

Champions 971

Chapter 971: The Silver Fox's Decision

"Our team needs to attack in the second half. However, I need to remind all of you to watch out for England's counter-attacks."

Lippi could already guess what sort of tactics Twain would employ in the second half. He had studied Twain's tactics prior to the match, and he would not be surprised if Twain chose to sit back and wait for Italy to attack them before going on the counter-attack. If his team had taken a one goal lead just like England, he would have instructed his team to play counter-attacking football as well.

Italy not only needs to focus on its offense in the second half, but they also need to be wary of England's quick counter-attacks as well.

"I want all of you to snatch the ball back if you lose the ball, and I want everyone to retreat backwards and defend if England gets the ball. You can foul them when necessary, but make sure you only foul them when they are in their own half of the pitch. All in all, do all you can to stop them from launching their quick counter-attacks."

Throughout the entire halftime break, Lippi only conveyed his tactics to the players. He did not give them a pep talk or say things such as 'hang on for another 45 minutes, the trophy would definitely be in our hands'. The man who is about to turn 70 knows very well that those words would not benefit the players in any way. To the Italy team, tactics were more important than the players' psychological states.

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Tony Twain was still speaking to the players, but James Vaughan did not hear a single word that he said. He was certain that he would not get the chance to play in the second half later on. He did not think about why he was not given the chance to play in the match. All he thought about was how he was going to become a spectator just like Mitchell. At least Mitchell knows why he is unable to play in the match. He was barred from playing because he picked up too many yellow cards, and that is something that cannot be helped. But, what about him? He has been forced to sit on the bench without any explanation from his manager...

He found it really suffocating to not know the reason behind why he has been dropped from the match.

Des Walker nudged Twain lightly, and gestured him to look at Vaughan.

Twain glanced over and noticed a depressed Vaughan sitting by the side.

This is not what he wanted to happen...

Twain lowered his head and looked at the watch. It was about time for the second half to commence. He waved his hands at the players and said, "Get out there, lads. There are only 45 minutes left in the match. I don't want any of you to leave the pitch with regrets."

Vaughan smiled wryly to himself after hearing those last few words from Twain. The players who are playing in the match later might not end up with regrets, but what about me?

“Vaughan, I want you to stay back for a while.” Twain suddenly called his name.

Vaughan froze in his tracks. His teammates averted their gazes towards the two of them, but they did not start whispering amongst themselves over what had just happened. All they did was to send a glance in their direction before they turned around and left without saying a word.

They all felt that the boss owes Vaughan an explanation. It was really too cruel of him to leave Vaughan on the bench when he has been performing well on the pitch thus far.

The pair stayed behind in the locker room and waited for the players around them to leave. Vaughan looked at Twain, but Twain had his eyes on the outside of the locker room.

Twain only directed his gaze onto Vaughan when everyone else had left the room.

Twain tried his best to make out traces of anger in Vaughan’s eyes. But, to his disappointment, it seemed like disenchantment was the prevailing emotion that could be discerned from his eyes.

Vaughan thought that his boss would explain to him why he failed to start in the match. He did not expect the first few words from Twain to be:

“Don’t take off the shirt underneath your jersey just yet.”

Twain then gestured for Vaughan to leave the room after finishing his words.

Vaughan left the locker room feeling utterly confused. His head was still in the clouds when he walked out of the tunnel, but the deafening cheers from the crowd snapped him out of reveries. A moment later, Twain’s words began registering in his mind. Maybe the boss is trying to tell me that I have a chance of playing in the second half?

But, should he be happy or upset to hear those words from Twain? Why did the boss not make me a starting player if he intends to play me in the match? Why did he put me on the bench? Oh well, at least there is a glimmer of hope that I might be able to play in the match later.

Twain walked out of the tunnel a while after Vaughan made his way to the bench. He walked over to his seat in the dugout and found Des Walker looking at him. “How did the talk go?”

“I told him not to take off the shirt underneath his jersey just yet.” Twain shrugged. The people who sympathized with Vaughan would have blown their tops if they saw the kind of attitude that Twain had towards the situation.

Walker smiled wryly. “Aren’t you afraid that he would come to despise you?”

“That’s exactly what I want him to do.” Twain answered grimly.

He did not mind being hated by a player if it meant that he could lift the trophy. Besides, Vaughan would just become one of many people in the world who want him dead.

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The Italy players marked the England players closely and performed more interceptions in the midfield in the second half. The way in which Italy defended against the England players made them feel quite uncomfortable. The England players were no longer given the time to think about whether they should pass the ball away or bring the ball forward themselves. The ball would be snatched away from them the moment they hesitate.

The importance of 'passing the ball quickly' becomes all too apparent in situations like these. This was also a point that was emphasized by Twain repeatedly at halftime.

The players need to carefully observe the situation on the pitch and have a good grasp of where their teammates and opponents are before they receive the pass. Doing so would allow them to instantly know what their next step should be. They should not be observing the pitch and thinking about what they should do next after they have received the ball.

Twain has been training the England national team players to observe before they receive the pass for two years. It did not matter which football club the player comes from. He has to play in this manner if he wants to play for England. Any player who fails to play in the way that Twain wants or refuses to change his playing style to suit Twain's methods would be dropped from the team, no matter how talented or famous he might be as a player. Twain would not change his mind and let the player back into the team even if the press lambastes him for it.

That is how he has managed to build an England national team that listens to his every word.

The players were not at a loss either when Twain told them to make quick passes at halftime.

England's tactics in the midfield became very simple after Italy started to pressurize them and intercept their ball in the midfield. George Wood and Gerrard were both positioned at the middle of the pitch, and their main role was to pass the ball forward. The two side midfielders played more like wingers when they moved forward to attack. Agbonlahor's position on the pitch was shifted backwards and it became very flexible. He essentially merged the line where the forwards are with the line where the midfielders are.

The entire England midfield would retreat backwards during defense, and all the midfielders will form a line right before the team's defense line. Their main role is to try and stop Italy's attacks before they reach their penalty box.

The players from both sides were constantly locked in a fierce battle for the ball, and fouls became inevitable eventually. The managers for both teams have instructed their players to commit fouls when necessary, and thus, the referee's whistle kept going off repeatedly during the second half. Both teams' attacks kept getting interrupted, and neither side was able to launch a complete attack.

Lippi soon came to realize that it was a quite difficult to find a hole in England's defense. Twain appears to have mastered the art of defense just like Italy, though it is unclear who taught it to him.

Even Rooney, who is typically positioned at the front of the pitch, has to retreat to the center circle during England's defense. There are several different parts to England's defense, and each and every part is closely linked with one another.

Alberto Paloschi tried attacking down the flanks, but his attacks failed to draw the defenders away from the middle of the pitch. The England defenders stood their ground and did not allow the Italy team any space to attack. Salvatore Foti was closely marked by John Terry the entire time, and he rarely got a decent chance to make his way past the England defender.

Lippi realized that the only way to break through England's airtight defense was to pin all his hopes on set pieces rather than on a particular player's moment of brilliance.

He looked down at his watch. 17 minutes had gone by in the second half, and the score remained 0:1. His team was still trailing by a goal. He has to make a change fast. This is definitely not the time for him to consider the pride or feelings of certain players.

He glanced at the players who were seated on the bench before pulling his assistant manager, Ferrara, over to him. "Ask Balotelli to do his warm-ups."

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Balotelli is an attacking player who possesses several unique traits, and he is quite famous as well. His absence from the list of starting players for the match was just as surprising as Twain's decision to keep Vaughan on the bench. However, unlike Twain, Lippi was not criticized by the press over his decision to not play Balotelli in the match.

The reason is simple. Everything went wrong for Balotelli ever since he made his decision to transfer to Nottingham Forest. He had chosen to transfer to Nottingham Forest because he was unhappy at Inter Milan, but Nottingham Forest has been going on the decline for the past few years, and both his form and fame as a player have been affected as a result. In addition, there is a 'tradition' among the Italy national team's managers – they do not pay much attention to players who play football overseas.

Balotelli used to be a starting player in the Italy national team, but now he is demoted to a mere substitute. Many Inter Milan fans could not help but lament his fate.

There can only be one reason why Lippi would choose to play Balotelli in the match at a time like this. Balotelli is good at taking free-kicks, and Lippi must be planning to make full use of that. Italy has the upper hand in the match at the moment, and they have been able to gain several free kicks in England's half of the pitch due to the fouls committed by the England players. Given how the players from both sides have been committing a lot of fouls in the match so far, Italy would definitely be awarded even more free kicks from here on out. Thus, putting Balotelli on the pitch would help Italy capitalize on those free kicks. Balotelli's free kicks would also add creativity to Italy's offense and create more chances for the team to attack as well.

Additionally, Balotelli is a Nottingham Forest player, and he might be able to provide his teammates with some insights as to how Tony Twain might direct his players to play in the match...

Balotelli stood by the side of the pitch and waited for the referee to announce the substitution. Lippi had already relayed his role in the match to him half a minute ago. His role was very simple. All he needed to do was to make use of his techniques to create chances for the team to make their way past England's defense. He would be the player to take all the free kicks and corners in the opposition's half, and he has to make sure that he makes full use of those free kicks and find the way to break through England's airtight defense.

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Twain began searching his memory for information regarding Balotelli after he saw the Italian player stand next to the fourth official.

Nottingham Forest's results for the past two seasons have been mediocre at best, but the black player has slowly cemented his place as a starting player on the team. This is hardly surprising, given how he is a player who cost the club 35 million pounds to bring in. Are there any managers out there who would possibly dare to put such an expensive player on the bench? Unfortunately for Forest, Balotelli was never able to make use of his own skills and abilities to boost the team's results. His form mirrors the ups and downs of his team and has been largely inconsistent.

It has been reported that Balotelli is not happy at Nottingham Forest. There were numerous news stories about how he wanted to transfer to a different club all summer, and it is said that he would prefer a move to Manchester United where he would be reunited with his teacher, Mourinho.

Lippi must have put him on the pitch after seeing how Italy has been given a large number of free kicks in the past few minutes...

Guess it's time to remind the players to pay attention to where they are committing the fouls on the Italy players...

Twain stood up and walked to the side of the pitch before calling Wood's name. He wanted the captain to convey his newest set of instructions to his teammates on the pitch.

"Pay attention to where you are committing the fouls!"

The truth was that most people did not have high hopes for Balotelli. Lippi was one of the few exceptions who did, since he was the one who made the decision to put him on the pitch.

Balotelli's form for this season has simply been too inconsistent. When he is playing well, he would be able to lead his team to victory by performing hat tricks. But, when he is not playing well, he turns invisible on the pitch, and the commentators would be left wondering if Nottingham Forest even played him in the match.

To make things worse, his poor performances occur much more frequently than his good performances.

However, Lippi did not see Balotelli in the same light as the others, and that is why he had given him a detailed analysis of the match before he sent him on the pitch. He told Balotelli about the issues that he needed to pay attention to, and he also advised him on what he should do when he faced those issues. In addition, he also gave him the authority to take every single set piece for the team. It is evident that Lippi has placed high hopes on Balotelli.

Sadly, Balotelli betrayed Lippi's hopes when he received the ball from his teammates for the very first time after getting on the pitch. He tried to stop the ball at his feet, but he ended up giving it away to George Wood instead.

The England fans at the stands all broke into a laugh after seeing his mistake. John and Bill even started singing a song that praised Balotelli. Their gesture was clearly one that was done with the intention of reminding everyone about the relationship between them and Balotelli.

“Does Balotelli think he’s still wearing a red Nottingham Forest jersey? He actually stopped the ball for George Wood who stood across of him! Even Wood himself looks to be surprised by Balotelli’s mistake! Aha!” Motson criticized Balotelli mercilessly. It was as if he had forgotten the times he had cheered for Balotelli’s wonderful goals in the Premier League.

The Italian commentator, on the other hand, did not react by criticizing Balotelli just like Motson did. Instead, he held a hand to his face. He could not bear to watch such an embarrassing scene.

Some of the Italy fans like to come up with conspiracy theories, and after seeing Balotelli’s performance earlier, they would definitely buy into the theory that Nottingham Forest had deliberately bought Balotelli just to ruin him as a player. They have been laying the groundwork for their victory in this finals match since two years ago! Everything that they did back then was all for today’s match! They have been plotting to render a gifted Italian player useless by buying him over!

And, it looks like they have succeeded!

The conspiracy theory caused several Italy fans to be furious at the England fans. The fact that Tony Twain was the manager of both Nottingham Forest and the England national football team also lends credence to the theory. Tony Twain could have been the mastermind behind all of this! He knew that this day would come, and that is why he got Nottingham Forest to buy Balotelli! We thought it was odd that Balotelli did not go to Manchester United where his teacher, Mourinho, is at, but now we know why!

Tony Twain truly is a man who would do anything to win...

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Laughter would erupt from the stands every time Balotelli received the ball. The laughter comes from the England fans, and they are all intent on making fun of Balotelli after seeing the mistake that he committed earlier.

One cannot help but wonder what Davide Lanzafame is feeling at the moment. He was the player who got substituted for Balotelli after all. But, what people are most curious about must be what Lippi is thinking about right now...

Twain began laughing along with the crowd. He felt a little proud. Balotelli’s mistake had delivered a blow to Italy’s morale, and it had also caused his teammates trust in him to waver.

He did not understand why Lippi would risk playing Balotelli in the match. Balotelli might be skilled at taking free kicks, but his flaws as a player still outnumber his strengths. Balotelli did not play in many games in the Euro Cup so far, and his performances when he did play have also been decent at best. His most noteworthy contribution to the team has been an assist.

Then again, Lippi is a man who is referred to as the ‘Silver Fox’. Did the ‘Silver Fox’ really make a mistake, or does he actually have something up his sleeves?

“I think putting Balotelli on the pitch is an absolute mistake. If Italy goes on to lose this match, Lippi would definitely be criticized heavily by the press for that substitution.”

“I think this is a chance for England to go on the offense and attack Italy even more ferociously than they are now. They should fight to get that second goal. The game would be over the moment they score, and the British would be able to celebrate winning their first ever Euro Cup trophy early.”

“Balotelli’s performances as a Nottingham Forest player have been mediocre. The relationship between him and the club has soured over the summer, and he is looking for a move away from the club. All the various transfer rumors surrounding him must have affected his state of mind and his form as a player. I think Lippi made the wrong decision to play such a player in the match...”

“Lanzafame was not outstanding in the match earlier, but he still made lots of contributions to the team’s defense. I wonder what exactly was going through Lippi’s mind when he made the decision to take off a player like Lanzafame, who had put in a solid performance thus far, for a problematic player like Balotelli?”

The commentators working for different countries did not miss out on the opportunity to criticize Lippi.

“Lippi has truly gotten on with age. I can’t believe he actually made a mistake like this in such an important match... I guess age really spares no man. We have to remember that he’s a 68-year-old man this year...” There were even people who shook their heads and sighed at Lippi’s decision. They made it seem as though Lippi’s decision to play Balotelli was truly a disastrous one.

The man who became the target of discussion sat firmly on his seat at the dugout. Many people expected to see either anger or impatience upon his countenance, but his face remained stoic and emotionless. He did not furrow his brows at Balotelli’s mistake, and neither did he berate his players from the side of the pitch. He did nothing and simply remained still like a statue at his seat.

The aged man sitting at Italy’s dugout resembled Paul Newman. Lippi was really getting more and more handsome the older he aged. He had a refined, gentlemanly air to him that was hard to go unnoticed by others.

Lippi’s lack of reaction was actually able to achieve a positive effect on the players. It boosted their confidence and made them believe that they still had a chance of winning the match.

The manager is not panicking, so why should we?

There were numerous Italy players who thought that way, and Balotelli was one of them.

Chapter 972: Counter Every Move

Everyone wondered about the substitution Lippi made, and unceremoniously questioned the substitution.

But the main person who was being questioned sat calmly in the technical area, as if he was not the one who had brought Balotelli on.

