliberate move by The Sun to make things difficult for Twain. The rumor of Wood and Twain falling out became half as believable.

The Sun’s reporter could tell that some people doubted him. He did not bother to explain himself, merely saying, “Ha, we’ll wait and see then!”

Those reporters were still being kept in the dark. The Sun had paparazzi all over England and they were guaranteed to be able to get the most accurate, most confidential and latest news!

We’ll show Tony Twain tomorrow when the papers are published!

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George Wood knocked on the door of Twain’s temporary office with his teammates in tow.

Twain and Kerslake were talking happily inside.

When the five players from Nottingham Forest appeared in front of him, Twain stood up and walked towards them with his arms open.

“Welcome, my friends.”

Wood was standing right in front, and he should have been the first one to hug Twain. However, Aaron Mitchell rushed out with his arms open from behind, as if he was afraid that he could not keep his promise.

“Boss!” He shouted excitedly and embraced Twain.

Twain did not let anyone see the expression change in his face—He had planned to give Wood a hug to soften his stance, he did not expect Mitchell to pop out first. He could only play by ear now...

“Oh—Not so hard Aaron!” Twain shouted. Mitchell used so much force in his agitation that Twain felt pain.

“Ah, sorry, sorry...boss!” Mitchell let go quickly, panicking a little.

But Twain just smiled and looked at him with a look that suggested he was looking at his own child.

“You look tired,” he said.

“I’m not!” Mitchell shook his head vigorously.

Twain smiled without saying anything and he looked at the next person.

Bentley did not hug Twain like Mitchell, he merely looked at Twain and said, "It's been awhile boss."

"You guys saw me a fortnight ago."

"We were...opponents then, this is different."

It was Agbonlahor and Joe Mattock's turns after welcoming Bentley.

Finally, he appeared in front of George Wood.

The smile on Twain's face disappeared because there were no traces of a smile on Wood's face.

The cordial atmosphere previously suddenly became awkward.

His four teammates tried their best to not look at the two of them as their eyes darted around the room to hide the awkwardness.

Twain did not know what to say too. He reached out and patted Wood on the shoulder.

Next, he turned towards the others and said, "There's a training session in the afternoon. Don't get hurt and have a good rest."

The meeting ended.

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When the players were gone, Kerslake was a little perplexed and asked Twain, "I thought you were going to ask George to stay back to talk to him alone."

"This is not a very big place," Twain meant the training base, "Are there any news that we can hide from others? I don't want people to think that I'm giving special treatment, that will be detrimental to the team's harmony."

"Then George..." Walker was still worried that Wood might think differently.

"I'll talk to him properly of course, just not now..."

Twain mumbled as his eyes darted around.

### **Chapter 913: The New Captain of the Three Lions**

The Sun decided to publish an article about the tension between Twain and Wood so as to gain an advantage in the increasingly competitive news industry.

On the other hand, the media outlets associated with Stamford Bridge were much more concerned about whether their player, John Terry, is able to retain his captaincy in the England national team.

Usually, every new national team manager would announce who the captain for the team is after all the national team players have come together. Some managers would choose to go with the player who was named captain in the previous year as a way of stabilizing the team, but there are quite a few

managers who would select another player whom they think are more suitable or whom they have a preference for as the new captain of the team.

After Beckham left the national team, Terry was named captain of the England national team, and Gerrard was named as the vice-captain.

The media outlets associated with Liverpool were also concerned about who would end up with the captain's armband. They hoped that Twain would promote Gerrard from vice-captain to captain.

Similarly, the media outlets associated with Nottingham Forest were also crying for Twain to pick George Wood as the captain.

However, George Wood paled in comparison to both Terry and Gerrard in terms of experience and influence. Most of the media outlets believed that the captaincy and vice captaincy should still be given to both Terry and Gerrard respectively. They felt that Twain should not change the captain and vice-captain of the national team if he wanted to maintain stability in the team.

Twain was cautious with his selection of the captain. Terry and Gerrard were both players who were quite influential in England's footballing scene, and he could stir up chaos if he was not careful.

He decided to discuss the issue with both Terry and Gerrard.

Both players expressed their desire to either continue being the captain or to become the captain of the team. They both felt that it would be a great honor to be able to wear the captain's armband on their sleeves.

Twain understood where they were coming from, but he could not agree with their thoughts.

He wants to rebuild the entire England national team after being appointed as the new manager. This meant that every single thing related to the old England national team has to be discarded, and this includes the previous captain and vice-captain of the team.

In simpler words, Twain wants a 'complete overhaul' of the England national team.

Changing the captain would be the first step needed for Twain to establish a new system within the team.

He conveyed his thoughts to the two senior players, and told them straight up that he found the two of them to be slightly old. He wanted a captain who could stay as the captain of the team for a long time.

Terry and Gerrard immediately understood what the new manager was intent on doing.

They were upset to be stripped of their captain armbands, but the manager has always been regarded as the biggest and most influential person in every single England football team. Nobody dared to defy the manager's words, and things were not different in the national team either. In fact, it was more common to see scenes of players congregating around their managers to go against the Football Association in England.

If this had been any other country however, Twain's actions would have led to him being fired from the job. It did not matter how good his CV as a football manager was. He would never have been given the job as the manager of the national football team.

Terry and Gerrard were both senior players of the national team. Twain hoped that the two of them would be able to act as role models to the other players and help to stabilize the team as a whole.

What could either Terry or Gerrard do besides to agree to Twain's arrangement after hearing what he had to say? They could not possibly leave the national team in a fit of rage.

The two of them did not have many years left to play in the national team, and neither of them wished to leave the team without accomplishing anything. Tony Twain was definitely a man who has the capability to lead his team to become champions. They both hoped that they could win something under the guidance of a manager who seems to have an affinity with trophies, given how England has failed to attain a single trophy for many years.

Tony Twain is a man who managed to achieve 12 trophies in 11 years. He definitely has the right to be pushy.

Both Terry and Gerrard agreed to the manager's arrangement.

Twain heaved a sigh of relief at their responses. The biggest obstacle was out of his way now.

He would not even have gone through all this trouble if it wasn't for the fact that he had to maintain stability within the team.

He did not care about what he had to say to the media regarding the change of captains. All he cared about was that the players understood the rationale behind his decision.

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The England national team players came together for the very first time during the afternoon practice session.

Twain was going to announce the new captain and vice-captain of the team before training commenced.

The expressions on both Terry and Gerrard's face were off. Their eyes kept swimming about and they evaded eye contact with their team mates. The two already knew that they were going to be stripped of their captaincy.

George Wood, who knew nothing about Tony's decision to announce the new captain, got called over by the assistant manager after finishing his warm-ups. He then waited for Twain to give his pep talk before the training session began.

It was a sunny afternoon. Twain appeared before the players with his Ray-Ban sunglasses on.

"Good afternoon, lads. I hope you all slept well yesterday, because our practice session today is going to be tough." Twain raised his hand to wave at everyone before he walked into the middle of the crowd.

"I'm going to announce the captain and vice-captain of the team this year before the practice session begins, just like how things were done in the previous years."

The Chelsea players all turned their heads to look at Terry, while the Liverpool players looked at Gerrard. Similarly, the Forest players all turned to look at Wood.

The players from other football clubs did not show particular interest in who the captain was going to be. It was not like they would get picked to become the captain anyway.

They all believed that Terry, Gerrard and Wood were the most qualified to become the captain of the team. Terry has been the captain of the England national team ever since 2008. His performances over the past eight years have not gone unnoticed by his team mates. Gerrard has always been the vice-captain of the team, and he would wear the captain's armband whenever Terry is not playing. He was regarded as a footballer who possessed the best leadership skills among all the England footballers. The media outlets associated with Liverpool have always believed that he should be named the captain of the national team over Terry. As for George Wood, he was the most successful captain in England for the past few years. He was widely regarded as the toughest footballer in England, and he was a role model to all other England footballers.

However, George Wood has something that would give him an edge over the other two players. It was age. He was only 28 years old this year. He was much younger than the other two players and was right in his prime.

Twain observed how the players reacted to his words. They behaved just as he had expected them to.

If he had not discussed this matter with both Terry and Gerrard earlier, then it would have been a risk to announce his new captains, and he would have had to bear the possible consequences of his announcement. But, Twain has nothing to fear now, because he knew that the two players were behind his decision.

"George Wood and John Terry would become the captain and vice-captain respectively." Twain announced his captains in a straightforward and clear manner.

A small commotion broke out within the team. The Liverpool players clearly looked crestfallen, whereas the Chelsea players looked surprised, because their captain had been demoted to vice-captain.

The Nottingham Forest players were the first to applaud Wood for becoming the captain of the team.

Everyone else also began applauding to congratulate both George Wood and John Terry on their captaincy shortly after, regardless of how they felt at the moment.

Gerrard was a little despondent after hearing Twain's announcement, because he did not even manage to retain his vice-captaincy. But, it was to be expected, given how he was the oldest of the three. He was already 34 years old, whereas Terry was only going to turn 34 at the end of the year. Center-backs are always able to play football for a longer time as compared to midfielders. It did not matter if the center-backs are old and unable to run about any longer. Managers would still play them because they want to rely on their experience. Take Fabio Cannavaro for example. How long did he play football in Italy? He was still able to represent the Italian national football team in the Africa World Cup despite being 37 years of age! In contrast, it was very difficult to even find a midfielder aged 35 and above who would still get picked in football teams.

Gerrard has been trying his best to stay in shape and maintain his fitness levels, because he did not want to be kicked out of the national team too quickly. He was well aware that there are numerous talented footballers chasing after his position in the national team, and George Wood was one of them.

Gerrard was not jealous of the fact that Wood got the captain's armband instead of him. The two have developed a special sense of respect for each other having battled each other numerous times in the Premier League for the past few years. Wood was definitely a talented player worthy of the armband.

The only player who was shocked by Twain's announcement was Wood. The expression on his face visibly changed, which was a rare occurrence. His eyes were bulged and his mouth was agape. He stared at Twain in disbelief.

Twain grinned at Wood. It was the first time that he was seeing a genuine display of emotions from Wood and he felt happy to be able to witness it.

"George." He called Wood's name and signaled for him to walk forward to accept his captain's armband.

Wood walked forward slowly. He was still reeling in shock. The Forest players patted him on the back and whistled to cheer for him.

Twain pulled Wood over to his side, then turned to speak to the other players. "I have to explain to everyone why I chose Wood as the captain. During the previous summer transfer window, rumors of George Wood's transfer were widespread throughout the whole of England. Forest was put into a difficult situation, because their best player was being enticed by numerous big clubs. But, in the end, George chose to stay in Forest, and he used his actions to prove that loyalty still exists in modern football."

Twain's voice was calm when he spoke about matters involving Nottingham Forest. It was as though he was talking about something that had nothing to do with him.

"He is a player who has been the captain of Nottingham Forest for the past seven years. I believe that he has the capacity and the qualifications to become the captain of the England national team. I'd like to thank Terry and Gerrard for all that they've done over the past few years, and I'd also like to thank them for being understanding." Twain looked at Terry and Gerrard. The Chelsea and Liverpool players understood through his gaze that he had already settled things with both Terry and Gerrard previously.

Both Terry and Gerrard forced a smile. They both lost the captain's armband, but what could they do about it? Wood was the one who spent the most time with Twain among them, and Twain also thought highly of Wood. In addition, many people also describe Tony Twain as George Wood's father. Now that the father has become the manager of the national team, how could the son not get a bit of a preferential treatment?

In truth, Twain's action of naming Wood as the captain has only piled pressure onto Wood's shoulders. Everyone knows that the two of them are close, even though there might be reports of tension between them recently. Thus, everyone would naturally speculate that Wood was only able to become the captain of the England national team because he is close to Twain, and Twain cannot do anything to stop any of those speculations.