Or he did not see Balotelli’s mistake at all...

In fact, he certainly saw it, and he was clear about it in his mind. It was just that he could not express his displeasure with the player who had just been brought on. He sat on the sidelines with a calm face, but he was sending a message to the players that –

Don't worry, we still have the time and opportunity. Don't be thrown into confusion.

The players all calmed down one by one on the pitch when they saw such a calm manager.

Why are we in a panic about when the manager is not panicking?

Even Balotelli, who had just made a mistake, thought so, too.

In fact, Balotelli knew what this UEFA European Championship meant to him. Before the UEFA European Championship, his agent had told him that if he wanted to leave Nottingham Forest smoothly, he had to produce a convincing performance at the UEFA European Championship. That way he could lobby around for him.

Two seasons at Nottingham Forest had gradually left him without a name in European football. At this point, he had to work hard again like a rookie.

With this idea, Balotelli played actively. Despite the mistake he made, he did not take it to heart. He just wanted to focus on scoring goals or assisting his teammates.

Balotelli played as a striker for the Forest team, but he went up and played as a right midfielder in this game. His main task was to help the team attack on this sideline, cross from the byline and allow Foti to compete for headers in the middle. But that was not enough to play his best.

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Italy's Giovinco broke through and cut inside on the left side. He flashed past the unsuspecting Walcott and intended to break through further when George Wood made him fall down.

The referee whistled to give Italy a free kick on the left side of the penalty area and gave Wood a verbal warning at the same time. Wood was smart enough not to step forward to defend himself. He did not rush at Giovinco, but Giovinco was a thin and weak guy. He just fell down with one hit. He was the same in the first half, so he could not be bothered to explain to the referee.

Seeing the Italian team scored a free kick, Balotelli rushed over from the other side and held the ball in his hands. His teammates were aware of Lippi's latest arrangement and Balotelli had officially taken over the right to carry out all of the place kicks in the front field.

The England players were no strangers to Balotelli's free kicks. In the Forest team, he and Bale were usually the ones to carry out penalty kicks. Balotelli had regularly used free kicks to break through the goals of those Premier League teams.

The England fans in the stands booed him when they saw him place the football on the ground and appeared to be the one to carry out the free kick.

Balotelli's kick went over the crossbar amid the widespread roars.

The England fans shouted out cheers of victory, while Balotelli looked a little annoyed at the turf under his feet. There seemed to be a bit of unevenness here, which caused his kick to be flawed.

Based on the free kick, it looked like Balotelli still could not find his form, which in turn gave the commentator another chance to attack Lippi.

Fortunately, the television commentary could not be heard in the technical area. Otherwise it was really known how many managers would throw the games aside and rush to the commentators' box at the back to find those who only knew how to move their lips to vent at them.

Balotelli had underperformed twice in a row and Lippi still remained unmoved. He had already made up his mind. Since he had brought him on, what else did he have to regret about? As long as it was not a major mistake, he could not bring him off, could he? The valuable substitution spots could not be wasted in this way.

Balotelli played poorly but the England team did not dare take it lightly. Because they had exploited Italy's underestimation of the underperforming Agbonlahor in the first half and cracked open the goal which had impenetrable defense. During the halftime interval, Twain also warned them not to underestimate their opponent and must be cautious.

Therefore, when Balotelli took the ball on the sideline, there was no sign of Joe Mattock's slackness at all. Although they were teammates of the same football club, they were currently playing for different teams.

Balotelli was going to force a breakthrough. Although he had overtaken Joe Mattock, Downing had rushed up from behind and blocked his way. With the slight delay, Joe Mattock came up again, and the two men joined forces to keep Balotelli out and force him near the corner flag.

Balotelli saw that there was no way to complete the pass. It seemed difficult to break through, so he retreated to seek another chance. Even a corner shot was good. As a result, after the ball that was kicked out hit Joe Mattock, the ball inexplicably bounced back instead of bouncing straight toward the end line and hit Balotelli's shin bone before bouncing out of the end line...

This time he did not even get a corner kick. The assistant referee immediately pointed the flag to the goal area, which meant that it was a goal ball.

The England fans sat in the stands behind the England team's goal in the second half. Seeing that Balotelli had failed in his bid for a corner kick and instead gave out a goal ball, the fans over that area burst into laughter.

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"He's completely marked to death by our men..." Des Walker sighed. The England coaching staff had already thoroughly studied this particular Forest player. Thanks to the Forest team's poor performance over the past two seasons, Balotelli's form had also become poor.

If he did not know or understand Twain, he would have wondered if it was a conspiracy... It was such a coincidence!

The England team's coaching staff had analyzed everyone in the Italian team before the game and made specific arrangements targeting their different characteristics, regardless of how many of them were able to play in the game.

Balotelli was naturally among them. At the time, the team's coaching staff analyzed two possibilities. First of all, Balotelli certainly would not be in the starting lineup, but he might come on as a substitute because he was a player with specific traits and his place kicks were excellent. And if the England team were to employ a solid defensive counterattack against Italy, a tight defense was something Lippi needed to consider. That was when Balotelli could simply do a good job.

In that case, he could play as a striker or right midfielder when he came on, because Balotelli could play well in both positions. So, they needed to make two different arrangements – what do we do when he is a striker? What do we do when he's a side midfielder?

When he was a side midfielder, Twain asked both the full back and side midfielders to actively defend and minimize Balotelli's chances for passes while cutting off his links with the others at the same time and trying to isolate him.

Judging from the defense just now, Joe Mattock and Downing did it well. They blocked Balotelli with their double team front and back which completely cut off the path for the ball to be sent out.

Twain had done a lot of work for this final, and now they all came to life one by one.

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Balotelli played averagely in the game. After being caught several times by the England team, he began to do more passes and not dribble the ball himself to break through. He knew he had been targeted by Twain. When he played for the Forest team, he had heard much about the legend of that man, who was always being referred to as a god, as if he was not a football manager but a wizard in a medieval legend, full of power to stir up people's sentiments. Every member of staff at the Wilford training base always had a look of worship when they talked about Twain, and had little feeling toward the club chairman, Mr. Evan Dougherty.

Although he was frozen in the game, Balotelli was not too worried. Because he still had a weapon that the English players could never freeze. It was just that he was trying his best to warm up his legs now...

Facing Joe Mattock's blocking, Balotelli forced to pass the football. Although the ball bypassed his teammate in the Forest team, it was also too high ...even if Foti was 2.03 meters tall, he could not reach such a "pass."

"It looks like his form is really bad..." This time even the Italian commentator could not help shaking his head as he spoke.

Balotelli then tried a long shot from outside the penalty area. This time the shot was rather accurate, only that it was too straight on and was grabbed by Joe Hart.

"Ah ha! It is his best performance since he came on!" Motson quipped.

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Balotelli was actually not the main character. Lippi did not instruct anyone else to pass the ball to him in Italy's offense. From the gap opened up from where he was, De Rossi was still in charge of dispatching. He was the core of the Italian team, and Giovinco was also active in front of the penalty area, causing a headache and tension for the England defenders.

As time went on in the second half, the Italian team's offensive grew stronger and stronger, adopting a stance of turning out in full strength.

Lippi also noticed the time. Time was the most precious at present. There were now 20 minutes to go before the end of the 90-minute game. These 20 minutes might not seem short, but they could actually flash by in a blink of an eye. If they did not hurry up, the Italian players would only become more impatient as time went on, and the scales of victory would tip in favor of the England team.

Something must be done.

Lippi thought about it and instructed a few things to Ferrara, the assistant manager sitting next to him.

Ferrara listened and bobbed his head in between words. Then he got up from his seat and walked to the sideline, gesticulating across the other side. Following which, Italy's two full backs could be seen starting to plug in from the back and assist with the offense.

The Italian full backs joined in the attack and England immediately felt a lot of defensive pressure, especially on Joe Mattock's side.

While Lippi let the full backs go up and assist with the offensive, Giovinco and Balotelli also changed positions. Balotelli did not achieve much on the right side. Since that was the case, it was better for him to switch to the left and face the defensively stronger Richards. He was not seeking a breakthrough to pass. He just needed to hold the other side down. Italy's main offensive direction was changed to their right side, which was England's left.

Paloschi also ran to the right side to get in on the action. With three players targeting this area, Joe Mattock and Downing could not hold any longer.

Downing was not the kind of player who was good at defense. It was not good to have him focus solely on defense.

Twain looked on with a frown, and then he turned around to say to his assistant manager, Des Walker, "Go call back Cohen and Vaughn in warmup."

Walker knew what he wanted to do. He nodded and ran away without saying anything.

When Vaughn heard that Twain wanted him to go back, he was a little surprised. It was normal to come out and warm up. The coaches would regularly pick a group of players to go warm up, and he was naturally among them. But in the next second he thought of what Twain said to him at the end of the halftime interval.

He looked down at the T-shirt inside the collar of his jersey.

It was already soaked in sweat. He hoped that the writing on it did not become fuzzy.

Vaughn and Cohen both appeared in front of Twain at the same time. Twain looked at them both, did not say much, and began to lay out specific tactics.

For Chris Cohen, the focal point of Twain's instruction was on the defense. He wanted him to go up to help Mattock and ease the pressure on his defense. It would not work if he were to always get Wood to fill in on the sideline, because there were Aquilani and De Rossi in the middle.

As for Vaughn...

Twain glanced up at him before assigning him the task.

"James, are you still brooding over the fact that I did not put you in the starting lineup?" He asked.

Vaughn was not a fool. If he honestly answered, "Yes, I still can't figure out why it is so till now." Then he would be done for. He just shook his head and replied, "I defer to you, boss."

He said these words a little reluctantly. How could Twain not discern it? But he did not mind. He had wanted this result. "Let's not talk about why I did it first. I just want to know this. Do you have enough passion and desire to go on the game? I'm going to bring you on to play now. Are you going to surprise me, or are you going to muddle through the game until the end?"

"No one wants to mess up, boss." James Vaughn said this sentence most willingly, "This is the final of the UEFA European Championship."

Vaughn felt that Twain asking such a question was an insult to him. Which professional athlete would want to muddle through to the end of such a big game?

Who would not want to score a goal or two and go down in history in a game like this? Wouldn't it be better if he could be the hero that saved the team in distress?

Twain looked at the unfriendly-looking Vaughn and was happy.

That was the effect he wanted when he stifled Vaughn for 70 minutes. It would have been a failure if he had not been infuriated from being held back.

"Well, don't say I did not give you a chance, James." The way Twain was acting now felt a little "shameless" in Vaughn's eyes. He only gave him 20 minutes. Could it even be considered a chance?

However, since this was now the situation, not to mention 20 minutes, Vaughn would even take ten minutes too. He did not say any other nonsense. He just nodded and did not want to delay any longer.

Twain discerned his thoughts and did not say anything else. He directly told him the mission, "Your task is simple, Vaughn. Just like the semifinal, score a goal. You are coming on at this time when the Italian defenders' physical strength is at its weakest and when they are the least focused mentally. They have fully pressed ahead, so there will be a lot of gaps behind them. Seize them well."

Vaughn nodded.

Twain gave him a push him again and pushed him to the sidelines. Then he gave him two pats on the back, hoping he would grasp the deep meaning within.

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“The England team is asking for a substitution!”

Just at this moment, Gerrard had tripped Aquilani who had rushed up on the pitch. The Italian team scored another free kick at the edge of the penalty area.

The referee signaled for Balotelli to wait before he carried out the free kick as the England team wanted to make a substitution.

Downing, who was building a human wall, looked at the signboard in the hands of the fourth official at the sidelines, and then stepped out from the human wall. He slowly walked toward the sidelines. Chris Cohen was going to replace Downing.

Following which, Agbonlahor also walked toward the sidelines at the behest of his teammates. James Vaughn was going to replace him.

Both men received the latest instructions from Twain on the sidelines when they came off the field.

“Slow down! Walk off! Don’t run!”

Therefore, the two men weathered the widespread boos from the Italian fans and moved unhurriedly to the sidelines amid protests from the displeased Italian players. Cohen and Vaughn completed the handover.

Twain first shook hands with Downing and then gave Agbonlahor a hug as he said, “Well done, lad, ha!”

He had strongly advocated for Agbonlahor to be in the starting lineup. And he had scored the only goal in the game so far, so he did not embarrass him. Of course, he had to give him high praise.

If this had been ancient China, Agbonlahor would be bound to say, “Your loyal subject did not bring you shame and succeed in the mission!” However, he only asked cheerfully, “Boss, we’re going to be the champion, aren’t we?”

Twain nodded firmly and said, “That’s right, who else can it be but us?”

As he said that, he looked at the pitch. Vaughan and Cohen had just went on. Both of them were just squeezing into the human wall. The England and Italian players were fighting around the human wall.

There were still 20 minutes left in the game. He just hoped that it would just pass by and no complications would arise...

Chapter 973: Two Minutes

Twain made two substitutions in one go. Vaughan was the player who replaced Agbonlahor, and Downing was substituted by Cohen.

Twain was only able to make his substitutions this quickly because Italy had been awarded a free kick in England’s half of the pitch. If not, the two players would have stood by the side of the pitch for quite some time.

The England fans immediately started booing Balotelli after they cheered for Agbonlahor as the latter walked off the pitch. The fans appear to have reached a tacit agreement to disrupt Balotelli by booing him every time he takes the free kick or the corner kick.

Balotelli re-positioned the ball after both of England's players had gotten into position on the pitch. Once he was done, he retreated backwards by a few steps, and was ready to charge at the ball and kick it. The boos from the England fans had no impact on him. He simply ignored them. He has to thank Nottingham Forest for allowing him to gain the ability to drown out the sounds of the fans' booing... Nottingham Forest is a team that would be constantly booed by opposing fans no matter where they go, and as the first choice striker for the team, Balotelli has been booed countless times over the past two seasons as well. His time in Nottingham Forest has allowed him to grow immune to the fans' booing, and their boos do not disrupt his play in any way now.

Balotelli was well aware that he has not performed well in the match so far, but he also knew why Lippi had chosen to put him on the pitch. In the second half, England had solidified its defense, and they mostly remained in their own half of the pitch to guard against Italy's attacks. As a result, Italy was able to earn more and more free kicks in England's half of the pitch. Lippi has brought him on because he wants to capitalize on those free kicks. He hopes that a technical player like him would create the spark needed for the team to score a goal and thereby break the deadlock in the match.

England is definitely doing a fantastic job at defending. Italy is hardly given any chance to score at all, and their only way of scoring a goal now is to take their free kicks well.

"This is the fourth time that Balotelli is taking a free kick. Two of his previous shots went over the bar, and one was blocked by the players..." The commentator did not hesitate in pointing out the fact that Balotelli had not performed well when taking free kicks for his team either.

"I think the very last match of Lippi's managerial career would be ruined by the black player."

"It might be a little too early for me to say this, but I'd still say it anyway. Lippi is 68 years old this year, and I think his old age has affected his ability to make decisions. I cannot understand why he would play Balotelli in the match. It is utterly puzzling."

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Twain walked back to his seat at the dugout after completing his substitutions. The cacophonous environment in the stadium had forced him to raise his voice to talk to his two players earlier. His voice was already hoarse to begin with, but it had become even more hoarse now. He desperately wanted to drink some water to make his throat feel better.

Right when Twain had his back towards the goalpost, the referee blew on his whistle once to signal that Balotelli could go ahead and take the free kick.

Balotelli inhaled deeply, then exhaled. Thereafter, he began his run-up to the ball.

His first two steps were done at the same spot, and he only took a big stride forward on his third step. That one big stride was all Balotelli needed to reach the ball. Once he was positioned next to the ball, he raised his leg and smashed his foot against it. The ball flew into the air and went past the wall of England

players who stood before Balotelli. It then flew straight towards the top left-hand corner of the goalpost!

It was the corner that was furthest away from where Joe Hart stood on the pitch.

Joe Hart immediately pounced towards the ball when he saw it make its way past the wall of players and straight towards his goalpost. However, it was too late by then.

The ball had already made its way into the goalpost when he pounced towards it...

“This... GOOOAL! GOOOOAL!” The commentator who did not work for either Italy or England only started cheering after a brief moment of shock.

Twain was startled by the sudden cheers that had erupted in the stadium. His hands trembled slightly, and the tremor caused the water from his water bottle to spill onto his tuxedo. “Goddamn it!” Twain cursed. He wanted to ask Walker for a towel, but when he looked up, he noticed that Walker was as angry as he was.

Twain did not fathom why Walker was furious. Before he could ask his assistant manager about what had happened, he noticed movement at the Italy dugout from the corner of his eye, and he directed his gaze towards it. He saw Lippi seated at his seat emotionlessly while everyone else around him embraced one another...

A bad thought raced through Twain’s mind. He immediately turned around and looked at the pitch, and he saw a group of players dressed in blue hugging one another in the middle of the pitch. His players, on the other hand, all had their heads lowered and they appeared crestfallen.

Twain did not need to look at the screen. He could tell what had happened...

He had spent less than half a minute to drink a gulp of water, but in that short span of time, Italy had scored their equalizer! Balotelli’s free kick must have gone in!

“F*ck!” Twain put even more emotion behind his curse this time round.

“We all thought he was also poor at taking free kicks, but...” Walker shook his head in anguish. There were only 20 minutes left in the match. Victory was right there before them, but now they have been pulled back to the starting line by their opponents with an equalizer...

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The commentators who have been mocking Balotelli all this while were suddenly heaping praises on him.

“That was a wonderful goal! Mario Balotelli! He has leveled the score for Italy!”

“Super Mario! Super Mario! An absolutely brilliant goal!”

“He is the only player who can be counted on when his team is in a dire state!”

Not only that, they were also full of praise for Lippi’s decision to play Balotelli as well. “This goal proves that Lippi was right to substitute Lanzafame for Balotelli earlier! Balotelli has effectively shut all his critics up by scoring a goal!”

“We have leveled the score! There is hope of us becoming the champions once again! Twain always says that ‘having a one goal lead in a match is the most dangerous situation that a football team can find themselves in’, and I am very happy that Balotelli has used a goal to prove that his words are true! Both sides are now back at the starting line and there are 20 minutes left to play...” The Italian commentator was the happiest out of all the other commentators. He was dancing before his microphone excitedly.

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The England players were frustrated after letting Italy score a goal. They have blocked every possible attacking route that the Italy players could take, but there was absolutely nothing that they could do about free kicks.

“Reduce the number of fouls that you make on them!” The depressed England players heard Twain yelling by the side of the pitch. “Try not to foul them at areas whereby they would have a good chance of scoring from free kicks!”

Twain understood very well that fouls are an integral part of defense. Generally speaking, one can know whether a defender is good or not by looking at the number of fouls that he makes. A defender who knows how and when to foul another player is a good defender.

However, the opposition just scored from a free kick that had been given to them as a result of a foul. The players would definitely be worried about giving away too many free kicks now, and this could lead to increased pressure on them during defense.

Hence, Twain is left with no other choice but to get his players to reduce the number of fouls that they make. The only weakness to his tactic is that his team would end up awarding a lot of free kicks to the opposition...

Twain wanted to pull Wood over to him and give him further instructions about what to do next, but the Italy players were in a hurry to get the game going once again. The ball had been placed at the center circle shortly after Italy’s celebration of the goal. The players from both sides quickly got into their positions on the pitch and waited for kick-off.

What upset Twain the most was the fact that he had only just finished making his adjustments to the team moments before Italy leveled the score. He would not be able to make any further changes to his team now, and all he could do was to put his faith in the players and hope that they are able to find a way to turn the match back in their favor. To make matters worse, his tactics for the match have been rendered ineffective by the opposition, and he needs to come up with a new set of tactics soon. He had asked his players to primarily focus on defense for the match, and even players like Chris Cohen who typically go on the attack have been asked to prioritize defense over offense. The team would only counter-attack when an opportunity to do arises.

However, things are different now.

Twain yelled at the pitch. His voice has to be as loud as the cheers from half of the spectators in the stadium, or else it would get drowned out.

“Cohen! Cohen!” He yelled by the side of the pitch. Chris Cohen was situated far away from where Twain stood, and it was quite difficult to catch his attention.

Fortunately for Twain, he had a transmitter on the pitch. Wood heard Twain's yells in the middle of the pitch, and he immediately called out to Cohen. Cohen then directed his gaze towards where Twain was.

"Go on the offense more!" Twain gestured to Cohen and he wanted him to stop focusing on defense.

Cohen nodded his head to signal that he understood.

After seeing that Cohen had understood his words, Twain began calling out to the other players.

"Rooney! Rooney! I want you to retreat backwards! Help out in the midfield!"

"Walcott, I want you to run forward whenever you get the ball! Go on the counter-attack!"

"George, be quicker with your passes!"

Italy would definitely press forward and attack now that they have equalized the score. They want that second goal that could potentially allow them to win the match. There is only one way for England to deal with the situation, and that is to play counter-attacking football. All they need is a chance, and they would be able to turn this match around. The situation is not dire just yet.

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The match resumed soon after, and just as Twain had predicted, Italy pressed forward and attacked England ferociously. They wanted to make use of the momentum of the match that had shifted in their favor to take the lead in the match. England was forced to retreat against Italy's attacks, and things looked bad for them for a while. Italy looked like they were going to score a goal at any time.

Both of Italy's fullbacks ran to the front to join in the attack, and this provided Italy with more attacking options. They attacked England down the flank and down the middle. England had no way of going on the counter-attack because they had their hands full from trying to defend against Italy's relentless attacks.

England's defense was not as tight as it used to be prior to Italy's goal. The England players were constantly worried about giving free kicks away, and this resulted in a lot more space for the Italy players to exploit.

Sebastian Giovinco tried to make his way past England's defense by making use of his flexibility and ball control. He noticed that George Wood had run up from the back to defend against him, but he did not choose to force his way past the England defenders. Instead, he cleverly passed the ball over to the middle of the pitch.

Daniele De Rossi was the player who received his pass, and he immediately raised his leg and did a long shot at goal!

Joe Hart pounced sideways towards the ball, and he fought hard to send De Rossi's powerful shot out of bounds.

The fans of both teams were no longer able to contain their wildly beating hearts after watching all that had happened on the pitch.

Italy was awarded a corner kick just one minute after scoring their previous goal.

The England fans could not help but be on tenterhooks every time Italy takes either a free kick or a corner kick. They had mocked Balotelli earlier, but it was clear that he had regained his form and was capable of taking both free kicks and corner kicks well now.

The sight of both Salvatore Foti and Giorgio Chiellini before England's goalpost left the England players in a state of anxiety. Both Foti and Chiellini are players who are good at headers, and now that Balotelli has regained his form, things might get really bad for England...

Everyone was under the impression that Balotelli would cross the ball into the middle of the penalty box. However, they were all wrong. Balotelli chose to pass the ball to De Rossi, who had run up to him to receive the ball.

A short corner!

Joe Hart saw De Rossi receive the ball, and he immediately bellowed, "Retreat backwards! Make them be ruled offside!"

The England players obediently retreated backwards in unison, and they were just like a tide. Everyone was worried that they would move too slowly and end up putting the Italy players onside. De Rossi passed the ball back to Balotelli who had run away from the corner flag. An England player raised his hand to suggest that Balotelli was offside, but both the assistant referee and the referee were unimpressed.

Balotelli raised his head to look at the penalty box after receiving the ball. The England players were still retreating backwards in an attempt to make him be deemed offside.

However, all hope was not lost yet. It was still possible for them to try and score a goal.

Balotelli keenly realized that his team's midfielder, Alberto Aquilani, had run up from the back as the England defenders retreated backwards...

Balotelli did not hesitate the moment he saw that, and he instantly crossed the ball into the penalty box. It was a perfectly placed pass, and the ball was sent into a space that Aquilani would run towards. Aquilani received the ball right as he was positioned between both Terry and Joe Mattock. He was not offside!

The entire England defense was in a state of chaos after Aquilani received the ball. It was clear that there was little use in trying to get Aquilani offside now... All the England players immediately charged towards the Italy player.

Joe Hart ran towards the ball the moment he saw Aquilani receive the pass from Balotelli. The angle in which Aquilani could make a shot was very narrow. All Joe Hart had to do was to try and block off the angle, and he should be able to stop Italy's attack.

The goalkeeper naturally assumed that the opposing player would choose to shoot at the goalpost the moment he received the ball. However, shooting was not on Aquilani's mind at all. He knew what he had to do the moment he saw Joe Hart rushing towards him.

He did not bother checking who was right before the goalpost. He simply passed the ball sideways towards the goal area.

None of the England players dared to stretch a leg out to deal with Aquilani's pass. They were all afraid of scoring an own goal...

But, there was one player who was not afraid!

Foti slid towards the ball. His foot reached the ball!

"Balotelli passed the ball over to De Rossi, and De Rossi passed the ball back to him. Balotelli then passes the ball into the penalty box... Aquilani! Aquilani has received the ball! There is no one marking him! Joe Hart has rushed towards him! A sideways pass! Well done! Aquilani's pass... Salvatore Foti..." The Italian commentator was just like a machine gun. He spoke extremely fast and there were no pauses in between. And, at the end, he went, "GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAL!!"

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Twain held his slightly wet tuxedo in his hands. He had taken it off after spilling water over it moments ago. After seeing that Italy had scored another goal within two minutes, he instantly threw his tuxedo onto the ground in a fit of rage.

"F*CK! F*CK! F*CK!" Twain was so furious that he cursed three times in a row.

Even the typically emotionless Lippi could not sit still this time round. He jumped from his seat and ran to the side of the pitch to hug his assistant manager Ferrara after seeing his team come back from behind to take the lead in the match.

Everyone at the Italy dugout were celebrating.

"2:1! 2:1! We are the ones in front! We are the ones in front!" The Italian commentator yelled at the top of his lungs. He was very emotional and there seemed to be a low sobbing tone in his voice.

He might have provided commentaries for countless matches in the past, but this finals match has been an emotional roller coaster ride for him. Italy was still trailing in the match a few minutes ago, but now, they have managed to turn the match around. He could not contain his excitement at that fact.

"Absolutely unbelievable... Italy has come back from behind and they are now in the lead! Both of their goals have come so fast that the England players were not even able to react!"

"What did we just see? The Italians have staged a comeback in just two minutes! They have come back from behind in this finals match!"

"Balotelli was definitely offside when he received the ball from De Rossi!" Motson believed that the goal should be disallowed because Balotelli was in an offside position prior to the goal being scored.

There were numerous England players who felt the same way as Motson. They crowded around the referee to protest that Balotelli was offside when he received the ball from De Rossi.

The referee shook his head in response to their protests. He did not change his judgement.

A slow motion replay of the moment where Balotelli received the ball from De Rossi was displayed on the screen at the stadium, and it was shown that Balotelli was not in an offside position when he received the ball. He would have been if De Rossi had passed the ball to him a fraction of a second later.

Italy's goal was a clean goal. There were no problems whatsoever.

There were still several England players who refused to give up in their fight, and they continued to protest to the referee. The rest of the England players, on the other hand, stood rooted on the pitch and looked to be at a complete loss...

Chapter 974: Five Minutes

When Italy scored the first goal, they still brought the football back to the center circle, hoping for the match to restart as soon as possible. However, when they scored the second goal, they simply embraced each other in their celebrations. The football was sitting alone in the goal and nobody cared about it.

That was because they were leading then, and they were the ones who needed to waste time.

Twain merely cursed a little on the sideline before recovering from the negative emotions of conceding a goal. He stood on the sideline and kept waving his hand, indicating for his players to bring the ball to the center circle and prepare to restart the match.

To the England team, there was really no time to lose...

Without counting injury time, they had only less than 18 minutes left.

"England is in a difficult situation now. From one goal up to trailing by one goal. Let's see what Tony Twain has planned for the last 20 minutes!"

What plans could he have? It was nothing more than attacking more and be wary of the Italians' counterattack.

Italy knew that England would be attacking now that they were trailing. They had the initiative and they could retreat and play on the counter, which was what Lippi and Italy were best at.

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The England players did not perform up to standard from the start of the match up till now. Many of them were dealt a heavy blow after conceding two goals in two minutes. The goals came too quickly and all of them were not prepared for it...

In the match afterwards, they did not demonstrate the "increased offense" that Twain asked them for, instead, they stayed in their own half, not knowing what to do.

The Italians wanted to make use of the opportunity to attack while the English had not reacted yet and get another goal to seal the match. They surrounded the England penalty area and dispatched balls after balls into it. For a moment, Joe Hart became the busiest player in the England team.

"Long shot by De Rossi! Not far wide..."

"Giovinco with the ball...he's through! What a move! He shoots... Saved by Joe Hart..."

“Long shot by Paloschi, over the bar... He should have passed the ball to Foti at the side...”

“Balotelli is not backing off against George Wood, he’s trying to get past him... Foul by Wood! Free kick! Great, Italy has another free kick!”

Wood could only shake his head helplessly at the current situation. He is not superman and no matter how well an individual performs; it is pointless if the team does not support him.

He was furious at the current situation. Were they going to give up just like that?

Balotelli had another chance to take a free kick and the Italy fans were filled with anticipation. They hoped to see Balotelli scoring twice with free kicks. These people had totally forgotten that they had complained about Lippi sending him on to “waste chances”.

“Super Mario! Super Mario!! Oh oh!” The Italy fans were chanting Balotelli’s name in the stands.

The England fans got nervous as the Italy fans chanted. They were trying to disrupt Balotelli with their jeers, but they did not know whether it was effective at all...

Twain stood on the sideline and bit his lips as he stared at Balotelli on the pitch. His heart was pounding rapidly beyond control, but he could not care much about his heart now.

Balotelli took a run-up and kicked... The ball flew over the wall straight towards the goal. Joe Hart did his best to dive towards the ball, but he was not able to touch it. The ball did not drop into the goal, flying over the cross bar instead.

That was close!

Twain gave a long sigh of relief. There were thousands of England fans who did the same.

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At the 80th minute mark, England’s attack did not get better. On the other hand, Italy were doing better as they were more relaxed after taking the lead and they were able to perform all sorts of combinations.

The England fans watching from England stared at the television screen for fear of missing out on any scene that might be the crucial moment that changed the direction of the final match.

England’s performance disappointed them a little, but they did not give up hope. After all, there were 10 more minutes to go in the match and they were only one goal down. There was still hope.

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Lippi took a look at his watch and saw that 80 minutes had already gone by. He looked at the situation on the pitch and decided to play it safe. If they continued to attack like this and there was a weakness in defense that England took advantage of to score, then everything would be over... Tony Twain was a sly one, how could it be possible for him not to do anything at the final moment?

He walked to the sideline and indicated to his players in the pitch to drop back and focus on defense. They would be victorious if they could drag till the end of the match.

The England players felt the pressure on them lessen and they knew that it was the final moment.

The Italians have dropped back, what should we do? There's almost no need to think at all, we must attack of course!

Twain stood on the sideline and called out to Vaughan. It had been 10 minutes since he was substituted in but he did not perform at all...

"James! Do you remember your task?!"

Vaughan remembered of course. However, his team was being suppressed in their own penalty area, they had no chance to counterattack at all. No matter how good he was, there was no way he could score from his own penalty area...

In fact, even if Twain did not remind him, he knew it was time to perform. Agbonlahor started the match and he got a goal. Yet he had not made any contribution even though he was expected to be starting the game. If England was to lose the match, then it would undoubtedly be his responsibility... People would start thinking: If Agbonlahor was still on the pitch, would they have still lost the match?

Lippi was also a little surprised that Twain only brought Vaughan on in the final 20 minutes. However, his team managed to comeback afterwards, so he did not mind so much. There was only 10 minutes left in this match, if they could hold on, even if Twain brought 11 Maradonas on, it would not have mattered.