However, Twain believed in Wood's ability to handle stress. After all, the stress that he has gone through as the captain of the Forest team was just as immense as the stress that will ride on his shoulders from here on out as the captain of the England national team. Additionally, Wood is also nicknamed 'St. George' by many of the British football fans, and Twain believed that all these different factors make Wood a good captain for the team.

Twain did not deny that he was thinking of forming a new England national team with Wood as the core. Letting Wood become the new captain of the team was only the first step of his plans, and he would continue implementing his plan in the matches to come.

It was time for a complete overhaul of the England national team. Many of the players in the current England national team would be slowly kicked out and replaced by new talent.

Twain wanted to build an England national team that belonged solely to him. He was going to get rid of any marks that had been left behind by others on his team, and he was also going to get the team to listen to his every word and to play for him.

All those aforementioned things need to happen first before he can even be confident in the team's ability to become champions of the UEFA European Championship.

After he finished explaining his rationale to the other players, Twain personally put on the captain's armband onto Wood's left sleeve. He then patted Wood's left arm when he was done.

"I must remind you of one thing, George. This armband is not without an expiry date. I would not hesitate to strip you of this thing the moment your performance falls short of my expectations, and when you are not able to fulfill your role as the captain of the team." Twain pointed at the armband.

Wood did not respond to his words.

"Everyone, get started with your training!"

Twain retreated to the side and allowed the assistant managers and coaches to get started with the training session.

Wood's Forest team mates went up to congratulate him, but his response to their words was rather flat. Both Terry and Gerrard also went up to congratulate him, and so everyone else in the national team followed suit and walked up to pat Wood either on the shoulder or on his head. Everyone seemed to be getting along well with one another.

Twain knew that Wood's captaincy was a challenge both for Wood and for himself.

Wood was able to cement his position as the captain of the Forest team due to Albertini's teachings and Twain's favor. The way in which he speaks through his actions rather than words has endeared him to his Forest team mates. They have all come to accept him as their captain wholeheartedly after interacting with him for a long period of time.

However, things were different now that he was the captain of the England national team. Most of the players in the national team are players who come from different football clubs, and many of them would not have interacted with Wood for a long period of time previously, thus they would not be able to accept him as their captain straight away.

Not only that, the impression that most players have of Wood is that he is someone who is reticent and who does not fit well into the group. Given how Twain has suddenly forced the title of captain onto someone like him whom the others did not have a very good impression of, Wood definitely has to perform even better than he did in the past so as to prove that he is worthy of the position as the captain.



Wood did not appear to be as happy at becoming the captain as others had expected him to be. He accepted the words of congratulations from his team mates with a stoic expression the whole time.

He did not seem to be in high spirits during training either.

However, Twain noticed something during training. Wood was more serious than any other player towards training, and he also put in the most hard work during each and every training segment as well. In fact, he performed even better than he did in Forest.

The edge of Twain's lips went up at that sight.

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After the afternoon training session concluded, Twain stood in the middle of everyone and analysed the pros and cons that he observed during the session. He commended a few players and also criticized a few.

Thereafter, everyone but Wood was dismissed.

This seemed like a normal gesture from the manager. The new manager has to communicate with the new captain so as to better manage the team.

However, Wood knew why Twain had asked him to stay behind. He just knew based on instinct.

The Colney Training Center was basked in the orange glow of the setting sun after everyone left the premises. The trees in the distance swayed gently in the breeze, and their movements seemed to have carried a sense of coolness into the training center. The weather felt less hot than it did in the afternoon as a result.

The cool weather seemed to make people feel much more relaxed and comfortable.

The training center was very silent. Only the chirping sounds of birds in the distant forest could be picked up.

Wood stood on the pitch and Twain stood at the sidelines. Approximately 20 meters separated the two of them from each other.

Twain took one step forward.

Wood took one step back.

Twain thought it was just a coincidence. He stopped in his tracks for a moment before he took one step forward. Then another. And another.

Wood swiftly took one step backwards. Then another. And another.

Twain understood what was going on. He stood still, threw out his hands and asked loudly, "What's this? Like charges repelling each other?"

Wood stood wordlessly on the pitch that was bathed in the orange hue of the setting sun.

Twain took several strides forward quickly, and Wood retreated backwards quickly.

Twain began running forward, and Wood turned around to flee.

Thereafter, a chase began on the pitch, and it looked just like a hunt that was taking place on the African savanna.

By right, the prey should be in front and the predator should be at the back. But, the scene right now was just like the prey chasing the predator... The rabbit was panting heavily, whereas the cheetah still had the luxury to look backwards here and there to see how far behind the rabbit was.

The two had barely run around half of the pitch when the 46-year-old Twain threw in the towel. He could not continue running anymore. He bent over and pressed both his hands on his knees as he panted heavily.

Wood stopped running when he noticed that Twain had stopped in his tracks. He then stared at Twain from a distance.

Twain suddenly straightened his back. Wood thought he was going to continue the chase, so he turned around and was about to continue running when Twain scolded him angrily, "Stop running for god's sake!"

#### **Chapter 914: Why Are You Running?**

George Wood had been running away. He had good conditions at the club – as long as he did not want to see Twain, Twain would not be able to see him. But now he had no way to escape. He was already in the national team and Twain was his manager and he was Twain's player. How was he supposed to escape? Just like today, he could at most circle around the training ground which was one to one same size as a stadium.

But the time had come in the end.

"Up your grandfather for running!" Gasping for breath, the tired Twain put his hands on his knees for a while and his ragged breathing finally evened out. The first sentence out of his mouth was a curse word.

Wood could not understand the phrase, but he knew that every time a moment like this happened, Twain would definitely speak in Mandarin. He moved slightly closer by taking a couple of steps and asked, "What did you say?"

"Ah ha, you're finally ready to talk to me. I was just cursing at you... But don't worry, it has nothing to do with your mother. It has to do with your grandfather. Hey, have you met your grandfather? Twain responded with gasping breath.

"I don't know who my grandfather is."

"Well, forget about your fucking grandfather. I ask you, why did you run just now?"

Twain's hands left his knees, but his back was still slightly hunched. He was still tired. His mind must have been so muddled that he came up with the idea to race against George Wood.

Wood chewed his lips a few times before he said, "I don't know..."

“You don’t know why you were running!” When Twain heard the answer, he was furious and said, “It almost killed me... I will say this to you, George. If I had a cardiac arrest, you will have to take full responsibility for it!” Although he was very angry, Twain was secretly sniggering. At least Wood had unknowingly started talking to him. Twain had a lot of confidence in his gift of gab, as long as Wood was willing to talk to him. Then any problem could be resolved.

Wood moved closer forward by another two more steps. It was far away for him to hear what Twain was saying properly.

Twain still felt tired. He had not exercised so vigorous for an extremely long time like just now. His heart in the chest was beating wildly, making him feel exhausted. He simply laid down and did not look at Wood. “I’m the England team’s manager and you’re the England captain. We need to work together. Can you please don’t make the situation akin to an encounter with your father’s murderer?”

Unexpectedly Wood’s answer almost made Twain choke on his words. He said, “My father’s murderer? I’ll be very glad if anyone could kill him.”

“You...” Twain knew he had used the wrong analogy. “Very well, don’t hold a grudge against me, George. I’ll apologize to you. Will it help if I say sorry to you?”

“Why are you apologizing to me?”

Twain suddenly turned his body to sit up and looked up at Wood, who was standing in front of him. “Must you really make me spell it out for you?” He gritted his teeth in reply.

Wood did not answer but looked at him quietly.

He stared at Twain like this for a while before Twain gave in and bowed his head as he muttered, “I’m really sorry that I did not say goodbye before I left, George. I... Well, I don’t know how to put it to you. But I hope you will believe me that I was also compelled by circumstances to leave.”

“I’ve coached for eleven years at the Forest team. If I could, I had wanted to coach there always and even watch you retire. Listen to me, you can play at least till you’re forty years old. You still have twelve more years. But that’s the reality – it’s becoming increasingly impossible to coach a team for more than two decades. The current English Premier League is no longer like before. The power of a manager is gradually weakening... I miss the English football world of the last century... Ha, why am I telling you about this?” Twain laughed, “Anyway, I just want you to know I’m sorry.” He looked up at Wood.

Wood, who had not spoken all this time, suddenly asked a question, “Will you still come back to the Forest team?”

“I won’t go back for at least the next two years.” Twain replied frankly.

“In that case, what are we going to do?” Wood continued to ask.

Twain smiled wryly. The question was rather childish.

“You’re not kids anymore, George. You guys have the freedom to choose which path to take. Why are you asking me?”

Wood thought Twain’s words were reasonable. But he did not want to admit it.

“Will you leave the Forest team, George?” Twain asked.

In fact, he felt conflicted inside all along. He wished to see Evan and Allan be taught a lesson, but at the same time, he also did not want the team to be broken up and scattered.

“I’m not going to.” Wood replied.

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to leave.”

His answer was very idealistic. It would be pointless to investigate the reason. Twain just smiled and said, “I’m going to say something quite selfish, George. I don’t want things at the club to affect your form. I don’t want to see how you were at the World Cup in Brazil again.”

“With... Without you, I was a little uncomfortable...” Wood suddenly became embarrassed. He scrunched up his face and stammered.

Twain looked at Wood in the twilight. The expression on his face was no longer visible. Only his profile was still very clear. The outlines of his face were as hard as forged in steel.

“How’s your mother, George?” Twain suddenly changed the subject.

Wood paused for a moment before reacting.

“She’s fine ... I think.” Wood spoke uncertainly. Twain knew Sophia’s health must be getting worse each day. In fact, his mother’s vitality had been very tenacious. From when he first met her eleven years ago, he had already thought she could leave Wood at any time. He did not expect her to endure for so long.

“Say hello to her for me when you get home. I’m busier than before now that the league tournament has started. I’m traveling all over England. I have very little chance to go back to Nottingham. I’m sorry that I can’t pay her a visit.”

“She knows you’re busy.”

How was this like a conversation between the manager and the new team captain? It was clearly two old friends talking about their ordinary daily lives together.

“How’s the little monkey?”

“Very good.”

“What about the others? I know that my sudden departure must have had a bad effect on them...”

“Everyone’s good after they read your open letter.”

Twain smiled with some pride. The players he had personally developed were still on his side. To have this little bit of support after eleven years, he could not be considered a failure.

“How’s the new manager?”

“He’s okay. He’s a little bit like you. But ...” Wood suddenly changed tack and said, “Now that the results are good, everything is good. If...”

“As to the future, you’ll worry it when it happens.” Twain interrupted his speculation.

He got up from the ground and patted his behind. Having sat down for a long time, his buttocks were wet. He had to change his pants when he got back.

“I did not ask you what you thought when I just appointed you as the captain. What did you think?”

Finally, he arrived at the main topic. Twain looked at the sky. The conversation should be over.

Wood shook his head and replied, “A little surprised, but I have no other idea.”

“Well...” Twain mused for a moment, “but you’d better be mentally prepared. Once the results are announced, it’s bound to cause a lot of talk. You’re going to be under a lot of pressure...”

“I know.” Wood’s answer was simple, but Twain heard the determination in his voice.

Twain laughed and said, “Don’t give them a chance. In addition, you need to be more active in the team. Don’t be an invisible person who’s silent all the time. You can act like this in the past but not in the future. There is no invisible team captain here. You have to make everyone understand your existence. The better you perform; the more freedom I have to do what I want to do.”

Wood nodded.

“Okay, better hurry up to take a shower in the locker room and change your clothes. The evening breeze here is really chilly.” Twain stepped forward to pat Wood on the shoulder. This time Wood did not turn around and run away.

Wood listened to him and left.

While Twain continued to stand in the training ground amid the twilight.

It seemed that the misunderstanding between himself and Wood had dissipated. It was a big load off his mind. As long as Wood was still on his side, he had nothing to worry about.

The next day, the new team captain and the media met. As to what those blabbering media wanted to say, he did not care.

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In fact, the media already knew the matter about the national team captain armband’s change of ownership.

What was the English media’s job? With their eyes and ears opened all the time, they were keenly observant and alert. They were lying in wait in the vicinity of the national team training base, so that they could scout out new information anytime and anywhere. The announcement of a new team captain of the national team was not insignificant news. How could they not know?

The Liverpool media cried out against the injustice toward Gerrard. Christopher Beesley, a columnist for the , took the lead to open fire.

“... I can’t understand at all how Mr. Tony Twain made such a decision based on what kind of judgment? Steven’s influence in the England national team cannot be ignored. As the spiritual leader of the Reds,

he deserves to continue as the captain in the new national team. But what do we have here? The spiritual leader of the Reds is not even the vice-captain! Is this a provocation against Liverpool by Tony Twain? ... I don't know why Steven would accept such an arrangement. If I were him, I would just quit the national team in protest!"

The pro-Chelsea media were also a little resentful, because Terry from their team had gone from being the captain to the vice-captain. But their anger could not be compared to the anger of the Liverpool crowd by a mile.

That evening, there was a big discussion on Liverpool's local television and radio stations about England's new captain. For them, Liverpool had not been awarded the honor for many years and Gerrard was the only ensign they could be proud of. Now the flag flying high over England had also been removed by Twain. When they further recalled how much pain Twain had brought to the club over the years... the new hatred simply mingled together with the old hate and it was absolutely irreconcilable to them!

"Gerrard is the spiritual symbol of English football! He deserves his place in the national team!"

"I don't hate George Wood, but compared to Gerrard, he's a little immature!"

"This is a blatant show of nepotism by Tony Twain. I'm not optimistic about the prospects of the national team!"

"His brain must have been misfired for him to make such a decision!"

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For a while, the listeners called in to the radio station in succession to express their opinions.

The guests on the television program also backed Gerrard as the team captain one by one and opposed to Twain making the England national team to be like "Nottingham Forest."

The Liverpool fans even planned to attack Twain in the stands, chanting slogans loudly and putting up signs during the England team's first game. They called it "a war to safeguard Gerrard."

Unlike the resentment at Stamford Bridge and Liverpool's wrath, the Nottingham side was full of joy. The Nottingham Forest fans had called in succession to the local radio station hotline to congratulate George Wood on becoming the captain of the new national team.

There were even fans who openly stated, "I knew Tony would favor us more! Because he started from here!" They did not seem to be concerned that Twain would be pushed to the heart of the struggle with the media, because they had a lot of experience with these kinds of matter. Tony would not Tony if he could not even settle on a new captain.

"George deserves to be the team captain. He has been the captain of the Forest team for eight years, and his achievements at the Forest team for the last eight years speak for themselves! As the team captain of the most successful team in English football in recent years, it would be the biggest joke if he was not qualified to be the team captain of the England national team!"

"Ignore whatever the Liverpool people say. Gerrard is good, but he is too old. Can he maintain his form till the UEFA European Championship? He'll be thirty-six years old in two years' time!"

“I even think it’s a little late for George to become the captain at twenty-eight years old!”

“In the later period of Capello’s era, George Wood was already the team’s mainstay core. It’s only to be expected for him to be the team captain.”

George Wood’s personal website had also become a battleground. The Liverpool fans went the site to abuse him and Tony, while the Nottingham Forest fans went online to defend their team captain. A fierce battle broke out on the site’s messaging forum, finally culminating in the website server being down to end the fight.

Within one night, the new team captain’s replacement set off a storm in England. Come tomorrow when most newspapers were published, nobody knew what kind of storm this would become...

Billy Woos gave Wood a call. He simply informed him what was going on outside and asked him to get ready.

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At the start of the next day’s training, Twain found that the number of reporters gathered outside was about twice as high as yesterday. He quickly thought about it and he knew what the reason was.

“It’s like a frenzy of sharks behind a slave ship. One tiny drop of blood can lead to a frenzied scramble among them.” Twain gave these reporters the most vivid evaluation. “Maybe we don’t have to officially announce the change in the team captain. They all already know about it.”

It was true. While everyone was eating breakfast, the hot off the press newspapers had already published the news of George Wood becoming England’s new captain in prominent placements. Admonitions and doubts about Twain already appeared in the Liverpool media. The Liverpool media regarded this as a blatant show of nepotism by Twain and a symbol of injustice. This type of behavior must be rectified.

There were even people who suggested that Gerrard should quit the national team in protest like Beesley.

A lot of media rushed forward one after another to ask questions about the choice of team captain when they saw Twain come out.

Before they could open their mouths, Twain shouted, “There will be a regular press conference in the afternoon. You can ask all your question at that time. It’s now time for training. I’m sorry, I have to ask you all to leave here!”

The security guards heard his shouts and coordinated with him to drive the reporters away.

“Just one question, Mr. Twain!”

“I won’t even answer half a question!”

“About the candidate for the team captain...”

“You can ask again in the afternoon.”

“Do you admit that it is nepotism on your part...”

“You only have fifteen minutes of free time to film. I have no problem with it if you’re going to waste all your time to have a glib repartee with me. But you can’t say that I’m blocking the freedom of the press later.”

With the ruckus going on outside the pitch, the attention of the players who were warming up on the pitch were drawn to it.

“What are they arguing about?”

“What else can they argue about? It’s about the new captain...” Someone gave Wood and Gerrard a look when he said this.

Wood was doing his warm-up exercise very seriously and did not notice what was happening off the field at all. Of course, there were those who suspected in their minds that Wood had seen it but deliberately pretended not to see it.

Gerrard just glanced over there and took his eyes off to focus on the warm-up. He had always kept a down-to-earth image. However, he did not expect that at the age of thirty-four years old, he had become a leading character in the national team crisis....

During a break in the training, Twain went to look for Gerrard and hoped that he would attend the afternoon press conference together with him. Initially, he was going to bring the new captain to the press conference to introduce the team captain to the media. But now it looked like it was not necessary to do so.

Apparently, this was to deal with the reporters. Gerrard nodded and agreed. He was not the kind of player who liked to be confrontational with the manager. When the team needed him, he would contribute in strength.

“Have you read all the news reports?” Twain asked.

Gerrard shook his head and replied, “I haven’t read any of them yet, boss.”

“Well... You can take time out at noon to have a look.”

“I don’t think it’s necessary, boss. I know what they’re talking about.”

“That’s good... Go back to training then.”

Twain dismissed Gerrard and stood on the sidelines to continue watching the training. However, in his mind, he was wondering what to do with those sharks during the afternoon press conference.

## **Chapter 915: This Damn Thing is Over**

To someone in the media industry, what could be a heavier blow than to be completely ignored?

“The Sun” was facing this awkward situation now. The news about the “falling out between George Wood and the Godfather” that they painstakingly got from deep within enemy’s territory was on the front page, but it was hidden underneath a wave of doubts about the new England captain.



Other than the local media from Nottingham, almost every other media thought that Terry and Gerrard were more certified than Wood to be captain. Especially the media from Liverpool, they were so incensed that they were almost cursing Twain to be unable to produce any offspring.

Wood and Twain falling out?

Quit joking around, The Sun! That bastard Twain has already named his son as England's captain, what falling out? Do you really think that everyone else will be as dumb as you to publish such irresponsible news?

At the press conference, The Sun's reporter raised his hand, wanting to ask a question about the falling out between Twain and Wood. However, nobody gave him the opportunity to do so. Everyone who got picked will ask, "Mr Twain, you chose Wood instead of Gerrard, is there a case of favoritism here?"

Or:

"Mr Twain, there are higher demands for Terry or Gerrard to be captain than Wood, how are you balancing the relationship between them?"

The scene was bustling, and the names "Terry", "Gerrard" and "Wood" kept coming up.

Gerrard was seated next to Twain with no expression on his face. The media from Liverpool was questioning Twain on his behalf, yet it only made him feel very awkward. The people who were claiming that, "If I'm Gerrard, I'll withdraw from the national team as protest", were simply causing trouble for him.

They had already known each other for so many years, how could these reporters not know what kind of person Gerrard was?

He stole a glance at the person next to him.

Twain was battling with the reporters.

"How about I get Terry and Wood here and we have a group discussion? You guys can ask them about their opinion of this choice yourselves," Twain said with an unfriendly look on his face.

The reporters grew quiet.

"I can tell you very clearly that I've talked to them before deciding on the captaincy. Steven and John are both supportive of this change in captaincy. You can ask Steven if you have any doubts," Twain pointed at Gerrard next to him.

Gerrard knew that it was his turn to speak and he moved towards the microphone, "That's right, boss talked to everyone of us, he told us his plans and we also told him what we thought."

The reporters did not think so, "Yes, you guys told him what you thought, yet he continued to do accordingly to his own plans, isn't it?"

Gerrard did not look good, "I respect the boss' opinion and I think George is worthy of the captain's armband. He has always been an impressive captain and he did well at Nottingham Forest. He's someone who can lead the team without using words."

He was part of the national team now so naturally, he could not say anything bad about the national team or his teammates. This was the same everywhere, the people you should trust the most were your comrades in arms on the pitch. That was why he did not think much about Wood taking the captain's armband away from him. On the other hand, it was indeed true that he did not think it was a bad idea for Wood to be captain...

That was the objective that Twain wanted to achieve by bringing Gerrard to the press conference. He knew that Gerrard thought very highly of Wood and was someone who could look at the big picture, therefore, he was not afraid that he would embarrass him in front of the reporters. Letting someone who lost the captain's armband praise Wood himself was obviously much more effective than Twain praising Wood himself.

The reporters looked at each other, not knowing what to say as it seemed that Gerrard was on Twain's side.

The reporters from Liverpool were especially disappointed. At the same time, another guess emerged in their hearts—Was Tony Twain so powerful? There was no one who was against him in the national team? They would never believe that Gerrard or Terry had nothing against this arrangement.

Is it a coercion terror policy? Players who don't agree with his management style can't play?

That would be an even more breaking news than the captaincy...

The reporters on the ground did not know what to ask for the time being and the reporter from The Sun finally grabbed this opportunity to ask his question, "Have you seen today's The Sun newspaper, Mr Twain?" He even took the opportunity to advertise for his newspaper.

"I'm sorry, Mr reporter. I never read trash like that," Twain's reply caused an uproar. The Sun's reporter felt very awkward amidst the laughter. Twain did not feel sorry for that as he really hated The Sun. This newspaper had been talking bad about him all this while.

"That's a pity, Mr Twain..." Since Twain was not being friendly, the reporter naturally did not see a need to hold back, "The latest The Sun paper today exposed the falling out between you and George Wood, what do you have to say about that?"

"As we all know," Twain opened his palms towards everyone, not looking at that reporter, "Trash papers love to make up some lies themselves, then publish them to attract attention. We have a live example here."

The laughter started again.

"I have a very good relationship with George, Mr reporter. How good you ask? Look..." He pointed to the reporters below, "There are so many reporters here just to prove one thing—That I treat Wood as well as I would treat my own son. Do you know the meaning of favoritism, Mr reporter?"

The laughter stopped as the smart reporters realized that Twain was insulting both sides now.

"My relationship with Wood is so good that it is at a point of public indignation, how could we have fallen out? I was right, am I not? Trash papers love to make up some lies to attract attention."

With that, Twain looked at the reporter from The Sun proudly. The reporter was so embarrassed that he was blushing. He looked at the other group of reporters. They were still attacking Twain earlier, yet they were now Twain's accomplices now. That was pretty depressing for the reporters. They were looking as awkward as can be. There were some people who were laughing heartily earlier but they were all staring at Twain with their mouths wide open in shock now. Those were expressions that one could only see in slapstick comedies.

Gerrard suddenly wanted to laugh as he witnessed this scene—He had never experienced a press conference like this before, it was so interesting to him...

As an English professional player, he understood very clearly how difficult it was to handle the English media. He did not expect his boss to treat the press conference as a game and tricking those difficult reporters.

Twain was preparing to leave, and he stood up and said to the shell-shocked reporters, "Looks like everyone got the answers that they are satisfied with and there are no other questions for me. Let's call it a day then."