Lippi brought in defender Fabiano Santacroce for Giovinco next as Giovinco did not have the stamina to continue and to strengthen the defense. Italy was playing a 5-3-2 formation now and the three center backs did not give England any chance to attack.

In the last 10 minutes, Italy started to use all the tricks in the book to waste time.

They would fall whenever someone touched them and they would take their time to get up. In the span of two minutes, there were three players who went to ground because of cramps.

Twain was furious about that and he kept protesting with the fourth official. The fourth official was powerless as well, "We can't possibly pull them to their feet using force, right?"

"Why not?! They're obviously wasting time!" Twain glared at the fourth official. If he was the one playing, he would have grabbed the players on the ground and dragged them out of the pitch when faced with such a situation...

The fourth official had no way to deal with this unreasonable manager, and he decided to stop talking and not waste his breath.

Twain did not care about his image now. He had already thrown his suit on the ground and did not pick it up—The tie that he had on was already off, the top button of his shirt was undone, sleeves rolled up, the back of his shirt and his forehead were wet with his sweat. He looked exactly like a gambler who had lost too much.

On the other hand, Lippi was calm as a cucumber. One still could not see any expression on his face. It was as if he was neither worried about Italy nor was he happy about having the lead. This elderly gentleman did not even have a hair out of place. His full head of silver hair were hugging his head and the gold-rimmed glasses he had on reflected the lights above and nobody could see his eyes.

These two were ice and fire, a stark contrast and it was especially eye-catching.

Twain was not someone who would only vent his frustration at the fourth official. He called Bentley on the bench and brought him on in place of Gerrard. England then changed their formation to 433 with Walcott on the flank and Vaughan in the middle alone.

When Italy made the substitution, their player took their time to get off. Gerrard jogged all the way to the sideline and gave Bentley a high five and the substitution was completed. Not a single second was wasted.

The commentator from China saw that Twain changed his formation to 433 and said, "He is going for broke here. Twain doesn't seem to be considering about anything else now."

Whether it was extra time or penalty kicks, it would be dumb for him to be thinking about those now. If they did not score, there would not be extra time, and there would definitely not be any penalty kicks!

Bentley shouted to his teammates after he got on, "Boss asked me to tell you guys, the final is only these five minutes!" He stretched out five fingers. It was the 85th minute now, Twain did not even think about injury time or anything else.

It was as if an alarm bell rang in the minds of the England players. "The final is only these five minutes" immediately brought an urgency into them and all of them started to focus. We've fought so hard all the way here, how can we lose right in front of the trophy?

Even Terry went beyond the halfway line. He was not thinking about defense at all now.

England's attacks were like waves of water gushing towards the Italy goal.

"James Vaughan with the header... It's too straight!"

"Long shot from George Wood! Too high! What a pity...maybe he should have been calmer..."

"Walcott has broken through and the pass from him! Wayne Rooney with the shot!"

Rooney's shot hit the near post, bounced back to Chiellini and just when the ball was going to bounce into the goal, Amelia punched the ball out and the Italians broke out in cold sweat.

England had a corner and the two center backs, Terry and Taylor went towards the Italy goal. When Bentley took the corner, Terry jumped for a diving header!

The ball flew towards the near post and just when it was about to cross the goal line, Amelia miraculously got a hand to the ball through two people and got it away!

No goal again!

Balotelli got the ball and he wanted to hit England on the break, but his ball was intercepted by Wood. After intercepting the ball, Wood turned and passed the ball to the front. It was lucky that Italy was not really planning to counterattack, otherwise Wood would definitely be overwhelmed there.

After regaining possession, England passed the ball to Cohen on the other flank. When it came to penetrative power, Cohen was not as impressive as Walcott, that was why he crossed the ball directly. This time, the cross was caught by Amelia. The attacks by England stopped for a moment.

During this suffocating attack, the match had reached the 89th minute.

Ever since Bentley was brought on, Twain remained stagnant on the sideline, not moving at all, just like a statue.

In his management career, he had seen his fair share of times like this. Sometimes, his team would level the match and even comeback to win it. Sometimes, his team would not create any miracle and they would watch the team lose the match.

What would be the result this time?

Next to him, the fourth official walked out with the board. At the same time, there was an Italian defender walking behind him. Twain took a glance at him and understood that there was only one objective to making a substitution now——To waste time and let time slip away here.

Paloschi took his time walking off the pitch, turning back a few times every step, shaking the hand of a teammate, then hugging another before turning one round with his arms raised to thank the fans... Twain gritted his teeth in anger when he witnessed this, he protested loudly on the touchline, “Why don’t you crawl out? Damn Italian! You ballless turtle, bastard!”

Too bad Paloschi did not understand Twain’s English which had a thick accent. The referee also noticed that he was deliberately wasting time and such an obvious intention could not be tolerated... He rushed forward and showed Paloschi a yellow card.

This yellow card gave Paloschi an excuse to waste even more time. He showed his displeasure at this and protested to the referee, intending to waste even more time.

Paloschi was almost at the sideline now and Lorenzo De Silverstri, who was waiting to get onto the pitch was just a step away. He was in no hurry to get on though and he wanted to wait for Paloschi to tag him in.

Twain could not tolerate the timewasting tactics of the Italian any longer. He took one step forward, grabbed Paloschi by the arm and dragged Paloschi out of the pitch!

Paloschi was about to lose his temper when he got dragged out by Twain, but when he saw Twain glaring at him, the fierce look on his face gave him a stare and he could not say what he wanted to say... He knew he was in the wrong and he could only complete the substitution with Silverstri under the watchful eye of Twain before walking towards the Italy bench.

Twain’s action brought him a lecture from the referee of course, but he did not care. If the referee did not want to punish them, he would do it on their behalf!

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Right after the substitution was completed, the fourth official put down the electronic board, pressed a few buttons on it and raised it again. This time, it was to announce the amount of injury time.

“Five minutes of injury time!”

Boos rang out from the England fans as they thought that five minutes of injury time were way too little for the time that Italy wasted. It should have been 10 minutes of injury time!

The Italy fans were similarly unhappy with the five minutes of injury time—It was too long! A customary three minutes of injury time should be sufficient...

Twain raised five fingers towards the bench.

Chapter 975: One Minute

Michael Bernard had never been so fretful as he was today. Even in the face of difficulties from his clients and official duties that came out of the blue, he always coped with them with ease. His subordinates would be full of confidence when they saw the polite smile on his face. That no matter what difficulties there were, he would certainly be able to deal with them.

But it was different today.

During noon time, he locked himself in his office and specifically instructed the secretary not to let anyone disturb himself. Then he planned to watch the game live on the Internet. But it was unfortunate that he was called into a discussion by his boss just when he was going to do it.

It was a disaster. What was even more tragic was that his boss came to him in high spirits this time to talk to him, telling him that the company intended to promote him to the next level and that he might be entrusted with a heavy responsibility. He did not dare to refuse to attend such a discussion and he also did not dare show any impatience during the conversation... even though he was really impatient.

Looking at his boss across from him, he really had such an impulse: to pick up the heavy glass ashtray on the table, put it over his head, and then make a dash for the door to run to watch the game. As for his job...how could this be the time to think about it?

The unexpected conversation made him realize one thing – that he still could not let go of football in his heart. He thought he had forgotten, but in actual fact, he had not. He only buried it in the deepest part of his heart, so deep where he himself could not even detect it. Until today, the rush to watch the UEFA European Championship had woke him up as if he had been in a dream.

He was only able to leave when his boss had covered the matters of proper business. Looking at the watch on his wrist, it was less than five minutes to go until the end of the 90-minute game.

He trotted all the way to the elevator, and discovered the elevator was still ten stories away. Looking at his watch again, he did not have the time to wait for the elevator here, so he simply rushed to the stairwell next to it. He skipped and hopped down the stairs as he ran.

Although it was only a few minutes, he did not want to give up just like that. His feelings for English football had faded, and the only team in his life that had impassioned him was Nottingham Forest. He just wanted to see how his old friend would look like, standing on the most dazzling stage of the international tournament.

I don't know if he still has that kind of arrogance, ha!

Like a whirlwind, Michael whooshed past the papers and documents on the tables on either side of the aisle and dashed into his own office under the surprised gazes of his subordinates, not forgetting to shut the door.

Flying over to his desk, Michael eagerly opened a link to the live stream and began to wait impatiently for the streaming to load.

The quality of the online network in the United States was very good. The online broadcast took only ten seconds to get on, and it was very smooth.

Still breathing raggedly, his eyes were fixed on the computer screen and he almost forgot to breathe.

In the player, the first scene he saw was the fourth official standing on the sidelines, holding up the signboard for the injury stoppage time: 5.

“Five minutes of injury stoppage time!” The ESPN commentator informed Michael, who had just opened the broadcast, in English. “And England is still 1:2 behind, leaving only five minutes for them. I can’t imagine how Twain’s team can salvage the situation...”

In between the commentary, the camera was aimed at the England team’s manager, Tony Twain, who was standing in front of the technical area.

Michael saw his old friend whom he had not seen in a long time, but he did not see his face, because the first sight he had was of Tony Twain’s back. The man was standing on the sidelines with his arms around his chest, and the back of his white shirt was drenched with perspiration.

The live broadcast did not give him a direct close-up of his face, because the game on the field had entered the white-hot stage. The camera only panned to Twain’s back once and then turned back to the field.

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“The England team is in trouble. With five minutes into the injury stoppage time, they must seize it or it’s all over! But can they grab the opportunity offered by the five minutes? Or can it be said...that how much time can the Italians give them? For it is the Italian team that’s holding the ball now!”

“Are we going to let them just pass the ball back and forth at the back? That’s not going to work!” Vaughn rushed up and wanted to intercept the ball in the front field.

Chiellini rushed to pass the football to Silvestri next to him.

But Silvestri had just come on the field. Both his legs had not even fully warmed up from running and all of a sudden, he received a pass from his teammate. He stopped the ball with a slightly bigger movement. Like a shark that had smelled blood, Rooney appeared in front of him in an instant. At this point, he could not even think about continuing to control the ball at his feet. In order not to make a mistake, Silvestri directly sent the ball with a long pass.

England finally got possession of the ball. It was less than five minutes away at this point. They had to hurry up and attack.

The Italians also did not have the strength to interfere in the front field. After 90 minutes of fierce fighting, their physical strength was lacking. In order not to have anything go wrong, they chose to retreat to the back half of the field to defend. Lippi did not care how pathetic his team would look in the last few minutes, as long as they could hold on. Then the final victory would be his.

England was a little at a loss with an Italian team that even had its strikers retreated to the front of the penalty area to defend. After passing the ball horizontally several times in a row, there was still no suitable opportunity for a straight pass. The somewhat anxious Bentley simply did a long shot from the flank that was outrageously deflected ...

The Italian fans in the stands warmly applauded his shot, thanking him for helping to waste an attacking opportunity for England.

Twain was no longer as restless as before. He was indifferent on the sidelines to Bentley's blind long shot. He did not make any rueful action and did not yell. It was as if it was not his team that was trailing behind. Perhaps it should be said that at present he had run out of ideas. As a manager, he had done all that he could. He could not possibly go on the field and help the team play?

What happened after would depend on the performance of the players.

For example, James Vaughan had not been able to achieve anything since he came on.

Vaughan himself was also unhappy with it – he complained that he was not put into good use before he came on whereas Agbonlahor, who was his substitute, had scored a goal. But when he had a chance to play and the team was in danger, he did not contribute, which was really unacceptable.

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“We need to score goals! Rooney! Vaughn! And Walcott, what are you all doing?”

In pubs across Britain, countless people stared at the screens, asking such questions. Twain had used all three substitutions, and there was nothing else he could do after.

“What else can we do at this point? We can't go up there and help them score goals, but we can inspire them with our songs!” John fervently pleaded to his friends in the stands at the Bernabéu, “Guys, sing with me – Saint George blesses England! Saint George blesses England——!”

“Saint George blesses England!!”

The song came out of everyone's mouth, as if rivers flowing into the ocean, and ultimately forming the momentum of stormy waves beating against the shore.

At this point, the England fans became the absolute masters of the stands, and the voices of the Italians were completely suppressed by them.

However, it seemed their singing did not help. England failed to threaten Italy's goal in the first three minutes of the injury stoppage time.

“The Italian team proves itself worthy and so is Lippi. Their defense has left Tony Twain's England team at a loss. The Italian team is a little closer to their second ever UEFA European Championship, while the England team, leading at first, is moving further away from their first UEFA European Championship title. It is a reality that has left England fans dispirited and saddened...”

It was not known if anyone else thought so, but John and the other fans in his section did not give up singing due to it.

Even Motson was a little frustrated and said, "Perhaps only the gods that come from the heavens can save us... Such a reality is so cruel. Who would have thought we were still one goal ahead twenty minutes ago?"

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The injury stoppage time had officially entered in the fourth minute.

Now the two managers had no other cards on hand. All they could do was to watch the game at the side. Lippi also got up from his seat and walked slowly to the sidelines. During such a tense moment, even he, who had experienced numerous storms, could no longer sit still.

The outcome of the game was almost finalized.

George Wood was holding the ball. He was under little defensive pressure because he was in a position that was relatively closer at the back while the Italian players had retreated even further back. There was a long distance between the two parties. The cautious Italians did not rush up to intercept the ball. They did not want to give the England team a chance to play behind them.

Wood gave the ball to Bentley on the sideline. Bentley then sent out a long pass to give the ball to Chris Cohen on the other side.

It seemed that England could still only pass horizontally across so pointlessly and were unable to send the football to the front.

Chris Cohen got his leg up to cross the ball, which Rooney struggled to get the ball, but the ball flew off out of the end line when it struck Criscito's body.

The England team quickly send out a corner ball, which was a tactical kick. Wood came forward to receive and pass the ball back to the full back, Joe Mattock, who rushed forward. Mattock faced Balotelli's defense. After a feint to grab the ball, he wanted to break through, only to be knocked to the ground by Balotelli.

The referee's whistle sounded, and the England team was awarded a low-angled free kick on the left side of the Italian goal. It was more like a closer 30-degree corner kick.

At this point, every place kick had the possibility of cracking open the opponent's goal. Terry and Taylor were all pressed forward. Even Joe Hart was restless and wanted to rush up and score a goal for the team.

Bentley was a right-footed player. Rightfully speaking, the free kick should be crossed over at this angle and would make more sense for a left-footed player to kick it. But for a right-footed player to carry out a free kick on the left, it had another function.

Bentley put the football in place and got up to walk away. He waited for the referee's whistle.

"It's an inner curve ball! Be careful of their plug-ins from the back!!" The goalkeeper, Amelia shouted in front of the goal, urging his teammates to step up on the defense.

At this point, the players on both sides were concentrated near the penalty spot and did not huddle in front of the goal like it was a corner kick. It was obviously to let the player carrying out the penalty shot

to kick the football toward the goal, rather than to swerve the ball outside, and then for the group of people in the middle to plug in from the back and simply rush to do a header to break the goal. And because those players who were defending also had to rush toward the goal with the attacking players, it was somewhat difficult to let them shake their heads to put the football in the opposite direction in the process ... Even if no one could head the football, it would continue to follow the established trajectory straight to the back corner of the goal. As long as Amelia was momentarily blocked by anyone in the whole process, and lost the decisive opportunity and due judgment, it might lead to the football flying directly to the goal.

That was the advantage of having a right-footed player execute a place kick on the left side and for a left-footed player kicked a place kick from the right.

How could the Italians not possibly see such obvious tactics? The Italians stepped up their guarding of the England's players. They were even willing to use the pulling and tugging of the football jerseys to stop their attack.

Everyone turned their attention toward Bentley's shot in the air.

George Wood stood next to Bentley without attracting any attention. Although Wood had used a free kick combination to score a goal in the game against France, the free kick's position was directly in front of the penalty area on the penalty area line. The angle of the shot was very good. Now that the football was at about thirty degrees angle from the goal, Amelia could easily seal the angle. A volley shot would not work here.