Gerrard stood up too and followed Twain as he left.

The reporters finally reacted then. There were some people who wanted to ask a few more questions, but they soon realized that other than the "new captain", they could not think of any other questions. The game against Macedonia? What did they have to worry about playing such a walkover team?

And so, a bunch of people could only watch as Twain and Gerrard left in front of their eyes. Later on, they realized that they did not get any useful answers from this one-and-a-half-hour session, all they achieved was to bicker with Twain!

"Damn it! We got tricked again!" The older reporters cursed.

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"Ha ha!" On the way back, Twain laughed very proudly in front of Gerrard, "Don't look at me like that Steven. This is a very good way of relieving stress, you can try it yourself."

Gerrard shook his head, "I don't dare to... I've been maintaining this image for more than a decade..."

Twain nodded and said, "That's true. You've always been an honest man in front of the media and the public. If not for that, I probably won't be able to get out of this press conference so easily. "At this point, Twain stopped and faced Gerrard, "Thanks Steven."

Gerrard did not expect Twain to speak to him with such an attitude, even thanking him. He stood there, stunned and forgot to react.

Twain could see what he was thinking, and he smiled, "Why? My image here is different from what the media portrayed me as?"

"No... Um, sorry. Actually...In Liverpool's changing room, there were indeed many rumors about you, boss."

Twain's interest was piqued, he raised his brows and said, "Oh? Care to tell me about it?"

However, Gerrard rejected him, “Sorry boss. What happens in the changing room is not allowed to be spread outside.”

Twain realized he asked a very stupid question and he quickly apologized, “Ah, I forgot about that... It’s okay, we don’t allow that either... Alright, now matter what, these matters are resolved now. We should divert our attention to Macedonia now. Do you know about Macedonia, Steven?”

Gerrard thought for a moment, then shook his head, “Not really...”

“Okay, there’s actually nothing to be worried about. If we can’t even beat a team like Macedonia by playing our own style of football, what chances have we got to be European champions?” Twain kept talking about “champions” as though he was talking about something common.

However, Gerrard was not surprised that someone like him would be talking like this. There were many legends about this man outside, but there was one that was not wrong—Tony Twain’s name means champion.

Think about the number of times he led the Forest team, a team that used to play in the championship, to become champions. He even the most prestigious club trophies, the UEFA Champions League, three times. This was someone that was comparable to the legendary Liverpool manager, Bob Paisley. Even though the number of trophies he got still trailed that of Ferguson, but if one thought about his age, one would realize he was only 45 years old. Nobody doubted that the number of trophies he got by the time he was at Ferguson’s age would be lesser than the old scot.

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Since even Gerrard came forward to say that he did not mind George Wood becoming captain, and he did not mind that he was not even vice-captain, then what rights did the local Liverpool media have to continue making a fuss?

Only Carl Spicer criticized Twain’s decision in his show, “...He’s trying to make the England national team the second Nottingham Forest. But I bet that he’ll realize how stupid he was before long. I heard that he could scold anyone at will in the Forest changing room, he could scold anyone just because he was feeling unhappy. If it was 30 years ago, he can probably even beat them up. But can he do that in the national team’s changing room? The Forest players had been with him everyday for 11 years, they know the temperaments of their boss, but what about the other national team players? Other than scolding, what else does he know? He knows nothing... The Football Association signed a two-years contract with him, but I think that Twain will be sacked before a year’s up! The reason is simple, if George Wood can be named as captain, then the starting lineup will have a large number of Forest players. If not for the fact that Akinfeev and Bale can’t play for England, Twain must have hoped that he can include them in his starting lineup.

Twain treated what Spicer said as “barking of a defeated dog”, and he ignored it. He knew that in the footballing world, it did not matter how much you talk, it all depended on your results in the end. The reason why he could be so arrogant and scold people at will was because he had the results to back him up. This was a simple logic, a pity it was not a logic that everyone understood. They merely saw Twain when he was being arrogant and started to hate him. They did not see why he had the rights to be arrogant while there were so many managers who could not even be arrogant for once.

Two days later, in the match against Macedonia, Twain not only wanted to win, but he wanted to win convincingly. He wanted to shut those people who were still unhappy with him up with a huge victory in this match.

### **Chapter 916: The New English Team Sets Sail and Soars**

It was not just Gerrard who knew very little about the Macedonian team. Even Tony Twain was not familiar with the opponent they were about to face.

Not to mention Twain, perhaps most British people would not be able to locate where Macedonia was on earth with a map in a moment and a half. Had it not been that they were participating in the UEFA European Championship Qualifying tournament, the citizens of the United Kingdom would have thought the little-known country would have been somewhere in the continent of Antarctica.

Long ago, Twain had thought that Macedonia was in Western Europe. He only found out later he was severely mistaken. Macedonia was part of what was once called Yugoslavia, and their football prowess had little to boast about. FK Vardar, the country's most successful football club, had played in three major European tournaments eight times, but the best results they achieved had only been to advance to the second round twice...

As to the current Macedonian team, the man whom Twain was most familiar with was Goran Pandev, who still played for SS Lazio. The thirty-one-year-old Pandev was also the Macedonia team's number one star player and team captain. He was also the only player who could pose a threat to England's rear defensive line.

In fact, England's coaching staff had focused the research on how to stop Pandev. They were largely unconcerned about the other players. After all, there was a large disparity in England's strength and that of Macedonia's. The only teams in the group that could pose a threat to England's advancing to the next stage were Denmark and Serbia. England's intelligence-gathering work had long begun for these two fierce rivals.

The Macedonians could sense England's contempt. As the manager, Tony Twain did not once mention Macedonia in front of the media. But he talked repeatedly about Wales, because after playing the game against Macedonia, Twain's England team would play against the neighboring Wales.

When accepting an interview from the reporters, Mitchell, as the team's main force, was asked the question "Do you know where Macedonia is?", his answer had greatly incensed the Macedonians – "Maybe it's in the north? I don't know..."

In response, Pandev proclaimed in an interview that they would teach England a lesson. "... Although we are the away team, I am glad that we have the opportunity to tell them where Macedonia is in the world. Hopefully they can firmly remember it after the game."

Macedonia appeared to be aggressive, but Tony Twain was still unconcerned. He discussed his friendship with Bale in the media and continued to put psychological pressure on Wales... even though the match between England and Wales would only start in October.

“The provoked Macedonia team will attack the moment the game starts. They must be in high spirits now. I can imagine how the opposing manager has goaded them—” Twain imitated the manager of the Macedonia team, the Slovenian, Srečko Katanec, and brandished his fists as he growled, “They have a low opinion of you! They look down on you! Teach them a lesson and let them know the cost of underestimating you!!”

The coaches next to him all laughed.

Twain also looked at this group of colleagues who were in stitches. He waited till their laughter subsided before he continued.

“If Katanec were a smart man, he would make use of our contempt to inspire the team’s fighting spirit. Originally, it would have been hard to raise the players’ spirits in an away challenge against a strong opponent. Now we’ve given them a great excuse and opportunity, which they will definitely seize it. So, once the game starts, they will take the initiative to attack and we will attack them as well. Their rear defensive line has a lot of loopholes, which we can seize and make the most of it. Try our best to score early and as time goes on, Katanec will know he is taken in. So, he’ll start to withdraw his defense. If we haven’t scored at that time, he will feel that maintaining a draw and obtaining one point in the game will be a great victory. If that’s the case...” Twain analyzed unceasingly to his coaches about the course of the game.

“We’ll press on. I’ll hand Pandev to George. We don’t have to take special care of the others. Next we have to pay attention to the mental state of our players. If the score continues to be a draw, it will be more and more unfavorable to us. This kind of situation has to be avoided, so I hope the team can score as early as possible. If Macedonia withdraws its defense, we will have a lot of opportunities for positional play. We have to seize this point to try to breach their goal.”

“This is not a problem. We’ve been practicing our positional play these few days.” Walker interjected next to him.

“We’ll just cover these topics today... No matter how complete a plan is, it can’t be compared to the changes in an actual game.” Twain clapped his hands and ended the meeting with the coaches regarding the preparations.

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It was the first time George Wood had worn the England captain’s armband to play in a match. Before the game, Twain pulled him to one side and instructed him to keep a close eye on Pandev. Formerly a striker, Pandev was now getting closer to the midfield as he became older. Now he was at the core of Macedonia’s offense. It was all up to him to organize and end the attacks. By marking him closely, Macedonia could not stir up any trouble.

Wood nodded as he listened to Twain’s tactics. His expression was very focused.

Once he was finished, Twain patted Wood on the left arm and said, “Before this game, there are still a lot of voices questioning and objecting to your being the team captain. What do you think of it, George?”

“I’ll prove I deserve the captain’s armband.”

Wood's answer greatly satisfied Twain. He laughed loudly and said, "Yes! That's more like it! If they mock and doubt you, then you use actual performance to give them a slap in the face! Didn't we do that when we were in the Forest team? In fact, there's no difference being the captain of the national team and the Forest team captain. Play the game well and then all problems will go away."

Twain liked this point about Wood the best. He would not mince his words and say overly self-effacing words like "I'm flattered and overwhelmed to receive the captain's armband" or "I'm surprised that I can be the team captain because Terry and Gerrard are more suitable than I am." He would only confidently express that he had the ability and he deserved to receive such a treatment. This kind of attitude would seem arrogant to most people. But like Tony Twain, he was entitled to be arrogant and conceited.

As Gerrard aged, the twenty-eight-year-old George Wood had indeed become England's number one midfielder in the country. For Twain to give the captain's armband to him, it could not be considered as nepotism. It should be said to that he "appointed people to important posts based on merits, even if it were to be his own son."

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Leading England to play in its first official senior international matches (previously, all the matches with the Forest team were against the club opponents and could not be counted as senior international matches). It would also be a test for Twain. He knew that the competition played with the Forest team was just a warm-up. From now on, he was officially on the path to his conquest of the world.

Standing in front of the technical area and listening to the British national anthem

### **Chapter 917: Forty-Six Years Old Twain**

After the match against Macedonia was done, England had a bye into the second round of qualifying on the September 9. However, the team did not dismiss early. Instead the team played a friendly match against the visiting team, Australia in London.

The day was also Tony Twain's birthday. After this day, he would have fully lived out his forty-five years of age and was on his way toward forty-six years old.

The national footballers from the Forest team had wanted to achieve a win to give the boss a birthday present. But Twain did not care about the result. To him, it was a chance for the team to get used to the lineup together. He did not mind sending a lot of players who did not play in the game against Macedonia.

But Twain still had something very important to do before playing against Australia.

On the morning of the match, he drove away from London Colney and left London alone. He drove along the A1 motorway and returned to Nottingham. Then he found the hairdresser shop he had visited many times before.

Next, he sat quietly in his chair and asked the middle-aged hairdresser to dye his hair.

Indeed, the important matter that he had to attend to was to dye his hair.

The days of hard work had increased the amount of white hair on his head. The roots of the previously dyed hair had grown out. He did not look good with a mix of black and white hairs.

Dying his hair was an important part of maintaining his image for him. He was only forty-six years old. He wanted to try and make himself look young. He did not want to give the impression of "being old." Forty-six years old was certainly not considered old, but a head full of white hair would give people the impression that he was already sixty-six years old, which was not very good ...

"Tony." Connolly, the hairdresser who dyed him was five years older than him. He had been serving Twain ever since Twain had decided to dye his hair. The relationship between the two people was quite close. Therefore, he was able to dye the hair and chat with Twain at the same time.

"Eh?" Twain, who had his eyes closed, replied languidly with a nasal sound

"Happy birthday!"

Twain opened his eyes when he heard it and slightly turned his head. He was going to give the other party a surprised look but was stopped.

"Don't move, Tony."

"How do you know it's my birthday today? I remember that I have not told you before..."

"Ha, as a celebrity, your birthday is no secret, is it? Today's also used an extra to wish you a happy birthday. Even if I did not know it before, I know it today." Connolly laughed.

But Twain was not in a very good mood. He muttered, "I'm already forty-six years old. My birthday six years ago was already not a happy occasion for me."

Connolly smiled wordlessly and continued to work.

That was when Twain's cell phone rang. He touched the button on his earphones and pressed the answer button.

"Happy birthday, Uncle Tony!"

Shania's voice, brimming with energy, rang out of the Bluetooth headset, making Twain's mood instantly better. Although Shania and Connolly essentially said the same thing, he was still a little surprised.

"It must be two o'clock in the morning on your side, isn't it?" There was an eight-hour time difference between London and Los Angeles. It was 10:20 a.m. on Twain's side.

But Shania said with a smile, "I waited especially until this time to call you, or else I won't be able to sleep."

Listening to his wife's voice, Twain suddenly wanted to put his arms out to embrace her. He lifted his shoulders, only to realize that the Atlantic Ocean and American continent separated the two of them. Perhaps ten thousand miles were not enough to describe it.

"I'm forty-six years old, and a year older..." Twain did not mind that an outsider was around him. He was flirting with Shania on the phone.



“The older my Uncle Tony is, the more attractive he is! I like old men!” Shania said with annoyance. It was as if she was acting coquettishly in Twain’s arms. “What are you doing?”

“Dyeing my hair. ”

When Shania heard Twain say so, she suddenly laughed, “You’re celebrating your birthday in this way. Is it your birthday wish, Uncle Tony?”

“Of course. If I’m a few years younger, I’ll be able to spend a few more years with you.” Perhaps he became aware of the sadness of the problem, Twain hastened to change the subject, “Is it hard to do the filming in Los Angeles?”

“It’s okay. I’ll be in Paris in a few days. I can come see you at that time.” Shania also cleverly did not to dwell on the issue.

“Are you going to stay for long?”

“Only three days...” Shania’s voice was a little disappointed.

Twain was also quiet for a while.

The long-term separation prevented them from even living like a normal couple, and they did not know how long the situation would last.

“I saw the news that your England team had defeated Macedonia, and it was a big win. Congratulations, Uncle Tony!” The previous remark about how long she was staying this time felt as sad as “How much more time can Uncle Tony be with her” so Shania changed the subject too. Even though she did not care about football, it was better than talking about those things.

The two people chatted about some other stuff and Twain repeatedly urged Shania to go to bed. They dilly dallied for a while and went back and forth several times before Shania finally reluctantly hung up the phone to go to bed.

Twain took off his earphones and Connelly was finally able to dye his hair on this side.

“You both have a very good relationship, Tony.” Connelly said enviously, “All I know is that my wife thinks I don’t make enough money.”

“So, are you envious of the long-distance relationship too, Connelly?”

“If it’s long distance from my mother-in-law, I’d be delighted to! Ha ha!” Connelly chuckled loudly, and Twain laughed with him as well. “I can go drinking and watch the football games without anyone nagging at me! A life with freedom is what every man like me yearns!”

“Hey, Tony. Can you reveal anything about the game this evening? How are you going to play against Australia?” After laughing, Connelly suddenly lowered his voice and asked beside Twain’s ear.

Twain smiled and said, “How else can we play against them? Anyone who did not get a chance to play in the last game has a chance to play tonight.”

“That’s right. Australia is not a strong team.” These words were inevitable and right coming from an England fan. In their eyes, no other team could be considered a strong team except England. “Then I’ll cheer you on in front of the TV tonight!”

“Thank you, Connelly.”

The two people stopped talking. Connelly focused on his work at hand, and Twain continued to enjoy the leisure time with his eyes closed. Then, unknowingly, he felt asleep. He had been tired lately as he had not been getting enough sleep. He could always fall asleep easily at such times.

But that did not stop Connelly from doing his work because even when he slept in a chair, Twain’s head was always in a fixed position and did not droop down.

By the time, Twain was woken up. It was already after his hair was dyed.

“Did I fall asleep?” Twain was still a little confused.

Connelly nodded with a smile, “You slept quite soundly. You did not wake up no matter how much I nudged you.”

“Well... I’m sorry.” Twain rubbed his eyes and then looked at himself in the mirror.

A head full of black hair plus he had caught some sleep just now, he looked full of vitality more than he did when he first arrived. He should have nothing to worry about when he made his appearance in front of the players and the media with this image.

He opened his mouth to the mirror and made a smile. “I look good!” He praised and said, “If I could, I’d really like to suggest to the Football Association that you be called up to the national team’s coaching unit, Connelly!”

“Ha!” Connelly laughed, “To go there specially to dye your hair?”

Twain took out some money and gave Connelly a tip as he replied, “Yes.”

Stepping out of the store, Twain sat in his jeep and pulled down the rear-view mirror to look at his reflection again. After confirming that he did not miss a spot or neglected an area, he started the car and drove away from here to head toward London.

On the long and boring road, he hummed an English song which he had learned in middle school.

“Happy birthday to you – Happy birthday to you – Happy birthday dear teacher — Happy birthday to you...”

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Twain finally rushed back to the hotel before lunch. He had informed Walker in the morning that he had some personal stuff to do, so everyone was not surprised when he rushed in from the outside, looking a little travel worn.

The players were having their meals. Twain found the coaches’ table and sat down as he greeted his colleagues.

“Happy birthday!” Walker raised a glass of juice and toasted him. At the same time, he noticed the black hair on Twain’s head which had increased a lot more from yesterday. He guessed what Twain had done.

“Happy birthday, Tony!” The other people also raised their glasses to Twain in succession.

“Thank you, thank you...” Twain returned the toast one by one.

After Walker saw Twain sit down, he smiled mysteriously at Twain and said, “We’ve prepared a birthday cake for you.”

He clapped his hands.

Then the players stood up one by one, laughing and clapping together as they sang the song. While Wood and Terry, the two captain and vice-captain, pushed a small dining trolley as they walked in through the door.

Amid the singing, they walked through the entire room of the hotel’s restaurant and came to the front of Twain’s table.

Wood lifted the lid and a chocolate cream cake created in the shape of Wembley stadium appeared in front of Twain’s eyes.

“Happy birthday, boss.” Wood tried his best to put a genuine smile on his face, but it looked even more awkward...

Twain smiled and shook his head, “You guys planned this in advance?”

“We heard it by chance from Aaron’s mouth after we won the game against Macedonia.” Terry explained.

Mitchell heard his name mentioned and quickly raised his hand to wave to Twain. It was like he was introducing him to a meeting with his large audience and friends.

“Don’t blame me for blabbing, boss!” Mitchell said loudly, “I was just talking to David about what gift to send you for your birthday, and they heard it.” He pointed to the other teammates around him.

In fact, Twain was a very approachable manager. Although there were a lot of rumors outside against him, these national team players found that the devil-like man was not difficult to get along with after interacting with Twain for a week, ... And sometimes he was even easy to get along with. They could joke with him and he would not glare at and rebuke them to ask them to pay attention to the difference in their ranks. If he was in a good mood, he would even take the initiative to joke with them. After the win over Macedonia, for example, Twain teased George Wood in the locker room. It was quite funny to see George Wood, who normally had a straight face, looking like he did not know whether to cry or laugh in front of Twain’s roguish appearance. To be able to cheekily make fun of that stern-faced and fierce star player, perhaps Tony Twain was the only one who could do so.

Seeing so many players care about his own birthday, Twain’s heart was filled with a sense of accomplishment. It looked like he had captured the hearts of the players and it was harmonious within the team.

He stood up and accepted the birthday cake from the players. He held up his glass which was filled with fruit juice in it.

“I’m very thankful to you guys. After playing this game, the national team will be temporarily dismissed. The next game is October 16th. I hope that I can still see you all come back to me at that time, and that everyone is healthy and well, plus in good form. To arrange to have so many good players is certainly a problem for the manager, but I would rather enjoy this kind of problem, which is a happy problem to have for me. Everyone, please enjoy and relax for this evening’s game! Thank you!”

It was a good opportunity and he had not forgotten to use this opportunity to further close in the gap between himself and the players.

He downed the glass of fruit juice in one gulp.

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In the game in the evening, just as Twain said, it was a completely different lineup for the England national team than in the previous game.

Even George Wood was placed on the substitutes’ bench. None of the eleven players who played in the game against Macedonia, was in the starting lineup.

Australia did not see the game that way. Although politically England was their mother country, football was not a place for politics. It was a very tempting result to be able to beat England at the Wembley Stadium. Australia wanted to give it a try.

Such a game still attracted a lot of fans to the stadium to watch the game live.

Australia took advantage of England’s lineup which was still not tight enough to take the lead. They played aggressively.

While Twain was said not to care about the outcome and that he just wanted to observe the performances of the players, not everyone on the pitch thought so.

Like Joe Mattock, Bentley and Agbonlahor, the three players from the Forest team, they did not want to lose on the boss’ birthday. They had already given his birthday cake and the birthday gift should be the victory of this game. Even if it was just a friendly game, they did not want to lose.

Twain’s long-held philosophy at Nottingham Forest had played an inertial role at this time. The Forest team’s habit of refusing to lose a game made them work particularly hard on the pitch.

The commentator also thought it was a way to put in a good performance in front of Twain and get a chance to be selected in the starting lineup.

By the end of the first half, England’s “Nottingham Forest gang” had a tight cooperation and tore apart Australia’s defense. In the absence of a good coordination within the entire team, these small collaborations within the players from the same club showed value.

Joe Mattock directly crossed the ball from the left side to the right side and Bentley beautifully stopped the ball. Following which he passed the ball across to the middle with the striker, Agbonlahor making

the most of his speed to then plug in from behind and shook off the hulking Australian center back. He receive the ball and went straight into the penalty area!

It was much easier to face the goalkeeper one on one. After Agbonlahor made use of his upper body and swayed to trick the goalkeeper, he shot, and the football passed through the goalkeeper's legs to roll into the goal. The score was equalized by England to 1:1!

After the goal, Agbonlahor dashed all the way to the England team's technical area and hugged with Tony Twain.

"Happy birthday, boss!"

On the way back to the field, Agbonlahor got hold of his other teammates and said, "Don't let the Aussies mess up the boss' birthday. We have to win!" He clenched and waved his fists vigorously.

The Forest players worked very hard. It did not look like a friendly match to inspect the squad. It was more like a life-and-death battle about who could advance to the next round.

The Australians fought hard for a while at the start of the second half before putting up their hands in surrender.

England started to work hard in the second half, which was completely outside of Twain's arrangement.

In the 67th minute, Curtis Davies succeeded in his fight for the header from the corner kick and his header put England in the lead.

In the 79th minute, Delph received a pass from Vaughan after he broke into the penalty area and gave a low shot to break the goal, making the score 3:1.

In the 85th minute, Downing had even scored a goal, but it was ruled to be in an offside position, so the goal was invalid.

But Twain was already very satisfied with 3:1 score. England's strength was indeed above Australia's.

In the post-match press conference, some reporters who had a better relationship with Twain congratulated him on winning the game on his birthday and receiving the best birthday gift.

It looked like his birthday would not be spent alone after he became the manager of England national team.

His forty-six-years-old birthday was Twain's first birthday with the national team. He was a year older again.

### **Chapter 918: I Want a Child**

It has been more than a month since Twain last returned to his home atop the Mapperley Park hill in the northeastern part of Nottingham City. Everything in his home was covered in dust and the yard was almost fully covered by fallen leaves. He had no choice but to employ a cleaning company to clean up his place.

If not for the fact that Shania was flying back from Paris to stay for three days, Twain had no need to return.

He realized that it was very hard for him to have any sort of routine in his life ever since he became the manager of the national team. His homes were hotel rooms and along with the league and cup matches, he had to travel all across England, even overseas sometimes, to examine his players.

If Shania was waiting at home for her husband's return instead of being busy in her own career, she would have to switch on all the lights in the sizeable house every night before she could go to sleep. Now that he thought about it, maybe it was not a bad thing for them to be living separately. Being unable to return to his own home was naturally worse than that.