In the penalty area, the England players and the Italian players were entangled together, with one side trying to get away and the other side struggling to stick to them. Both sides were unwilling to give in. But the England players had their own little plan – it did not matter, let them pull. When the ball comes out, we just need to follow the momentum and fall. Maybe it will yield a penalty kick?

The referee retreated from the penalty area and he blew the whistle to kick off the free kick.

Bentley did not pass the ball straight into the penalty area after he ran up to kick, but instead pushed the ball aside!

Wood, standing on the side, rushed up, picked up his left foot and directly volleyed the football straight in!

From Amelia, to the striker, Foti, Italy's eleven players had put the center of gravity of their defense in the air. No one expected the football to roll along the turf toward the goal!

Could it really be a direct shot at the goal?

Amelia turned pale with fright and quickly dropped his center of gravity. He hunkered down and tried to pounce on the ball by throwing himself sideways.

At the same time, the penalty area was like the Royal Ascot with warning shots fired. The Italian and English players fought hard to be the first and rushed toward the goal.

In fact, it was not a shot to the goal, but a cross pass. It was a Wood-style pass. The football rushed to the far corner of the goal. During the process, as long as someone touched it, then it would be...

Rooney, in the front position, did not manage to kick the football under Criscito's interference. He narrowly missed the football. Wood's powerful "volley shot" was indeed too fast. The chance to shoot was fleeting.

Walcott and Terry, both in the middle, also did not touch the football either. Instead, it bumped into Chiellini and Di Natale and made a mess.

This multiple collision also interfered with Amelia. When he managed to shake free of the situation in front of him and got ready to make a save after much difficulty, he realized it was too late!

In the chaotic penalty area, people outside could not see exactly what was going on. But only a white figure could be seen suddenly sprang out of the crowd as if it were a flashing cold dagger. Then the football was seen changing direction all of a sudden just a step away from the goal and rolling over the goal line!

It was a really unexpected scene. No one thought this free kick could actually turn into a goal!

"What? What...what a great GOOOOOOOAL!!!"

John Motson, who was still somewhat dejected just now, was instantly revived.

"What are we seeing here? A miracle that's happening! England has equalized the score in the fourth and ten seconds of the injury stoppage time!! Who has scored the goal? Or is it simply an own ball?!"

Just when he was still baffled, one person rushed out of the crowd in front of the Italian goal, and it was James Vaughan wearing the white jersey!

As he ran toward the corner flag, he lifted his jersey in front of the camera lens, revealing the T-shirt which he had long prepared, that read, "We're with you, Aaron!"

"This ball is for you, Aaron!" He shouted to the camera as he pointed to the T-shirt on his chest.

"James Vaughan! James Vaughan!! He saved England!! He saved Tony Twain's heart!!!"

Motson roared so hard that he almost lost his voice.

"What just happened? The ball has gone in? The England team has equalized the score?" The Italian commentator asked three questions in a row. The shock in his mind was unmistakable. "Good God, what's going on here?!"

The thunderous cheers from the England fans in the stands answered him, "Long live! James Vaughan! All hail! Saint George!"

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Amelia laid on the ground with his hands outstretched to form a large shape. At this time, he did not even have the strength to get up. He only felt that he lacked energy and his entire body's strength was drawn away with this goal concede.

What was going on? His brain was still unclear up to this moment.

How did this happen?

It was perhaps also a common question among countless Italians.

Lippi stood on the sidelines and watched helplessly as the football rolled into the goal. His face was still expressionless.

Next door, Tony Twain jumped from the ground and waved his fists hard, as if he were about to yank his arms off to celebrate the goal.

His heart that had just beat faster in his chest suddenly slowed down, and his breathing was no longer ragged.

It was an escape from calamity...

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Vaughn yelled at the camera near the corner flag, followed by the equally excited players behind him. The score was equalized at the final crucial moment of the game, so they wanted to celebrate it well.

But someone interrupted their celebration.

George Wood stormed into the Italian goal and snatched the ball away from Santon with a lightning move of the hand. Then he shouted at his teammates, still in the corner flag area, "The game is not over yet!"

Seeing him like this, Lippi, who had remained immovable, suddenly felt a chill in the intense heat – he's truly a frightening guy ...

Lippi felt that even if the two sides tied for the game, it was not unacceptable. At least with 30 minutes left, he could make adjustments again and drag the game into the penalty shootout for the Italians would not suffer. But George Wood obviously did not think so. He wanted the game to end in 95 minutes!

Even with one second left, the game was not over for him yet.

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"YES!" Michael waved his fists at the monitor. Vaughan's last-minute goal was so thrilling that it made him, a man located as far away as the United States, felt impassioned.

Meanwhile, in pubs of all sizes in Britain.

Golden colored beer sprayed over everyone's head, and countless beers were tossed into the air.

"Cheers to England!!"

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Vaughn wanted to turn around and hug Wood, who had helped him with the attack, but he saw Wood waving to him to signal to get back on the field.

He was a little surprised by his action. Was it not enough to tie the score?

There was not much time left. What else did he want to do? Did he still want to score a goal?

Before he could think about it further, he was swept along by his teammates back to the field to prepare for the remaining game.

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Lippi only paused on the sidelines for a while before he turned around and went back. He had to talk to Ferrara about the tactical strategy for the overtime.

Similarly, Twain called Walker to his side and began to prepare for the overtime as well as even the penalty shootout.

“We must curb their morale! We will storm to attack in the first half of the overtime!” Lippi himself might not have noticed that the volume of his voice had been unwittingly raised by a lot. He was clearly in a very emotional state. He said, “Take back the initiative of the game in our hands. Tell them, don’t rush and don’t panic. With a few dozen seconds left in the game, England must be thinking about playing overtime!”

“This damn five-minute break...” Twain complained that the game was coming to an end while England’s hard to come by high morale could suffer a loss due to the five-minute short break. “Well, let’s put this aside... The game is bound to head into overtime and we have to be ready. Tell them don’t get besides themselves with joy during the break. The Italians are still very strong. Thirty minutes of overtime is like giving them a tranquilizer... Son of a bitch!” He still could not help but swear.

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The two managers were racking their brains off the field for the sudden additional 30 minutes in the game, hoping to overwhelm each other and continue to take the initiative in their own hands.

Meantime, on the field, Wood seized the last bit of time to tell his teammates what to do next.

“I don’t want to play overtime, not even for a minute. They will think we’d accept the outcome...” He pointed to the opposite side and said, “We’re going to surprise them.”

“But what are we going to do to score another goal? There’s no time, George...” Terry was doubtful.

“I don’t know too...” Wood was honest and shook his head to answer. If he was not familiar with his temper, Terry would have really thought that he was joking before...

But as the captain, he must have been using this method to boost morale, right? It is not really that he cannot accept a draw. In fact, a draw is actually a good result. At least we don’t lose the game in 90 minutes. Now there are still thirty minutes left, we can rouse ourselves and make a comeback.

That was what Terry thought. Wood did not really want to score a third goal. He just talked big to keep everyone’s morale up.

The football was rearranged by Wood on the center circle for the kickoff, with James Vaughan and Wayne Rooney standing outside the center circle, waiting for the Italians to come up to kick off.

Vaughn became a hero, but now he did not have the energy to think about how a hero should be treated. Because the game was not over yet. It was only a tie. The captain was right in that the game was not over yet.

Lippi stood on the sidelines, yelling at the Italian players inside, "Keep the football under your feet, don't send out any long balls easily! Drag out the time to the end!!"

At this time, his original meticulous silver hair had been messed up because of his fierce movements. His gentlemanly manners had long gotten away from him. England's equalizer in the final minute gave the cunning silver fox a taste of danger. Years of experience told him that they should absolutely not think about scoring a goal again to take the lead at this time. It was what a dangerous "risk-taker" would do. There was only less than a minute left in the game anyways. There was only hope of winning the game going into overtime. In his original tactics, there was a deployment targeted for overtime.

Twain did not rush to the sidelines to shout because he felt it was foolish to run to yell nonsense since the game was bound to be dragged into overtime.

The Italian forwards, Foti and Balotelli had come up to prepare for the kickoff. They had already been given the latest instructions from the manager that the game would continue to be played in overtime.

The likes of Vaughan, Rooney and Walcott, who were waiting in front, suddenly heard the voice coming from behind.

"Go up and make a grab for it! Don't mind the defense. Go grab their ball!" It was George Wood! He urged, "Get the ball and we will have one more chance to attack!"

With a whistle from the referee, Balotelli knocked the ball to Foti, who then sent the ball back. Meanwhile, George Wood was the first to rush up. Vaughan and Rooney were slightly behind. Then Walcott, Bentley, Cohen, Joe Mattock, Richards... and the other people all rushed to the Italian team's half of the field. They only have one mission which was to grab the ball!

Like the "monkey in the middle" game played during training, the Italian players were passing the ball back and forth in the backfield while the England players seemingly act like they were rookies playing professional football for the first time, giving chase to the ball without any counterpoint defense.

The scene looked slightly comical.

The England fans in the stands were booing as they were unhappy with Italy's cowardly action. They could be eager for the Italians to send the football directly to the feet of the England team.

In such a situation, Twain could only secretly swear for he had no other ideas.

It was the England players who were anxious on the field.

If the football was allowed to pass back and forth at the feet of the Italian players, then the referee might not wait for the injury stoppage time to really be up before he blow the whistle to end the game. That was not what they wanted to see.

Vaughn did a dangerous slide shovel, but he did not shovel the ball, nor did he shovel anyone. De Rossi dodged his rash tackle and passed the football to Aquilani next to him. Aquilani, facing Rooney's closing down on him, passed the ball to Chiellini behind him. Chiellini then passed to Santon on the right side.

Joe Mattock rushed up and Santon passed the ball to De Rossi in front. No matter how the England team fought, the football was always at the feet of the Italian players. In terms of the footwork skills alone, the Italians were indeed better than the English.

But when it came to interception of the ball, England's best man had not made his move yet.

Wood had been checking out the referee. Although he had not looked at the watch so far, there was little time left for England.

De Rossi took the ball again and this time, he passed to Balotelli in the middle. At the same time, Wood followed suit. In the face of his club's captain, Balotelli was not afraid, he even decided to bypass Wood, and then pass the ball again. But the next second he discovered how stupid the idea was. Wood pounced quickly and basically did not give him any time to show his footwork skills.

Helplessly, Balotelli had to turn around quickly and guard the football in front of him while blocking Wood with his back. He thought this would save the football for a while, but he did not expect Wood to suddenly extend his leg from the side to jab the football!

Balotelli watched Wood skirt around him to give chase to the ball. He hurriedly reached his hand out to yank in a panic. Originally, it would have been impossible for Wood to give up his pursuit of football in the face of such a pull. But when he found out that it was Aquilani the front of the football while he was yanked by Balotelli, it was probably not enough for him to reach the football, so he calculated in his mind.

Balotelli naturally pulled Wood with all his strength, but Wood's fall to the ground was a little too smooth...

The referee's whistle followed closely.

"Balotelli has fouled! England is awarded a free kick in front of goal! This can very well be England's last chance to attack!" In actual fact, the injury stoppage time had long gone for more than five minutes. But the England team had scored a goal earlier. The celebration of the goal and waiting for the Italian team to come forward to kick off had delayed the time a little. Although the fourth official did not raise the signboard again, the little bit of time still had to be added accordingly."

The atmosphere on the pitch was not tense, because everyone's mind was currently thinking about overtime, not the game at present. Even John Motson began to speculate about what tactics the two managers would use in overtime.

After Gerrard was brought off the game and even though Bentley could also carry out the free kick, the current free kick was somewhat special – 32 meters from the goal. If he wanted to shoot directly at the goal, Bentley's leg power could not reach that far. He could only choose to pass the ball.

Bentley had the same plan when he carried the football over.

But someone stopped him.

"If you kick the ball out, the game is over." Wood stopped him halfway.

Bentley looked at the captain and could not understand what he meant by that.

Wood took the football from his arms and said, "I'll do it."

This remark greatly surprised Bentley. He and Wood had been teammates at Nottingham Forest for many years, but he had never seen Wood practice free kicks because his free kicks were not good at all. He himself was aware of it, so he never asked to carry out a free kick during a game.

Why did he suddenly want to execute the penalty in the final moments of the game?

Bentley kept guessing and could only take it that Wood wanted to get a kick out of it. Anyway, it was the last attack and the chances of a goal were too small.

So, he allowed Wood to take away his right to carry out the place kick.

Looking at Wood place the football on the ground, Twain also wondered: Could it be that he was going to kick the ball himself? What did that mean?

Lippi saw Wood prepare for the penalty shot and he had no more worries on his mind – the game looked certain to head into overtime.

“George Wood? It looks like England is going to give up this last chance to attack, ha!” The Italian commentator was no longer flustered.

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The Italian players were forming a human wall. The ball was indeed a little far away from the goal. The human wall did not line up with five or six people. There was only four people blocking in front of Wood. The referee looked at his watch and prepared for after the free kick was played. He was going to blow the whistle to signal the end of the game, no matter what the outcome was.

Thinking that they were going to play overtime soon, there were not as many English players going on the attack as there were before.

The stands suddenly quieted down. Regardless of whether they were the England fans or Italian fans, they both chose to shut up. Maybe the endless fighting for 95 minutes had exhausted them at the end. Maybe it was because they felt it was a critical moment, for fear of any noise disturbing them.

Equally quiet as they were, were also the fans of the two countries in front of the televisions as well as Michael Bernard, located as far away as the United States.

Sophia could not watch the game live at the stadium. She sat at home, staring fixedly at the television screen with both her hands clasped together as if she was praying to God.

In such a quiet environment, it seemed that everyone’s heartbeat could be heard.

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Wood put the football in place, which was in a blink of an eye. However, so much had happened around him that it felt like another 90 minutes had passed.

The Italian human wall did not step forward. They thought the ball was too far away and it was going to be kicked by Wood. So, it was not really a threat.

Wood set the ball and began to pull back to help with the run-up distance.

He did not take two steps and stop. Instead, he kept backing until he was almost at the center circle. The distance to run up was about ten meters.

Could it be that he wanted to take a leaf out of the long-retired Roberto Carlos, Brazil's left-back and master of powerful free kicks?

Wood looked at the football ten meters away and the human wall further afield, as well as the goal at the end of the path. At this time, he recalled something that happened a long time ago. At the time, Demi had not yet retired and was still playing at the Forest team. Twain had asked Wood to follow Demi to learn how to be a good midfielder. So Wood was often with Demi, including when Demi was having extra practices on free kicks. He was never far from his side.

He had revealed the idea of trying to practice free kicks at the time, but he dropped the idea since he did not have the talent. But Demi said something that deeply impressed him. It was what Demi had advised him when Wood wanted to master Albertini's banana kick. He said, "I have my own style and Beckham has another. There are many styles of free kicks, George. A powerful volley shot is also a style of ..."

A powerful volley shot was also a style!

The referee blew the whistle, signaling that Wood could make the penalty kick.

Wood took a deep breath and then stomped his feet hard. Following which, he leaned his body forward and adopted a stance to start a 100-meter sprint. His entire body's muscles contracted and tightened. And he launched like a cheetah in the next second!

The distance of ten meters was covered in a flash. He had already rushed to the front of the football. His left foot stamped firmly at the side of the ball and his left hand swung out, drawn in a circle, while he picked up his right foot. The power traveled up from the ground through his left foot and right foot respectively and the strength from the left foot was then amplified by the waving of his left hand. He twisted to the right at the waist, combining the force from the left and right sides which directly sped up to the arch of his right foot.

In the end, the force which came from the ground reached its final destination –

Wood's right leg was like a whip, and the arch of his foot was the tip of the whip, pumping the ball hard.

The football shot to the sky as if it had been shot out by a cannon and whizzed forward.