Twain clapped in satisfaction as he looked at his home, which looked brand new after the makeover. Then, he looked down at his watch, decided that it was about time to fetch Shania from the airport and hopped into the car at his door.

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At the London Heathrow Airport, Twain found out that there was a group of reporters lugging their cameras and video cameras with them also waiting for the same flight from Paris to London.

These reporters did not react to a celebrity like Twain, so it was impossible that they were sports reporters.

Who were they waiting to interview then?

The answer was revealed when Shania appeared at the exit.

There was a commotion amongst the reporters when they saw the tall and fashionable Shania walking out with a small Louis Vuitton luggage. They all rushed forward and camera flashes started to flash all around them.

The situation became out of control for a moment.

The security detail tried their best to maintain the order and prevent the reporters from disturbing Shania.

Shania paid no mind to these disturbances. She tiptoed a little and started searching the crowd. Twain did not wave at her to indicate where he was. He was standing outside the group of reporters, trying to see if Shania would be able to find him.

The telepathy between the two lovers passed this minor test.

Shania merely turned her body a little and she found her target. She did not care that there were reporters and security guards around. She waved at Twain and then walked quickly past the surrounding reporters towards Twain, who was waiting in front of a pillar, with the luggage in tow.

Twain stood there with his arms open as he waited for Shania to dive in.

The reporters finally recognized the old man who appeared in front of them as Shania's husband—England national team's manager, Tony Twain.

“Uncle Tony!” Shania exclaimed happily as she dived into his arms.

If he was not leaning onto a pillar, Twain would most definitely have been floored by Shania.

“Oh... Take it easy, have you grown fatter dear?”

“That’s the luggage!” Shania rolled her eyes at him.

Twain looked at the LV luggage on the floor and chuckled.

Of course, Shania knew what Twain was laughing about. This made her a little red-faced from embarrassment and she used her ultimate move in order to stop her husband from teasing her about her weight—She planted her lips on Twain’s without hesitation right in front of countless media and strangers, and her nimble little tongue even took this opportunity to enter Twain’s mouth.

“Mm...”

Twain could not speak even if he wanted to and he could only make muffled noises like that.

Even though he had been a Caucasian for so many years, Twain was still not used to kissing in front of other people. However, Shania had no such concerns since she was a true-blue westerner and she only wanted to fully enjoy this moment after being separated for so long. She eventually threw her purse on the ground and put her arms around Twain’s neck, completely losing herself into her husband’s scent.

Twain lost track of how long this kiss was. When their lips separated again, he was almost out of breath and Shania was flushed in her cheeks as well.

The media got the whole process on camera from all angles. These images would probably appear on all entertainment news and the internet the next day...No, later in the afternoon.

“We’ll be on the headlines again, Shania,” Twain panted as he told his wife.

“Who cares!” Shania did not care how she would be judged by other people, “I love you, Uncle Tony!”

“I love you too,” Twain picked up Shania’s purse that was on the ground and gave it back to her, then grabbed her luggage that was behind her before telling her, “Let’s go.”

“To where? The hotel?” Twain did not tell Shania that he had cleaned up their home so that he could give her a surprise. That was why Shania thought that Twain had booked a hotel room in London for her.

“No,” Twain turned around and gave her a warm smile, “Let’s go home.”

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Let’s go home.

Shania was very excited in the car all because of that sentence. She even whistled at the people outside without giving a thought about her image. Twain laughed as he shook his head and drove. He did not stop her as he knew why his wife was so excited.

For a couple that had been living in different countries for so long, “going home” was a phrase that was so tempting. It could invoke countless beautiful imaginations within them.

In their quiet home, there was no paparazzi following and stopping them, they did not have to worry about whether their outfit and behavior were congruent with their public images. They could sit on the sofa in front of the television in any way they wanted, prop their bare feet on the table and eat their favorite chips while enjoying the soap opera that was aired.

There was nothing they looked forward to more than a quiet life like that.

The world could only see the money and lifestyle that a superstar enjoyed, but not the freedom that they had to sacrifice for them. Normal people could vent their displeasure by scolding vulgarities when they were unhappy. However, if a superstar did that, what awaited them was someone exposing them and them getting criticized. Tony Twain was a star that did not act like a star. Too bad in the eyes of the public, he was merely a “star with an attitude”. They did not know that he was a star that was working hard to be a regular person.

Shania was known as someone who loved an old man and because of that, she was also the victim of a lot of gossips when she announced that she was marrying Twain.

“Uncle Tony, would I be disturbing your work now that I’m back?” Shania got her head and arms back into the car after she was done being excited as she turned to ask Twain.

“It’s just a weekend without watching football, it’s nothing,” Twain said nonchalantly.

“Aren’t you afraid that the media will say you’re unprofessional?”

Twain laughed and said, “Haven’t the media criticized me enough times?” For Twain, it was a situation of “a dead mouse feels no cold”, “It’s rare that you’re back. I think it’s worth it to be criticized a little just to accompany you.”

Shania felt that it was very sweet. All women desire to be the only one that her man thinks about, even if he had to go against the whole world. Every woman will have this selfish thought, even though it was not a very rational one...

Then, she turned her body a little and slowly slid towards her husband in the driver’s seat, before finally resting her head softly on Twain’s shoulder.

“Uncle Tony,” Shania mumbled with her eyes closed as she leaned on Twain’s shoulder.

“Hmm?” Twain had to ensure that while focusing on driving, his actions had to be not too exaggerated while changing gears so as not to disturb his wife.

“I’ve calculated, these few days falls into my risky period you know,” Shania looked up and smiled at Twain.

Twain was stunned for a moment before realizing that “risky period” means “ovulating period”. If they were to make love during this period, it would be very easy for her to be pregnant.

“Let’s have a baby?” Shania looked at Twain expectantly.

Twain backed down, “Shania, you’re only 23... It’s too early...”



“Why are you just like Mr Fasal?” Shania pouted, a little unhappy, “We’ve been married for five and a half years.”

“My bride had just reached 18 then,” Twain freed one hand and gently held Shania’s hand, caressing it, “You’re still young, Shania. You should not be tied up by a child at this age.”

“But you’re not young anymore, Uncle Tony,” Shania had a different opinion.

“This isn’t good for your career...” Twain continued to back down.

Shania continued to press him, “I’ve already said that I don’t care about my own career. If we have a child, I’ll retire from the entertainment and modelling circles.”

“Are you acting in a fit of pique?” Twain gave a wry smile.

“I’m serious!”

And Twain’s smile became more awkward.

Shania knew what Twain was afraid of, she consoled him and said, “Don’t think too much, Uncle Tony. Maybe you’ve been too tired and have too much stress? Let’s have a good rest during these few days and not think about anything, okay?”

Twain finally nodded, “We’ll do as you say, Shania.”

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It was just like what Shania said. There were almost no trace of Twain and Shania in the entertainment or sports media during these few days.

They disappeared from the public eye after that passionate kiss in the airport.

Not caring about anything, enjoying their married life.

They made love passionately, all because they wanted a baby.

A child, their plans for the future ever since they got married.

Shania’s considerations were valid, and Twain agreed in his mind too. He was already 46 years old, an age that would not be considered young for someone who was healthy, let alone someone who had a heart disease like him. It was a serious matter to still not have a child and nobody knew how much longer he could live for.

If he was a little older... Taking four years as a stage. The World Cup is held every four years, so is the European championship. If he led the team to the European championship trophy, he would undoubtedly be offered the contract to lead them in the World Cup as well. In four years, Twain would be 50 years old. He did not know whether he would still be as potent as he was now.

That was why they had no time to waste.

Life is really short...

Maybe having a child was the one thing that Twain would never be able to do. A person who was a godfather after winning so many trophies and yet he did not have any offspring. Could this be a side effect of time travel? Or maybe... This was karma for all the times he acted so arrogantly?

Twain did not want to think about such questions. He spent all his effort on his wife.

After he got tired, Twain laid next to Shania, considered for a very long time before saying, "Shania... If this doesn't work, let's adopt a baby?"

Shania covered his mouth with her hand, "I only want a child that looks like you, Uncle Tony."

Twain had no choice but to continue working hard.

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Working hard for a baby with Shania was the only time for relaxation in Twain's busy schedule. Holding Shania's youthful and alluring body in his arms, no matter how stressful he was, how busy he was, how exhausted he was, they would all be forgotten. Twain did not deny that he was madly in love with this youthful body. He was not a believer of platonic sex. A relationship without a material basis was something that he could not imagine.

Twain did not appear in the Goodison Park's stands for the seventh round of the league because he was spending his time with Shania. The national team's assistant manager, Des Walker was there in his place.

As there were photographs of Twain and Shania kissing passionately at the airport, some of the media complained that Twain had forgotten about his work because of love. This was not the attitude that the manager of the England team should have.

When Twain returned, the reporters asked him some questions regarding that. He simply replied that it was his private life and he had the rights to enjoy his private life. As for the match between Everton and Manchester City, he indicated that he watched the match live at home and recordings of the match after that. He also analyzed the notes that his assistant manager, who was there on the grounds, provided him. He was sure that he knew more about what was happening at every single moment of that match than any of the reporters who covered it.

Even when he was with Shania, he did not stop paying attention to everything that happened in the English Premier League, no matter how minor it was.

Tottenham Hotspur's Delph had been in a bad form for the past two rounds. If he did not adjust soon, his name would not be included in the call up list for the next national squad.

Manchester United's Ferdinand pulled his left thigh muscle during the match with Newcastle. Initial reports indicated that he would be out of action for a month so he would definitely not be able to make the international matches in mid-October.

Nottingham Forest's David Bentley did not have any impressive performance. If there were no surprises, he would also not be included in the call up list for England this time.

He also considered the fact that there were too many players of the same type in midfield, so Twain removed Manchester United's midfielder, Michael Carrick from the next call up list too.

Middlesbrough's Paul Pepper had been performing admirably in September. Not only did he attract the interest of all the big clubs, he also made Twain think about calling him up to the national team.

If there were no other surprises, Anton Ferdinand would be replacing his brother in the national team.

There were two more weeks to the next European Championship qualifier match and Twain was already preparing for it. He had already led the team to three wins on the trot (if one counted the friendly match against Nottingham Forest), and the fans and media were all looking forward to watching him keep winning.

He used to be the most hated person in the whole of England. Other than the Nottingham Forest fans, 93 percent of the people in the country disliked him. Now, what could he do to win them over?

Winning of course.

Only winning.

### **Chapter 919: Reunion with Bale**

Even though Joe Mattock was his substitute in the Nottingham Forest team, the Little Monkey was very envious of him. That was because this substitute left back was able to get up close with boss and listen to his lectures in the changing room, joke with him and play for him.

For Gareth Bale, this was the kind of treatment that he might never enjoy again.

There were many players who had a good relationship with Twain in the Nottingham Forest team that he built from scratch. However, there were not many whom had a relationship that went beyond that of a manager and his players. Gareth Bale was one of them. To him, Tony Twain was the reason why he was able to play professional football, win so many trophies and accolade, and become a world famous left back now.

If not for the boss' sudden inspiration to go to Southampton, he would not have met his own father and thus, the stories after that would not have happened for him. Bale was very grateful for the impact boss had on his life. In China, there is a saying that goes "the scholar dies for his bosom friend", even though there is no such saying in England, the logic is the same.

For a professional player, the greatest happiness of one's career is to meet a manager that understands and likes him.

He was happy for 11 years.

When the English national players returned to Forest, Bale was very happy to hear that Wood had patched things up with boss. He pestered Wood the whole day to ask him about what happened in the England national team, although he was actually focused on things related to Boss. If Wood did not tell him, he would ask the others.

Bentley was a little annoyed by him and he used "state interests" as a shield.

"We'll be playing you next, Little Monkey. Are you trying to dig information about our tactics?"