The people nearest in distance were the Italian team's human wall. They only felt a gust of wind blowing over their heads and the football flew past them.

The whizzing sound emitted by the football's friction over the air sounded like an alarm, ringing out over the Italian team's defensive zone.

WARNING! WARNING!! WARNING!!!

With the sound of "whizz-", the football had already flown into the penalty area.

Amelia began to move once he saw the football went over the top of the human wall, ready to pounce. When the football flew into the penalty area, he jumped and made a saving action.

But a terrible thought suddenly emerged from his mind – I may not get to the ball...

“Wow!” The image of the football in his eyes did not gradually magnify, but it was as if it suddenly expanded, twice over, and then doubling again. Now it was close at hand, but his hands were not in place yet.

“Crap...”

It was the only thought in his mind as the football flew over his defense.

Soon after, in the quiet pitch, he heard the rustling of the football brushing against the net, as well as the gasps of his Italian teammates.

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The people outside the field only saw a white line piercing through almost half of the pitch, then crashed head-on into the goal and lifted the net.

The first people to react were the England fans in the stands. They jumped from their seats with their hands raised high. The deafening cheers from the crowd broke the silence of the stadium.

It was closely followed by John Motson who had also woken up from a trance and was extremely thrilled as he shouted, “Saint George! Saint George! Oh my God, what just happened? What do I feel like I’m dreaming? Is it true? Did the football really enter the goal, and not just hit the net at the side? A goal scored at the last second... Yes, not the last minute, but a goal scored at the last second! It’s simply unbelievable!!”

Not to mention him, even the England players on the pitch could not believe what they were seeing. It was reasonable to say that after their teammate had scored, they should raise their arms high and cheer. These people’s arms were opened, but they were holding their heads and staring at the ball inside the goal ...

Terry stood in the back as he did not go up to take part in the attack because he thought the game was over and it was a wise move to save his strength to play overtime. But now as he looked at George Wood’s back, only then he realized that he was not talking big to boost morale. He was for real!

“I can’t believe that George Wood can shoot a ball like this! If he were to do it again, he would most likely shoot it to the sky! This must have been a shot by God! It was God who used Wood’s right foot to kick a goal like this! In the last second of the game, England got their last chance and they reversed the game! Can anyone believe such a game if we were to tell them?” The Spanish commentator was also very excited as he said, “But this is happening! We have the privilege of witnessing a game like this... No, it’s a miracle!”

Wood, who scored the goal, was not as excited as the other people. He did not dash to the sidelines or take off his jersey. He just stood there in the same spot, with his arms open and his clenched fists pointing to the sky.

Even if he was not excited, other people would naturally be excited. His teammates rushed excitedly from all directions to fully surround him. In the end, they simply lifted him up and threw him into the

sky! Such a celebration was really a rare sight. In the past, no matter how excited they were, they only piled on top of the goalscorer...

“George Wood – what an incredible goal! Whether it was the way he scored the goal or the timing of a goal, it’s incredible! The Italians lost at the last second! They did not manage to drag the game into overtime. They lost the championship trophy in the last second!”

Amelia knelt on the ground, while his teammates next to him looked at the excited Englishmen in a daze. No one could accept such a reality – just a minute ago, they thought they were going to be champions. Just a second ago, they thought the game would be dragged into overtime. And with their impenetrable defense, they would still be the winners.

Wood’s world-class kick shattered their dreams. The post-victory revelry had now been shattered into pieces and scattered away in the night wind in Madrid.

Lippi stood blankly on the sidelines. This time he was not calm, but completely lifeless... He did not expect his team to lose the game in this way. In the most unlikely moment, the most unlikely person had become the one to end the game.

They almost had the game in the bag...

While Lippi was struck dumb, Twain did not jump up and down like the people around him. He stood in place but held out his right hand and pressed on his heart.

He was feeling his heartbeat, which was very fast and strong.

“Hey, Tony! We’re champions! The European champions!” Walker did not give him a chance to feel the emotions here. He ran up from behind to hold him. “We did it, we really did it!”

Twain did not struggle and just let him hold himself as he howled crazily.

He felt as if a weight had been taken off his mind. It was a good thing someone was holding him. Otherwise he really doubted that he could continue to stand any longer...

At this point, he did not have to care about what kind of counterattack Italy would do, because he was certain that the game was already over. This time it was really over!

No one would need to fish out the football from the net and put it in the center circle. The leading England team would not do that. Nor would the trailing Italians do the same.

The referee followed closely with three whistles to end the game after he blew the whistle to declare the validity of the goal.

The game was over!

The England team’s substitute players rushed to the pitch along with the coaches to celebrate their first ever UEFA European Championship in history.

Twain did not follow the crowd to rush up. He stood on the sidelines and got ready to shake Lippi’s hand.

It was a post-match etiquette.

Lippi was back to normal after the game ended. Having won numerous championships in his life, he also had won a lot of runner-up titles. He had experienced a lot of such defeats.

“Congratulations, Mr. Twain.”

He politely congratulated as he held Twain’s hand.

“Thank you, Mr. Lippi.”

The two men did not have any more conversation. Lippi needed to be busy appeasing his players. Those people were already crying as if they were dissolved in tears. And as for Twain himself... he was already surrounded by a large group of reporters, waiting for him and Lippi to finish shaking hands before they rushed up to interview him.

Lippi had just turned around to walk away when the reporters swarmed up to surround Twain for fear that he would run away.

“Mr. Twain! First of all, congratulations on winning the first UEFA European Championship in the history of English football...”

“Mr. Twain, can you talk about what you are thinking now?”

“Was it beyond your expectations that you would win the game at the last minute, Mr. Twain?”

“Do you have anything to say about George Wood’s goal?”

“Mr. Twain...”

“Tony...”

“Mr. Twain...”

“Mr. Tony Twain...”

Countless questions, microphones, recording pens and mobile phones were stuffed to the front of Twain’s lips. Now even if he were to let out a fart, it would be considered fragrant. Any remark he made would be presented as famous. No one in the world of football would dare to question his ability to coach the national team anymore.

Tony Twain was the champion. The established law would come into effect again in the national team.

At the end of the first installment of the classic film, , Michael Corleone finally became the new godfather of the Corleone family. With his wife peeking at the door, he accepted the kiss on the hand from his men as vows of loyalty and devotion, completing the transformation from a young officer full of ideals to a ruthless mafia don.

Now, at the Bernabéu, the old godfather of Italian football was walking off the stage, step by step. He was comforting his players. No media outlet expressed any concern about him, and no one cared how he felt as the “loser.”

And Twain had received unprecedented welcome and popularity.

Tonight, the whole of Europe squirmed at his feet and kissed the hand that he extended to acknowledge their allegiance.

As the old godfather alone departed in disappointment under the Sicilian afternoon sun, the new godfather sat high on the throne of power, enjoying the pledges of allegiance from the new recruits. Overlooking the world, he was full of mettle, as if there was nothing or anyone in the world that could stop his steel horses from conquering the world.

It was only Europe tonight. Two years later, he wanted the whole world to surrender at his feet!

He had no doubt about it, for the champion's heart in his chest was beating powerfully.

Chapter 976: Two Years Later

When Tony Twain led the England team to win the first UEFA European Championship in history, the English media heralded that the football world had entered "Twain's era." During that period, Tony Twain's prestige in England even showed trend of surpassing that of the British prime minister's. Even Carl Spicer, his arch enemy, did not say anything bad about him. Just thinking about when he brought the England team back home, the scene of multitudes coming out from everywhere to welcome them, he already knew how unwise it was to say bad things about him at this time ...

But Carl Spicer did not have to wait too long. When the World Cup qualifiers were reignited, they finally found a chance to attack Twain. The England team, which was awe-inspiring in the UEFA European Championship, seemed to have lost all its drive and faltered in the qualifying rounds.

There was even a time when Tony Twain's manager position was precarious. The media admonished him and put him up against all kinds of charges. There had even been a number of authoritative media outlets that had proclaimed that the English Football Association was seriously considering whether to let Twain go. As for the great feat of leading the England team to make history a year ago, it had long been forgotten by people.

Competitive sports was so cruel. The losers were always in the wrong.

It was the 2017 FIFA Confederations Cup held in Australia that saved Twain. As a preview for next year's World Cup, the FIFA Confederations Cup, which gathered the champions from all continents, had received more and more attention. As the 2016 UEFA European Championship winner, England was invited to the tournament.

The England team, which competed in the Confederations Cup, was very different from the one that competed in the UEFA European Championship a year ago. The old players such as Gerrard and Terry had left the national team, with the 25-year-old Wilshere being appointed with the heavy task. The media all saw him as George Wood's future successor in the England squad.

At this point, the England team was overwrought over whether they could advance out of the European section. The Confederations Cup would be a break away from it for them. No one had any hope of their results before the game. There were even rumors that Twain would be sacked by the Football Association when the Confederations Cup was over if the results were bad.

It was just that no one thought Tony Twain would show his talent once again. He led the team that no one was optimistic about, and surmounted all difficulties to finally beat his arch-rival, the Copa América champion, Argentina, to lift up the Confederations Cup trophy.

With a victory over a team like Argentina in the final and winning the Confederations Cup, Twain's position was firmly established overnight again.

So much so that Carl Spicer said sourly in his program, "Twain always gets a good chance at a critical moment. The Confederations Cup was his good chance..."

And Twain had also completed the team's generational change and reshuffling through the Confederations Cup. The new England team was younger, more dynamic and had more driver. They would not halt and go no further just because they won the title.

In the subsequent World Cup qualifiers, they went from third place to finish second in the group and eventually qualified for the play-offs. During the qualifiers, England beat Russia to secure a last-minute ticket to Australia's World Cup finals.

But at that time, just as England was celebrating their qualification for the World Cup, perhaps anyone who was bold enough, did not expect them to see what they were going to see today.

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Sydney's Stadium Australia had never been as lively as it was tonight, like a volcano erupting. It was not spewing with lava, but with passion. Stadium Australia, which could hold up to 81,000 people, was the venue for the World Cup finals this time and was currently at full capacity. The snow-white lights shone out of the stadium, and the surrounding sky was lit up. The helicopter responsible for the aerial filming could be clearly seen hovering over the stadium.

Overlooking from the air, players of the two teams were caught up in an irresolvable fight in the middle of the green field. It was a brouhaha in the crowd within the stands and the heatwave shot straight into the clouds. It could be clearly felt in the helicopter.

More than 200 countries and regions around the world are watching the game live, with about 1.2 billion people watching it on the television. In a game like this, there was Tony Twain's figure!

"... With less than five minutes to go until the end of the match, the England team is now 2:0 ahead of the last World Cup winner, Brazil! It is an unexpected score which no one could have anticipated before the game. Perhaps a lot of England fans will think they're dreaming, even until now..."

The Brazilian team is turning up the full pressure. If they can't equalize the score in these five minutes..."

"There are five minutes left! Just hold on for another five minutes! And we will hold up the World Cup trophy for the second time! Our tight defense has left the Brazilian team with no way to attack... From the beginning of the game, the initiative has fallen into our hands! Tony Twain completely figured out their tactics!"

"Twain is standing on the sidelines. I can't tell what he's feeling at the moment. His face is so calm that he's not worried about the Brazilian's counterattack."

“I need to recap Tony Twain’s career since he became a manager – only one word consistently pops up in the entire list: champion! Now, the World Cup title is close at hand and within reach. If England can finally win the World Cup, then to Tony Twain, there’s no championship trophy that he hasn’t gotten in the world!”

The man who was commended by people was standing on the sidelines with his arms across his chest and looking calm. In fact, his heart roiled like boiling water, bubbling over. Although he had long set himself a goal to dominate the world, his heart was still beating uncontrollably at this moment as if it would jump out of his throat the moment he opened his mouth. So, he just tightly pursed his lips, which made him look unperturbed and serene.....

The England team was now completely in a defensive stance on the pitch. Wilshere, who had scored his second goal for the team, had long since been brought off by Twain. England deployed a double defensive midfielder formation in the midfield, with the two players, George Wood and Michael Johnson locked in their positions in front of the penalty area. It was hard even for the Brazilian team to attack.

The current situation was also thanks to the fact that Brazil’s current manager was not Dunga from four years ago. Dunga had left after he succeeded in leading the team to their sixth World Cup using a more conservative approach and then went to Europe to make his fortune. He was replaced by the former Brazilian under-20 national team’s manager, Rogério. Unlike Dunga, he was a supporter of the classic Brazilian football tradition. He preferred offense, emphasized the short passes on the ground and aspired to restore the glory of the Brazilian art of football.

It was a pity that his ambition was no use in the face of Twain. Rogério, who wanted to play offense head to head against England in the final, found they faced a shrinking England team that fought defensively. As a result, the Brazilian team did not score and instead, the England team made use of its defensive counterattacks to score two goals in a row, forcing them to the brink.

Twain did not stay and stand on the sidelines to watch the game. He turned around and walked back to the technical area. Next to him, no one could sit still in their seats. They all went to the sidelines, waiting for the referee to blow the final whistle of the game so that they could rush into the field to celebrate the historic moment with the players on the pitch.

The other people were excited. Only he felt tired.

He had been under a lot of pressure over the past year and he himself had exerted most of the pressure. Now it looked like the England team would win the World Cup title without a doubt. And after that?

Go back home to celebrate...

Twain thought even further.

Before the World Cup, the Football Association had hoped to renew his contract with Twain, but he refused. Despite Shaun Harvey’s displeased look, Twain still laid his cards on the table – he would not renew his contract with the Football Association when the World Cup ended, and his contract expired. That meant he would not continue to be coaching the England team again. The piece of news was nothing new.

As the national team manager, he had won all the championship titles there were. What was the point of staying? Twain did not want to lead the England team to create a great undertaking of all ages. He had no interest in the future of English football. For him, leading the England team was just to satisfy his love of football as well as a challenge to himself. Now that the challenge was over, he was tired.

As Twain sat alone in his chair, lost in his thoughts, the referee blew the final whistle.

“The game is over! England has won the 2018 World Cup title in Australia! Congratulations to them! Congratulations to Tony Twain, too! He has led the national team to accomplish the national team’s grand slam honors – the UEFA European Championship, the FIFA Confederations Cup, the FIFA World Cup! This is indeed an enviable achievement!

Twain only stood up from his seat at this moment and raised his hands high, appearing as a winner in front of the camera lenses. Fatigue was not displayed at times like this.

“England is a world champion! This is an unexpected result! Who would have thought they would have a day like this when they couldn’t even get out of the European qualifiers at one point? Two years ago, Twain had led the team to the top of Europe. Two years later, they have become the king of the world!”

“We are the champions! We’re the champions!!” John Motson was incoherent from the excitement. He only knew how to shout the phrase, which everyone knew well.

Around him, the coaches and players rushed about in ecstasy. Some people even cried tears of excitement. And Twain? He was in a calm mood and was being interviewed by reporters at the moment.

The reporters surrounded him. They thought that Twain had become the world champion tonight, so he must be in a very good mood. So, he would answer every question. They could also use this occasion to get more insider news to satisfy a wide range of audience and readers.

As Twain looked at the reporters who kept throwing questions and microphones at him, he just waved his hands and signaled that they did not need to hurry.

Seeing his hand gesture, the reporters did calm down. Yes, the game was already over, so there was no hurry. They had a lot of time to ask questions. The award ceremony was another half an hour away.

“First of all, I have a name list here...” Twain said as he pulled out a folded piece of paper from the inside pocket of his suit. He unfolded it to wave it at the press. No one could see clearly what was written on it. They only saw a swath of dense text.

“For the names of the media outlets which I call out, I will refuse to accept interviews from them.”

Once he said it, it was as if a heavy artillery had been dropped in the crowd!

What did that mean? Why did he have to have such a grim expression and refuse to be interviewed during such a happy time? What was going on with Tony Twain? Was there something wrong with his brain again?