“Who cares about that?” Bale proclaimed proudly, “Do you think there is any secret that England has and we Welsh don’t know about? I merely wanted to know how boss took care of those reporters.”

“How would I know? I didn’t attend that press conference. Go ask Gerrard!”

“You should have heard something about it, right?”

“Oh, you’re so annoying, Little Monkey! You were the one who insisted on representing Wales instead of England last time. They can’t even qualify for the European Championship...”

“It’s none of your business!” Bale glared at Bentley before turning and walking away.

Bentley scratched his head as he watched Bale walk away. He talked to in confusion, “Did I say something wrong?”

Now that Tony Twain was gone, the England national players in the team could still be reunited with him in the national team. But what about him?

Bale had never regretted his choice to represent Wales, although he wished that Twain could manage Wales...

He wanted to give boss a hug just like what Pepe did when they met on the field. However, he definitely could not do that in next week’s game. That was a match between two nations and he was representing Wales, not himself.

Therefore, as much as he liked boss, he would do his best to help his team defeat England in this match.

He also wanted to play in the World Cup for once...

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England’s visit to Wales was the third round of the European Championship qualifiers and England’s second game in the qualifiers.

Wales was never considered a strong team. Even during the few years when Giggs was in his prime, they were unable to compete against the stronger teams in Europe. That was why the Englishmen did not pay much attention to this neighbour of theirs. They were discussing the match after this, the visit to Slovakia on 20th October. That would be a difficult game.

Unlike what he did against Macedonia, Twain did not avoid talking about this opponent. Instead, he mentioned a few Welsh players during the interviews with particular focus on the key left back for Wales, Gareth Bale.

“...I’ve managed Bale before, that was a beautiful memory for me. I know what he can do, and I also know what Wales can do. After all, they have many players playing in the English Premier League and I’m able to observe them first-hand. This is different from Macedonia. Bale is a talented player, I’ve never doubted it ever since he played for me. He did very well for Wales, taking care of the whole team’s attack and defence on the left. We’ll think of something to mark him out...”

Next, Twain reminisce about many things that happened with Bale in the Forest team.

Seemed like a very warm occasion, was it not?

However, Bale understood very clearly that boss was playing the mental game again. Why is he talking about the past? Isn't that to disrupt me?

Bale did not fall for it.

Before he reported for duty with the Wales national team, he was interviewed by reporters at the Wilford gates as the media wanted to hear his replies to what his benefactor said.

"Even though Flores is my manager now, I had a great time in the 11 years I had with Twain. However, this will not affect the match next week in any way. I'll still do my best to go for victory because this was what he taught us—Do our best no matter what. I'll prove that I've not forgotten this with my actions."

Bale was very serious and there were no signs of any smiles on his face.

Bentley watched him getting interview from the side and he mumbled, "Something feels weird after that day... Did I upset him?" Bale had not spoken to him ever since that incident.

"You idiot!" Mattock slapped his head, "It has always been a pain in Gareth's heart that he was unable to participate in a major world competition. You just had to talk about it."

"I got irritated as he kept pestering me..." Now that Bentley thought about it, he felt that he went a little overboard too.

"I understand that you guys miss boss, but..." Gago suddenly appeared behind the two of them, giving them a shock.

"But what?" Bentley asked.

Gago frowned, "Little Monkey is talking about how good boss was in front of the media, how he'll not forget what boss taught him. How do you think these will sound to Mr Flores?"

The other two looked at each other and they too felt that what Bale said was not appropriate.

As they looked over, Bale was still talking about his expectations for that match with the reporters.

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In the last round of the league matches before the international break, Gareth Bale found himself on the substitute's bench while Joe Mattock started in his place.

Flores' explanation for this was "normal rotation of the team". However, why was he rotating the players now when there was a two-weeks international break after this? Rotating for the national team? Since when did the managers of the clubs sympathized with the national team managers so much? The media were not stupid. If Forest won, that would be fine. If they lost, the reporters had a truckload of questions prepared to bombard Flores, the foreigner who still had not learnt how to speak English yet.

Maybe only Flores himself, and the Nottingham Forest players understood why their key left back, who had been performing well, would suddenly find himself on the bench.

Sometimes, a more stronghanded approach was required to remove Tony Twain's influence.

Bale sat silently on the substitute's bench and he appeared to be deep in thoughts as the camera swept across him a few times.

Maybe news of him falling out with the manager would spread like wildfire after this match. It was his fault for openly declaring his longing and love for his previous manager. This meant that he was obviously not showing any respect for his current manager.

While Bale was still in a daze on the substitute's bench, his team was trailing Arsenal by 2:0 at the Emirates stadium.

Arsenal focused their attack on Joe Mattock's side as his individual skills were still some way off Bale's standard after all. One of the two goals came directly from his flank while the other came indirectly from that side.

Tony Twain and Des Walker were watching this match from the VIP box seats at the Emirates stadium as they were observing the performances of the players involved in the national team. At the same time, Twain also wanted to observe Bale's performance to see if he was affected by what he said earlier. He did not expect Flores to not play Bale at all.

"Idiot," Twain complained unhappily, "He's doing this in such an important match against Arsenal, he's asking for it."

"Didn't you announce long ago that you don't care what happened to Nottingham Forest anymore?" Walker teased.

"I'm worried that Flores will cause my national team players to lose their form. He's able to do this to Bale today, who knows if he'll do the same to Wood, Bentley or Mitchell and gang?"

Walker did not say anything else as he felt that Twain was right.

George Wood scored with a long-range effort near the end of the match, but it was merely a consolation goal. Arsenal defeated Nottingham Forest easily at home with a score of 3:1. This was also their second successive loss under Flores.

"Bentley did not play well either... He was much worse when compared with Walcott..." Twain stood up and told Walker beside him after the match, "If there're no accidents, Bentley will not be starting the game against Wales."

"Mattock is still a little lacking in terms of skills, his name will probably not be on the call-up list this time."

He evaluated the performances of the players on his name list one by one.

"Wilshere did very well, maybe I should give him a chance?"

"You can only have four players in midfield, how are you going to do that?" Walker asked.

"Gerrard can be on the bench," Twain replied nonchalantly.

"Aren't you worried that the Liverpool media will destroy you?" Walker laughed.

“I’m only responsible for the team. Media? Who cares what they think, “Twain said as he turned to leave. “Besides, Gerrard’s performance in this round of league match was very average. I think it’s logical to let Wilshere, who performed better, start the next match. Wood also played very well in this match. If we’re to rate their performances, he should get the highest score out of the whole Nottingham Forest team.”

“George is now our core player, his status and effect are the same as what Gerrard used to be for England a couple of years back, “Twain told Walker, “A midfielder who can both attack and defend, is consistent and hardly ever injured. I’ll have to be mad to not make him our core player.”

He left with Walker closely behind him.

Below the stands, Flores was shaking hands with Wenger with a forced smile on his face. The reporters surrounding him kept taking pictures of him and some could not wait for the press conference before asking him their questions, “Mr Flores, can you explain why you didn’t play Gareth Bale? He was not injured, and his performances are very consistent...”

Flores pretended not to hear them as he walked straight into the tunnel.

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There was indeed news of Gareth Bale and Flores falling out with each other in the papers and online the next day. The picture that accompanied the report was that of Flores anxiously shouting commands at his players on the side line with Bale daydreaming on the substitute’s bench behind him.

However, the reporters did not manage to get any further information as they were unable to interview Bale. That was because Bale had already left Wilford for Cardiff. He had been staying in Nottingham all this while but his home was actually in Cardiff.

As the biggest footballing star in the Wales national team, he had become the player who captured the most attention from Wales ever since Eastwood retired due to injuries. He was again stopped by reporters outside his home who wished to get some replies from him regarding the latest rumours floating around in the media.

Only an idiot would say that he had a falling out with the manager, unless he had already decided to leave.

Bale denied any unhappiness between him and Flores. As for the reason why he did not feature for the match against Arsenal for even a minute, he had this to say, “...There are not issues with my form and my body, and I’ll prove it in the international match. However, Flores said that he wanted a rotation, so I accepted his suggestion. That is all. I don’t think things are as complicated as you imagined.”

There was no reporter who would believe what he said. They were waiting to collect new evidence to expose the disharmony within the Nottingham Forest changing room!

Wales’ manager, John Toshack, stood out in support of his key player, “I don’t know why he was the only one who was rotated, but I’m very happy that Bale had this precious opportunity to rest. This is a piece of good news for us against England. I believe that Bale is the best left back in the world and we’ll be going to Spain for the European Championship this time. England? They know us well and we know them well too. I’ve already formulated a plan to restrict their Lampard-Gerrard Duo in midfield...”

Toshack was confident and Gareth Bale was fired up as he sought to prove that he still remembered what his benefactor taught him.

It looked like England's visit to Wales would not be all smooth-sailing this time?

### **Chapter 920: A Decision on The Sidelines**

Toshack believed once he had found the tactic to deal with England's "Gerrard and Wood Duo", he would have found the key to defeating the England team. It was not completely big talk for the sake of psychological warfare.

All along, England's core section was the duo, Gerrard and Wood in the midfield. Capello's England team was able to finish fourth in the World Cup in South Africa because it relied largely on the excellent play of both men, especially George Wood's successive break outs.

As a result, everyone thought for England to be able to rise again, it was down to these two players. As long as he could contain the play of these two people, then England would be no different from an ordinary strong team.

However, Toshack must have not anticipated that Twain did not schedule the appearance of "Gerrard and Wood Duo" in the game. Gerrard was told he would not start in the match, while his replacement for the starting lineup was Wilshere, nominated to be the best player in the previous round of Premier League game between Nottingham Forest and Arsenal.

Gerrard gave no indication to the decision and chose to accept it. He played averagely in the last round of the league, which he himself was aware of. He had nothing to add when the manager did not let him start. He was not the kind of prickly person who was going to have a big fight with the manager if he did not start in a game. After all these years in the English football world, no one had ever heard of Gerrard being at odds with the manager due to his appearances in games.

Liverpool's media did not have a fight with Twain this time. From now on, these pro-Liverpool reporters must accept the fact that Gerrard was getting older and his position in the national team was gradually faltering. He would no longer be the flagbearer and symbol of the England team. Even if it were not Tony Twain who was coaching, the fact could not be changed.

The change that Twain made caught Wales off guard.

When Toshack saw in the technical area that the player standing in the midfield together with Wood was Wilshere, and not Gerrard, he lowered his head and uttered a foul word.

Gareth Bale did not care if Gerrard was playing in the game or not. Toshack did not arranged for him to mark Gerrard one-on-one. it did not make an impact on him whether Gerrard was in the game or not.

The live broadcast was playing the national anthems of both teams. Having just finished playing Wales', it was now playing England's .

Making use of this moment, Bale's eyes looked at Tony Twain in the visiting team's technical area.



After more than two months had passed, he saw his mentor again. But he could only look from afar and not go up to hug him.

He averted his gaze after he looked at Twain for a couple of beats. He knew what the most important thing he had to do now was during this period.

His teammate at the club, George Wood was in the line of players next to him. If there was no other surprise, he would surely be instructed by the boss to mark Aaron Ramsey. The Wales national team depended mainly on Bale and Ramsey. Bale was a full back with limited role and posed a limited threat. Ramsey, on the other hand, was the attacking midfielder and the playmaker who organized the offense. Sometimes he also served as the one who finished the attack.

He understood the boss's tactical thinking. With regards to such a player, he would not ignore and let go of him. If he especially marked him, then Wales' offense was left to his own side.

Ramsey was not yet an absolute mainstay at Arsenal. With Wilshere present and in the same position, he was a substitute player more often than not. Even so, he remained unquestionably a core player in the Wales team.

Toshack's tactics in this game did not pin their hopes on Ramsey. He knew George Wood must have been assigned to keep an eye on Ramsey, so Ramsey's activity in the front field was only intended to attract the attention of the England's defense. With Bale being moved up to the left midfielder position by Toshack for the game, the main attacks would come from his side.