It was during this time that a lot of the English media suddenly realized – the person they were facing was still Tony Twain. More than a decade had passed. Even though there were more wrinkles added on

his face and the hair on his head was getting whiter, he was the unruly Tony Twain who liked to clash with the media.

“The Sun, News of the World...” Twain looked down and read the names on the “blacklist” one by one. These names were the media outlets which had hit him while he was at the lowest and during his most difficult times. They viciously scolded him and clamored for him to be fired from the England national team manager position. At that time, Twain also had his own column to fight back, but his voice was like a small stone dropped into the sea. It did not even create a ripple.

At the time, these media did not think that one day they would have to put up a smile to interview Twain and hoped that he would open his mouth to let them have their reports.

Gentlemen, it was time now to settle all accounts.

Twain had long remembered each and every name of these media outlets and written them down on the list to be carried with him at any time. He was preparing for this moment. Of course, if he did not win the championship in the end, the list might not come in handy, because even if he wanted to refuse to be interviewed by these media outlets, he would not be able to stop the others from rebuking him.

When these media outlets heard Twain read their names, the expressions on their faces suddenly became excited. Twain’s list included the vast majority of the English media outlets, as well as several foreign media, including one media outlet in China, which once described him as “impotent.”

After he read not so short list, Twain looked at the crowd of stunned reporters in front of him and asked, “Do the other people have any questions?”

The first people to react were the Liverpool Echo reporters. Because they had an anti-Twain representative, Christopher Beesley, so there were a lot of bad stuff written about Twain in the newspapers. They appeared to be agitated by Twain’s announcement that he would reject their interviews. They said, “You can’t do this, Mr. Twain!”

“Of course, I can, Mr. Reporter. I’m a world champion!” He roared cockily. “You’re the ones who asked to interview me while I’m not the one who asked you to come and interview me.”

“You...” The Liverpool Echo reporter was rendered speechless by Twain’s words for a long time.

On the side, The Sun reporter was relatively sly. He would not directly protest. Any fool could now see that Twain was in the limelight. It was fruitless to clash with him. Although they had clashes before, being flexible and taking advantage of the situation was a basic quality of an excellent reporter.

He moved closer, adopting a humble approach as he said, “I’m a reporter for The Sun. We’ll publish an apology in the newspaper, and offer you our sincerest apologies for what we’ve said in the past...” His submissive attitude made the other media outlets “wake up” – that’s the right thing to do now! Use an apology to ease the strained relationship with Twain and make the boss happy after the World Cup first. Why did not they think of it? Instead, they had let The Sun reporter seize the key moment!

The Sun and other media outlets all thought that it was the only solution to the problem.

But Twain’s words shattered all of their dreams as he said, “I refuse to accept any form of apology, and I will not accept any form of interview from you.”

His attitude was very firm and had absolutely no intention of making any jokes or giving in. He laughed when he saw the group of media reporters dumbfounded.

“It looks like everyone has nothing to ask. That’s good. I have to be with my players. Sorry, step aside.” He pushed away a few people in front of him and squeezed out the huddle of reporters.

The group of reporters watched as his figure mixed in with the celebratory crowd before they reacted. But in the face of the meritorious manager who had just led the team to win the World Cup, they could only lament – they did not dare to say anything bad about Tony Twain in their respective published media all because he was now the national hero. Anyone who went against him would be going against the whole of England, and even the whole of Britain. He would be the public enemy of the country.

Furthermore, what made the media even more frustrated was Twain would announce his departure after the World Cup. Since he was not in the manager’s position, there was naturally no handle for the media to seize upon, not to mention such talk of “it was never too late for a gentleman to exact revenge.”

Twain was suave with the turn of events and cut off the possibility of the media looking for an opportunity to pick a quarrel with him. He had incensed this group of people with no ways of venting it till they stifled from the bottled-up anger.

The group of reporters sighed helplessly and dispersed.

On this happy night, they were not happy at all.

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Twain was not done with dropping bombshells yet. At a press conference that evening, Tony Twain, who had just led the England team to its second World Cup title, had announced a somewhat unexpected piece of news:

“I’ve decided to retire. Yes, it’s retirement, not resignation. Not only am I going to step down as the England manager, I am also not going to consider invitations from the other teams. I’m no longer Manager Tony Twain from today onwards,. I don’t have any plans for the future. For the moment I just want to enjoy the joy brought by the World Cup victory. I want to thank my team and to the fans who have supported me.”

When he finished his speech, the reporters below the stage were in a frenzy...

Everyone had been looking forward to Twain creating a new glory. How could he retire? He was currently not even fifty years old... As a manager, how could he retire when he was in his prime?

No one knew what Twain was thinking. Since more than a decade ago, no one had been able to guess what was on this man’s mind. He always liked to be unexpected. When he was admonished by people and during the most difficult times, he persisted and did not resign. Now that he was at the peak of his success, he suddenly announced his retirement.

Maybe he just liked to dally with the masses like this...

Twain stood up and waved to the media, preparing to say goodbye. Perhaps realizing that this was his last public appearance as a manager, the reporters lifted their cameras in succession, pressed the shutters, and set his image with the cameras.

Just that for such a mad man to suddenly bid farewell, even though those media outlets had been checkmated by him, they still inevitably felt that it was a great pity – what are we going to have to attract the attention of readers in the future?!

Chapter 977: A Child

“Tony Twain has announced his retirement!”

“This time, it’s goodbye for real!”

“Unbelievable, he actually chose to leave at the peak of his career...”

“His retirement is a massive loss to English Football!”

Even those media bodies who were put into Twain’s blacklist after the final felt that it was a pity that he left. Although it was not news that Twain was going to resign from his post as England’s manager after the World Cup, nobody expected him to choose to leave completely—To retire.

England’s triumph in the World Cup dominated the headlines of the newspapers for two days before it got replaced by Twain’s decision.

For a moment, there were many rumors about his reasons for retirement, but none of them was trustable. That was because Twain did not explain why he was going to retire instead of just resigning.

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“You actually resigned?” Shania’s beautiful eyes widened as she looked at Twain opposite her.

Twain smiled as he enjoyed the expression on his wife’s face. She looked beautiful even when she was surprised.

“That’s right, I quit! Aren’t you happy? I only see surprise in your expression.”

“Er...” Shania did not know whether she was happy with the news. She did not even know if she should be happy.

The two of them were in France, Paris, not in England at that time. Shania had a show to attend there and Twain was accompanying her.

“I wanted to give you a surprise, do you like it?”

Twain spread his arms out and waited for his wife to jump into his embrace.

However, Shania did not do that. She merely cocked her head as she examined her husband, “I’m just thinking about the number of days that you can keep it up this time...”

Twain blushed in embarrassment at this comment. The last time Twain said that he would quit, not go back into management and focus on accompanying Shania, he went back on his words within the month after his heart got restless after a call from London.

"I'm retiring this time!" Twain raised his right hand and swore, "I'm going to have absolutely nothing to do with football now."

Shania merely gave him a smile. She was not a silly girl who would believe everything a man said.

Twain could tell that she did not believe her, and he had no choice but to mutter, "Let time prove everything then."

Shania only leant onto him after seeing that he was feeling down, "What will George say about you quitting again?" The last time he left his job as Nottingham Forest's manager, Wood got into a cold war with him for a very long time. Shania knew all about that incident.

"You don't have to worry about it this time," Twain patted Shania on her back gently, "I've already talked to him about it."

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George Wood received a call from Pierce Brosnan, asking him about "insider information" regarding Twain's retirement.

"He said he wanted to take a break, "George's answer was as succinct as ever.

"That's it?" Brosnan could hardly believe what he was hearing. How could something so grave be decided so easily?

"Yes."

"How could that...wait!" Brosnan finally reacted to it, "You didn't try to stop him when he told you?"

"I did, but it didn't work," Wood was honest and did not lie.

Brosnan stayed silent for a while before asking, "George, can you tell me the details of the events at that time?"

"Um..." Wood became hesitant as he did not know what he should or should not tell the media. Twain did not agree to it, nor did he disagree.

Brosnan decided to use the door-in-the-face technique, "It's fine if he forbade you from talking about it. I won't make things difficult for you, George."

"No, he did not say that..." Wood shook his head.

He thought back to a month ago, the night before England was due to play Australia. Twain suddenly asked Wood to go to his room as he had something important to talk to him about.

"Actually, this is not something that I should be telling you before such an important match. However, I trust that you have the mental strength to cope with it, and if I talk to you about this when it happens, there will be many disruptions which will make it difficult for us to have a sit and talk properly," Twain

was very direct at what he wanted to say, "My contract will be up after the World Cup and I don't intend to extend it. You know about it, don't you?"

Wood nodded his head. Not only him, the whole England knew about it. After the FIFA Confederations Cup, England returned in glory and the media guessed that the Football Association should have given Twain a new contract. After all, it was only a year till the World Cup. However, the Football Association did not do that then, choosing to wait till after the World Cup before deciding if they wanted to extend Twain's contract based on the results. It sounded like they did not trust Twain.

Even though Twain did not openly lose his temper, he lost his faith in the Football Association because of that. He could not feel the cooperation between him and the Football Association anymore. The only thing left was for them to make use of each other. Harvey was merely using him to solidify his position as he led the England team to a series of good results, yet he was unwilling to take responsibility for any possible future failures. Twain, on the other hand, was just doing it for the 14 million pounds annual salary.

Since that was the case, then it was better to end this earlier. So, after leading England to the final round, Twain released an announcement to say that he would not be extending his contract with the Football Association. Regardless of the results in the World Cup, he would be leaving his position after the competition.

At that time, England barely made it out of the group stages and the public did not think that England would be able to achieve any good results in the World Cup, that was why they did not protest against Twain's announcement. In their views, Twain was giving himself an out first, in case England performed badly in the knockout stages—This was still a very big possibility to them—This way, he could leave with his dignity intact as he would have left on his own accord, instead of being forced out...

As he looked at Wood nodding his head, Twain continued saying, "However, this time it's not as simple as just stepping down as England manager. It's leaving the game altogether. It's retirement. I've decided to retire."

Wood looked up at the man in front of him in astonishment.

"I'm not joking or anything, George. I'm telling you because I don't want to hurt you again," Twain was referring to the time he left without a word.

"Why retire?" Wood asked.

"So that I can give more of my time to my wife. For the past few years, I've been too busy and too tired to take care of Shania." The manager of England was probably the busiest manager in the world. And in a country where paparazzi was so rampant such as England, there was almost no private life at all. Twain was not being spoiled or exaggerating when he said that. "I'll be fifty in September next year. How much more time can I have by her side?" Wood had a special relationship with him, that was why Twain could tell him heartfelt words like this. Otherwise, for someone who needed to maintain his image in front of others, he would never had revealed his inner feelings.

This made Wood fall into deep thought. He was facing the same problem as Twain. His mother's health had been getting worse, which is why he had not been looking for a girlfriend. That was because to him, there might not be much time for him to stay by his mother's side anymore.

As they had similar feelings, Wood had no rights to stop him at all.

“So, it’s because of this...” Brosnan muttered to himself after hearing the narration by Wood.

Tony Twain was the man of the moment after all. Even if he led England to the World Cup triumph, his popularity was off the charts for now and his retirement led to a great discussion. Not every fan understood his decision. If this was the reason, then there would probably be no one who would complain about it.

“I understand now George. Thank you.”

Brosnan hung up after thanking Wood. Wood did not know if he did the right thing by telling this to a reporter.

But he shook his head very soon and shook this thought away. If there was a problem, Twain should be the one troubled by it, not him. It was his fault for leaving him again anyway.

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“What other plans do you have after the show in Paris?” Twain asked his wife who was cuddling in his embrace.

“I have some time off,” Shania understood the meaning behind Twain’s question, “Do you have something planned Uncle Tony?”

Twain went silent for a while, as if he was making a very important decision. He looked at Shania again and said, “Let’s adopt a child from China.”

This was a decision that Shania did not expect. She escaped her husband’s embrace and looked at him in shock, as if she heard wrongly.

“I’m sorry that I couldn’t make you pregnant...” Twain sounded apologetic and remorseful. His life since the transformation had been very successful. He enjoyed great success in his career, he married a supermodel wife who was 21 years his junior, but this was the only thing that troubled him. He did not know whether it was a residual effect from the transformation, or maybe it was God’s punishment for having the best of his career and love lives, or maybe it was retribution for having too many enemies... He seemed to have become impotent.

Shania shut Twain up with her hand, preventing him from continuing to blame himself, “The person I fell in love with is Uncle Tony, not some kind of stallion. It doesn’t matter if we have no children, I love you Uncle Tony.” She was a little worried that Twain would think there was some cracks in their relationship because of his biological flaw. She had to ease Twain’s mind.

Twain could not say anything after Shania covered his mouth. He could only stare at his wife’s eyes and Shania similar stared at him. They did not say anything but they both understood each other perfectly.

Twain opened his mouth and gently bit on Shania’s hand. Shania frowned and lightly gave Twain a slap and took her hand back.

“Let’s adopt a child from China,” Twain repeated his plan.

Shania did not object to it. Since her husband wanted a child so badly, how could she possibly object? Even though she did not know why her husband wanted to adopt a child from China.

It was natural for her to not know that Twain wanted to make up for his own regret——He could not be a Chinese anymore in this life, the next best thing was to have a Chinese child.

“When are we setting off? I’m free from the day after tomorrow. What kind of procedures do we have to go through to adopt a child from China?”

Twain shook his head, “I don’t know, let’s go check it out. If there is none who is suitable, then we won’t adopt one first,” Twain was very cautious about picking a child.

Shania looked at Twain’s eyes as they moved in their sockets. If Twain had decided to adopt a child, then do they have to continue to make love so frequently? Making love is part of being in love and to be honest, Shania loved the tussles she had with Uncle Tony on the bed. Even though Uncle Tony was almost fifty, he did not feel like he was old at all in the bedroom.

Twain seemed to know what she was thinking and carried her all of a sudden before tossing her onto the bed next to them. Shania exclaimed in shock but very soon, her lips were sealed...

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Tang Jing was still in a shock when she received the call from Twain as Twain rarely called her. If he had something to discuss, he would call Tang, not her.

When Twain told her to find out about the materials that he had to prepare and the certifications that the adopter had to have to adopt a child in China, she was even more shocked.

Even though she agreed immediately, she did not recover from the shock until she hung up the phone. There were rumors that Twain was impotent as he and Shania did not have any child between them after so many years of marriage. So, Tang Jing was not shocked about that. What shocked her was that they actually thought of adopting a child from China.

Tang noticed that his wife was a little restless after receiving the call and he asked with concern. He did not expect it to be related to Twain. His wife did not understand why Twain wanted to adopt an orphan from China, but Tang knew the reason. It was too bad that this was a reason that he could not tell Tang Jing. He could not possibly tell his wife, “Your husband and Twain exchanged their souls and Twain is actually a Chinese. That’s why he wanted to adopt a Chinese child.”

At that moment, he merely said, “Twain loves China, doesn’t he? Maybe he loved the children from China too?”

That was a valid explanation too. Besides, how could anyone understand the likes and dislikes of someone else perfectly?

Tang Jing felt that something was off, but she did not take it to mind. Instead, she was very active in making calls back to China to enquire about the relevant information for Twain.

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After two days, Twain and Shania returned to England. They looked for the relevant authorities in England to certify their age, occupation, marriage, health, wealth and whether they had any criminal records. They also contacted the English embassy and Chinese embassy to make some preliminary preparations for adoption.

In England, where the media were highly trained, how could their actions escape the attention of the paparazzi?

The media inferred that Twain was planning to adopt a child from the information that Twain was preparing for. There had always been rumors floating about regarding the lack of a child between Twain and Shania's marriage after so many years so this news was not that surprising.

In China, it might be an embarrassing thing for a man to be impotent, but not so much in England. It was very common for couples to adopt an orphan when they were unable to conceive themselves. Even if they were able to conceive, families would also adopt children from other countries too.