After the game began, Ramsey was indeed quickly marked closely by Wood.

His team lost to Arsenal in the league tournament. He would not fall at the feet of the Arsenal player again in the national team competition.

Very soon, Twain could see that Wales' attack was clearly biased to their left side and he was very clear about what Bale's position being moved up meant. Because he would do it occasionally when he was at the Forest team.

Cardiff Millennium Stadium was no stranger to the players on both sides. It was here that Twain won his first championship trophy. So even though it was away game, he had a favorable impression of the pitch and thought that the Millennium Stadium could bring him good luck.

In fact, he did have good luck.

In the beginning, Wales did make use of its home field advantage to create some threatening opportunities when England had still not yet adapted. For example, in the 14th minute, Wood tripped Ramsey and Wales got a direct free kick from twenty-seven meters away from the goal in the right-hand side of the penalty area.

The penalty made Twain nervous. He got up from his seat and walked to the sidelines. His eyes unblinkingly stared at the field.

Bale came up to take the free kick and there was a unison of shouts in the stands at the Cardiff Millennium Stadium to cheer on Bale.

The England team were very careful too. They lined up a six-man human wall.

England might still be a little arrogant and underestimate the opponent if they were to attack in a mobile warfare. But when it turned into a dead ball and Wales was awarded a direct free kick in front of the goal, none of them dared to take it lightly because they all knew how powerful the Welsh number 2 player's free kick ability was.

Bale's free kick managed to get around the human wall. It also bypassed the goalkeeper, Joe Hart's fingertips. But its arc was too wide, and the football flew out of the end line after a brush with the goalpost.

When the football brushed the side of the net, Twain had even thought that the football had gone in, which really startled him.

Huge cheers also broke out in the stands at the Millennium Stadium. But when they saw Bale lifted his arms up to cover his head in frustration instead of celebrating the goal, they realized that the football did not fly into the goal. They had collectively wasted their joyful expression ...

"Damn it! It was a great opportunity!" Toshack was sorely disappointed that the ball did not go in. He was aware of the disparity in strength between the two teams. If he could be in the lead against the England team at home, then the next game would be easier to play.

Next door, Twain said to his assistant manager, Des Walker, "There is a saying in China that 'those who survive a catastrophe are bound to have good fortune later on.' We're in luck."

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The England team, which took its time to warm up in the game, soon launched a siege on the Welsh goal.

Wilshere did not have to think about defense at all. He could devote all his energy to organizing the attack. As a result, the England team's offensive efficiency had improved a lot.

Any attacking midfielder would want his partner to be George Wood. Because they could be completely free of worries. Without any pressure, they could naturally play at the highest level.

"Wilshere's beautiful direct plug-in... He bypassed two defenders from Wales... Unfortunately, Mitchell missed the ball because he was too high!"

"This time he personally dribbles the ball to plug in ahead. Beautiful! He shook off the poor James Collins! And he shoots!! Hennessey's wonderful save rescues Wales' goal!"

Toshack did make an exceptional arrangement to counter England's attack. Even though Wilshere's appearance came as a surprise, there was no let-up in the defense against several key players. England's attack was full of sound and fury but with little result.

If the situation continued to develop in this way, Wales' self-confidence would rise, and England would be in trouble. It was their home ground, after all. With more than sixty thousand Welsh fans cheering on and encouraging their team, the momentum was scary.

Twain stood up again from his seat in the technical area. He walked to the sidelines and whistled toward the field. After attracting Wood's attention, he made a gesture to move forward.

Wood now no longer needed Twain to pull him over to his side and lay out the arrangement in detail. He knew exactly what to do during an attack.

He nodded his head.

So, Twain walked back and sat down.

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In the 40th minute, England was awarded another chance for a corner kick. The two center backs, John Terry and Steven Taylor rushed to the front of the Welsh goal, ready to fight for the header.

Bale noticed Wood dragging at the back near the center circle. He felt slightly reassured.

He still remembered one of the Forest team's many corner kick tactics in the past was to arrange for Wood to wait outside the penalty area. Then when the corner kick went straight to the top of the penalty area arc, Wood would try to score a goal amid the chaos after he received the ball and volleyed a shot.

Despite seeing Wood far from the goal, Bale did not completely let his guard down. He did not join his teammates in the penalty area to contain England's center backs. Instead, he stayed outside the top of the penalty area arc, just in case.

Downing, who was in charge of carrying out the corner kick, raised his right hand and put up three fingers as well, which was the secret signal for their tactics. Different hand gestures had different arrangements, and everyone in the England team must know what tactics these hand gestures corresponded to.

After seeing him raise his hand, it became even more chaotic in front of the Welsh goal, with players from both sides huddled together and tugging at each other aggressively in the corner where the referee could not see.

But Downing did not kick the ball into the penalty area. He directly passed it diagonally ahead toward Wilshere, the small guy in the corner of the penalty area.

"Spread out!" The Wales national goalkeeper, Wayne Hennessey yelled and pushed the man in front of him outwards. He was worried that Wilshere would cross the ball, so he wanted to create an offside position.

The players rushed out in a flurry. But Wilshere did not pass the ball inside. Instead, he turned around and kicked the football diagonally toward the back...

Bale cast a glance to the center circle once again, and he found that Wood was gone!

"George Wooooood!!!"

The commentator roared.

The disappeared Wood appeared in front of the Wales defensive line which was pressed forward. About thirty meters away from the goal, he received Wilshere's ball and dribbled forward.

Bale only saw Wood at this time. He could not remind his teammates in time and rushed up on his own.

It was a rare opportunity for him to meet his own club captain head-on in an official arena!

This was not the time to care about their friendship in the club. Bale charged toward Wood's legs and ferociously shoveled.

Wood certainly saw Bale's movements – he did it so obviously by charging head-on. He would be blind not to see it.

Instead of shaking Bale off with a feint, Wood directly swung his leg for a long shot first before Bale could kick him or kick the ball!

Although it was not a shot that was ready to be shot, to shoot like this in a football game was many times better than the effect of a shot at the goal after the stance was arranged properly before the leg was lifted to fire a shot.

Because that was the human instinctual reaction. Amid fierce competition and lightning quick attack, the body's instincts were more trustworthy than the composition of the complex and sophisticated brain.

With a muffled "pop" sound, the football flew over Bale's head and stirred up a gust of wind, dropping blades of grass on his face. He looked back at the football that flew straight to the Welsh goal.

Wood, who finished the shot, landed on the ground a little messily. He made a dodging move in the air. If he did not so, his knee would hit Bale's face directly. The consequences ... would be too horrible to contemplate.

The football he powerfully shot out was like a shell that hit the bullseye in the target in front.

Ten points!

The speed of Hennessy's save was still slow in the face of this long shot. There were so many people in the penalty area, but no one managed to touch the ball. The football flew straight into the goal!

"George Wood's signature long shot!! England takes the lead towards the end of the first half!"

Wood fell and laid next to Bale on the ground.

The two men looked at each other.

"Your action just now was too dangerous." Wood said to Bale, and then he got up from the ground. He waved his fists to celebrate his goal.

Bale laid on the ground with his face to the sky, watching countless feet appear and disappear from his line of sight. The cheers of the England players rang out in his ears.

He spat out a breath as his hands formed into fists. He grabbed a clump of turf and swore, "Damn it, so lame..."

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Seeing Wood score, Twain rose from his seat for the third time. He raised his arms high and hugged Des Walked next to him in celebration. No matter what kind of game they were playing, to be able to score a goal first and take the lead over the opponent was something worth celebrating.

After the halftime interval, the two sides changed sides and fought again.

Wales still relied on Bale's offensive on his side. So, Twain adjusted his approach. Instead of strengthening the defense on the right side, he stepped up the offensive. The huge defensive pressure forced Bale to have no choice but to reduce the number of times he stepped in on the attacks. More often than not, he helped the defenders at the back and played more like a full back than a winger.

Toshack was a little disgruntled by it. But what could he do? England was in full attack mode and his players naturally had to stabilize their defense first.

Unfortunately, they could not hold on...

Following which, the game entered England's orbit.

Ramsey was entangled by Wood. While at the same time, Wood still had the energy to step forward and be involved in the attacks. Even a long shot from him was enough to make the Welsh players panic at the slightest move, let alone his superb long passes. Wilshere's and his combination of long and short passes had left the Welsh team weary and struggling.

England scored another goal in the second half. The goalscorer was Walcott. At the time when England was fighting back, he dribbled the ball and raced over fifty meters. No one in Wales could catch up with him, and a crowd of people looked on helplessly as he left them in the dust. He swung past the goalkeeper and kicked the ball into the empty goal.

Twain gave his opponent a vivid knowledge of the disparity in their strength as compared to England with Walcott's gallop of fifty meters.

The game eventually ended with a 2:0 score. England comfortably beat Wales at the Millennium Stadium. With two wins in two games, they had the same six points as Denmark. But they had more net goals and now England was at the top of the group.

Gareth Bale played the entire game. After the game ended, he did not exchange his jersey with his opponent, but went straight to the visiting team's technical area.

Twain was celebrating the victory with his assistant manager at the time. Suddenly he heard someone calling him from behind.

"Boss."

He turned his head around to find that it was Bale. The sweat-soaked little monkey looked like he had just been fished out of the water. The hairstyle which he had always cared the most about was stuck close to the scalp at this time. His hair was completely out of style.

"Gareth. You okay?" Twain laughed.

"Not good at all. Your team just beat us." Bale pursed his lips tightly while he opened his arms at the same time and asked, "Can I have a hug with you?"

“Of course.” Twain also greeted him with open arms.

“I’m all good!” As he let go, Bale smiled at Twain and said, “Now I don’t have to envy them anymore. Boss, why is Bentley not here?”

Twain wondered why he asked about the opposing player. But he still replied, “His form has been average, and we have too many midfielders, so we did not pick him.”

Hearing the boss say so, Bale laughed happily, “Now I have a reason to laugh at him when I get back!”

With that, he said to Twain, “Goodbye, boss. I’ve got to go back there...” He pointed to the pitch, looking a little forlorn.

Twain rubbed his head and said, “Do a good job, Gareth. Try your best to lead Wales to the UEFA European Football Championship.”

“We’re in the same group, boss...”

“The second-best team in the group can play in the play-offs.” Twain winked at Bale and added, “I hope to see you in the Welsh red jersey playing in Spain in two years’ time.”

He reached out his hand.

Bale high-fived him and said, “We’ll be there!” He even shouted at Twain as he turned and ran away, “We’ll definitely go!” He raised his fist and waved.

“Do you believe Wales can advance to the next round?” asked Walker next to him, “There were still Denmark and Serbia in the same group. If Freddy had not retired, maybe...”

“Hope is always a good thing.” Twain walked straight to the middle. He had to shake hands with the Wales manager.

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Ramsey was looking for Wood to exchange his jersey. He said to him, “Okay, George. You had marked me for ninety minutes, and I had gotten over it. Come on, let’s swap the jerseys! What are you hesitating about? Still thinking about the last round of the league tournament? That had nothing to do with me...”

Then Wood took off his wet jersey and handed it to Ramsey.

“Wow!” Ramsey took the jersey and exclaimed, “It’s so heavy with water! Aren’t you tired?”

伍德没理他,直接从拉姆塞另外一只手上抢过他的球衣,搭在肩上.

Wood ignored him. He directly grabbed the other jersey directly from Ramsey’s other hand and put it on his shoulder.

“We’ll see each other in the league tournament. The next time we’ll be at our home ground, so we won’t lose to you.” With a toss of the remark, he turned and walked away.

Ramsey looked at his back and muttered, “This petty guy can really hold a grudge!”

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“Tony Twain has led the England team to win their second UEFA European Championship Qualifying game. England is currently at the top of the group with six goals and zero goal concede. It looks like they have no problem to advance to the next round. The English press must be starting to proclaim that England is the strongest team in history this time, isn't it?” The television commentator in Wales said sourly.

“Good luck to them.”