There were reporters who stopped Twain outside the Chinese embassy, but they did not ask him about the adoption, instead, they asked, "What made you decide to pack up and leave at the peak of your career?"

Twain was not angry that he was stopped by reporters, instead, he waved the Chinese visa in his hands excitedly and said, "I'm working hard with my wife to build a new family. This is what I intend to do now and in the future!"

Chapter 978: Teresa

Adoption was not something one could easily hide from the media, so Twain did not go about the issue furtively. The Chinese media knew that Twain was returning to China to adopt a child but news like this regarding a celebrity's private life would only make it to the tabloids. Mass media would never publish something like this — since when did the Xinhua News Agency or China Central Television publicize news of a famous person coming to China to adopt a child? Never, right? In reality, there were a lot of foreigners who visited China to adopt children and quite a number of them were celebrities, too, so the media did not really report things like this.

On top of the paperwork that came with adopting a child in China, the foreigners had to fork out a large sum of money as well. China set a high threshold for foreigners who were looking to adopt children. Even if the person was someone as famous as Twain, they would have to do it by the book: pay the requisite amount of money and abide by the necessary formalities and procedures. But for Twain, problems that could be resolved with money were no problems at all. He had no lack of money and there was no issue with the procedures either; he was determined to get what he came for.

Right from the get-go, Twain specified for the adoption area to be in Sichuan. He would not settle for anything else — he was born there and he had a deep attachment to his hometown, a sentiment that carried over to the children of this land.

He went round to the welfare centres in Sichuan and picked out a few of the better children before discussing with Shania again. Finally, they chose a four-year-old girl. In the more backward and remote

parts of China, there was still a clear preference for sons instead of daughters. Many families had a lot of children because they desperately wanted a boy but they did not have the means to raise all the children, so they either abandoned or gave away their daughters. As such, there were a lot more girls than there were boys in the welfare centres. Even if there were boys, half of them had a physical disability. Twain did not have the same preference, and neither did Shania. To them, boys had their own merits and girls were cute in their own way; it just so happened that there were more girls in the welfare centre and so they settled for adopting a girl.

The little girl who was on the cusp of turning five was not as rowdy as the other children when she met Twain and Shania. She was very quiet. Decked a red floral dress, she sat on the chair and blinked at the two strangers in front of her. She seemed a little apprehensive, much like an innocent animal, and was extremely loveable.

Shania was taken by the little girl the moment she laid eyes on her and Twain was also very much enamored of the way she sat quietly. Because of the nature of his work, he preferred for his life to be calm and silent so he did not really like children who were too rowdy. Quietness was just right up his alley. According to the case file the welfare centre had, this little girl was from Zigong, Sichuan. She was left on the doorstep of the welfare centre not long after she was born. Her parents were heartless, leaving her on the doorstep without even giving her a name. The parents left the child there and no other information or message. As such, the people at the welfare centre named her Liu Ai, homonymous with the Chinese phrase for “keep love”, in hopes that the little girl would hold on to love. They decided her birthday would be the third of October — the day the welfare centre found her.

Now that they had decided on a child to adopt, they would move on to settle the paperwork. Once that was done with, Liu Ai would have no more ties with the welfare centre and would officially become Twain and Shania’s first child, even if she was adopted.

Twain realised how fortunate he was when he was dealing with the paperwork. According to regulations in China, foreigners who wanted to adopt from China had to be older than thirty but younger than fifty. Twain was two months shy of fifty, falling just within the age range. Had he been two months later, there was no way he would have fulfilled this wish of his.

Twain was a celebrity; even in Zigong, a small town in southern Sichuan, he was still rather popular. On top of that, the person accompanying him was much more popular amongst the Chinese public than he was. Shania was a worldwide model and Hollywood star who had long broken into the Chinese market. The public had long familiarized themselves with posters of the products she endorsed as well as television advertisements.

There was a perk to being a celebrity: much emphasis was placed on his status as a celebrity and so it was a lot easier to get things moving during his discussions with the welfare centre and the Civil Affairs Department, which was really satisfactory.

In just a day, Liu Ai had become the child of Twain and Shania. Now that she was a foreigner’s child, she had to have a foreign name, too, though Twain decided to keep her Chinese name. He had an inexplicable affinity with China and this child was part of that, so how could she not have a Chinese name? And so, Shania was tasked with giving her an English name. She eventually chose ‘Teresa’, Greek for ‘harvester’ and the Portuguese Goddess of Harvest. This was a name often given to girls with black

hair who were beautiful, demure, direct, and pious. Faith aside, everything else seemed to fit Liu Ai's appearance and personality to a tee.

After the paperwork was done, the lady at the welfare centre helped Liu Ai — she was Teresa now — pack her belongings and handed them over to the Twains. Not that there was much, really, just a few gifts from different people as well as some toys and coloring books donated to the welfare centre. She had some clothes but Twain rejected them, opting to keep only the toys and coloring books. Why would she still wear those old clothes? He would definitely be buying her new ones. She was his daughter and he would make sure she was dressed to the nines, like a princess.

Little Liu Ai said little through the entire, trailing behind with a little toy doll she owned clutched to herself. Twain thought she was really likeable; he really liked children who were quiet and sensible.

At the end, when they were standing at the door of the welfare centre, a bunch of the kids came out to send Liu Ai off. She was adopted by parents who came from overseas and had to move there with them, so this would probably be the last they would see of her. The bunch of kids were crying and laughing, reluctant to see her leave. The Twains were stood by the side, talking to the director who was probably thanking them for being so kind and adopting little Liu Ai, and hoping they would treat her well.

“Mr Twain, Miss Shania. Ai-ai doesn't like to talk a lot and she keeps a lot of things to herself instead of talking to us. I know you're both celebrities and have a lot on your plate when it comes to your job, but I do hope you take care to not neglect her,” said Liu Ai's caretaker, who went out of the way to mention this. This was the lady who looked after the little girl and she seemed rather worried still. She knew Liu Ai rather well and feared that the little girl would be unhappy moving to a foreign country with that personality of hers, but also because of language barriers and a possible inability to adapt. There was something else that worried the lady, though she did not vocalize this concern. Twain and Shania were, after all, foreigners — celebrities, at that. Celebrity marriages were often tumultuous, and what would happen to Ai-ai if they ended up splitting? Who knew if Twain and Shania even loved each other in real life? Could they really love their adopted daughter?

Twain was not aware that the lady had her doubts about him and was just happy that he had a daughter now. He nodded at what she said, “That won't be an issue at all. I've retired and can look after my daughter now.”

Twain dealt with the bulk of the communicating since Shanie still did not know how to speak Chinese. All she did was stay by his side and stare at the little kids nearby who were bidding Teresa farewell with eyes full of love. She had always wanted a child of her own but she never got pregnant despite trying for nine years, so she had no choice but to take another route and adopt a child instead. Now that she had a daughter, the maternal instincts she had suppressed for so many years had resurfaced. Twain was probably going to be neglected in the coming days.

The children were ultimately herded by the other ladies. After saying their goodbyes, Teresa was brought to Twain and Shania's sides.

Shania saw tear tracks staining her daughter's face — the girl had obviously been crying. She hurriedly fished out her handkerchief and gently dabbed away the tears on Teresa's face. Her eyes were filled with worry and her smile was a little forced. It was as if this short interaction had established some sort

of telepathic bond with her daughter, and the sight of her daughter's sadness was enough to trigger her own.

But Twain was focused on something else. The little girl had been very sad when she was saying goodbye to the other kids but she could control her emotions when she was in front of them. She was obviously a very sensible child and Twain liked this very much.

The director of the welfare centre was a lady in her fifties who had been working here for more than two decades. Now that she had to send off a kid, she was a little reluctant too. She squatted down to stroke Liu Ai's head, whispering, "Hey, Ai-ai, you have parents from today onwards. Are you happy?"

Little Ai-ai kept her head down. She snuck a glance at Twain before casting her gaze down again, then nodded.

"Granny hopes you'll live well and healthily in England."

The director stood up and patted her shoulders, signalling for her to walk over to her new parents on her own.

The little girl slowly took two steps forward to stand in front of Twain and Shania. She then said in a whisper, somewhat embarrassedly, "Daddy, mommy."

She spoke in Chinese, but it was a Sichuan dialect. Despite that, "mommy" sounded almost the same in every language so Shania could pick up on that. She bent down, elated, hugging her daughter and kissing her face.

Twain was not as expressive as his wife so he only smiled brightly. He had been married to Shania for nine years and now they finally had their own child. It did not matter that she was adopted; he was still very much content with this. After all, he knew he was sterile. This summer, he had led his team to clinch the World Cup — the highest accolade in football — then retired after that accomplishment to adopt his first child. This was arguably the happiest year he has ever had.

Just like this, Liu Ai — she was Teresa now — boarded the car with her new parents. She was leaving behind four years in this welfare centre with her friends, who were sending her off reluctantly, to start a new one.

Now that he had his first daughter, Twain was in a really good mood. He was now a father. Twain had little experience in that field and all he knew was that he had to keep his child happy. As such, he took Teresa around Chengdu the next day. He brought her to see the charming and adorable pandas, even buying her a few panda dolls. They then headed to Jiuzhaigou to sight-see after roaming around Chengdu. He wanted the little girl who had never left the welfare centre to experience the scenic sights the world had to offer.

During the course of the trip and having interacted with the child over these few days, Twain understood the problem that the lady at the welfare centre had told him about: Teresa was just too quiet, almost as if she did not know how to laugh happily anymore. This was not a good habit; it was scary for a child to not know how to smile. Twain decided he would do something about her overly introverted personality. Since she was still a child, then she should be sprightly when the occasion called for it.

And so, Twain and Shania brought her to themes parks in Hong Kong like Disneyland and Ocean Park after they returned from Jiuzhaigou, in hopes of giving her a new experience and a taste of happiness.

They headed to Beijing after Hong Kong and Twain brought her to Tiananmen Square for the flag-raising ceremony. This was not Twain's idea. Teresa had brought it up herself; she had always watched the ceremony on television and so she wanted to see for herself what it was like. This was his daughter's request, so how could he not grant her wish? Twain brought her to Tiananmen Square for the ceremony and even brought her to the Great Wall of China, the Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven, and other tourist attractions in Beijing. He brought her to the zoo as well to see the lions, tigers, monkeys, and elephants. He brought her to the amusement park to ride the roller coasters and Ferris wheel. On the roller coaster, the quiet girl screamed for the first time, a sort of cathartic release. Though she was still rather frightened when they stepped down from the roller coaster, Twain caught a trace of exhilaration on her little face. Teresa was the only child from her welfare centre who had been to Beijing to have fun, and this was as good as her buddies back in the welfare centre having their wish granted as well. After this day came to an end, she printed out the pictures from this excursion and sent them back so her friends could share the experience with her.

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The Twains got closer to their daughter after the trip around China. At the very least, she was no longer calling out for them in a timid and quiet voice. In fact, she was interacting with her new parents very liberally.

After their China trip, Twain and Shania brought their daughter straight to Brazil from China. They brought her to visit Shania's parents so the latter could meet their granddaughter. Shania's parents were also very fond of the obedient and sensible granddaughter. They did not care that she was not related to Shania by blood, and they loved the child if their daughter loved her. On top of that, they were not the type to prefer sons to daughters. On the contrary, they seemed to prefer daughters.

"But I'll never allow Teresa to follow in my footsteps!" Shania swore to her parents as a precaution. She was not expecting her daughter to be making big bucks or building a name for herself — it was still much too early to be thinking about something like this. All she wanted was for her daughter to have a healthy and happy childhood.

"She's your daughter, Jo. Whatever you say goes."

Her parents were not angry. After all, parents knew their children best. They knew that their daughter had always wanted a child and felt helpless that Twain was sterile. Now that she finally adopted a daughter, she was over the moon, and her parents were too content with that to be fretting over a training plan for the little girl.

Teresa was on her best behaviour, too, which her grandparents really adored. They bought her a pile of new stuff to bring back to England.

They stayed in Brazil for about a week before Twain and Shania returned to England with Teresa. The Twains were surrounded by a bunch of reporters who had caught wind of their arrival at Heathrow Airport. It was a chaotic scene and the airport security was there as well. The flash of the cameras and the noise of the crowd frightened Teresa, who hurried to hide behind Twain.

Twain furrowed his brows at this. It seemed like the vicious reporters had scared Teresa.

He did not care if he was the one being harassed by the media, but there was no way he would just let his daughter suffer through this. The child could not understand why there were so many people here to see her, which would surely stress her out somewhat.

And so he pointed at his daughter who was hiding behind her and said to the reporters, "This is my daughter, Teresa. You've scared her and so I'm declining any and all interviews here. If you have any questions, ask me when I'm alone. I hope that you won't harass my daughter like this in the coming days as well." After saying his piece, he guided his wife and daughter out of the crowd and hurriedly disappeared at the airport exit.

The reporters shook themselves out of their shocked stupor. Tony Twain has a daughter! Not only that, but it was also very obvious that he loved her. Seems like this will be something they have to take note of when they deal with him in the future...

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PS, Twain has finally gotten a child, please give more of your support~~~

PS2, There are people who cursed me in the comments to be unable to bear a child and only able to get children through adoption. I have to thank this friend for giving mercy and not cursing me from having a bastard child. I would rather not be able to bear children than having a bastard child. If I am unable to bear a child, then I would just go ahead and adopt a child, isn't that a lot more simple. However, if I were to bear a bastard, then I would be in trouble...

Chapter 979: After Retirement

"Okay, no matter what, Tony Twain has left the footballing world. It's time for us to stop focusing on him," On BBC's "Match of the Day", the three guests said this when discussing about the important events that happened in the footballing world. They unanimously agreed that Twain's retirement would be the second biggest event in England sports this year. The first was naturally England's triumph in the World Cup.

This also represented the media's attitude. After hogging the limelight for more than a month, with the start of the new season on the horizons, a retired manager would not be able to attract more attention anymore, even if he was a top manager. Besides, if Twain was to not manage any teams anymore, there would be no point in making a big hoo-ha out of his retirement. Outside of football, Tony Twain was nothing and the media did not have to entertain him anymore.

Twain was happy about it. Naturally, Shania had to work, and Twain was able to take care of the child at home without worries. The good thing was that Theresa spent the most difficult times of taking care of a child inside the orphanage and it was not difficult for a man like Twain to take care of her now. Twain had no experience being a father, but he kept a saying in mind, let the child be happy.

A man who was almost fifty acting like an overaged child in front of his kid, spending the whole day playing with Theresa, doing everything he could to make her happy. For now, his whole life revolved around Theresa. Football? He had already thrown that out of his mind.

Furthermore, in order to let Theresa get used to life in this foreign country, he would bring her out for walks often, or take her to Burns bar. Of course, beer was forbidden. He even allocated the area around Theresa as a “non-smoking zone”, and he forbade the fans from smoking there. Now that he was no longer busy with work, he could finally have more time to chat with his old pals in the bar. Everyone was more than happy for him to come daily and they could not care less about being unable to smoke. Theresa was very popular too. Even though she was adopted, the people did not care about it at all. If her father did not care, why should an outsider mind something like that?

This was the happy life that Twain led after retirement.

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“Who do you think have the greatest chances of being champion in the new season?” Lineker asked the guests in the show.

“Liverpool,” Alan Hansen replied without hesitation.

“What’s the reason?”

“Do we need a reason for that? I’m a fan of theirs... Fine, I was just joking. I wish that Liverpool can become champion, but if we analyze it properly, I think Arsenal or Manchester United have the best odds of being champion...”

Lineker switched his attention to the other guest, Mark Lawrenson.

“Ahem,” Lawrenson cleared his throat and replied, “I think Chelsea has a good chance...”

“Then, the teams that will be able to qualify for the next UEFA Champions’ League?”

The two of them had the same answer for this question, “Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea.”

Lineker suddenly popped up with a follow-up question, “No Nottingham Forest?”

Alan Hansen and Mark Lawrenson shook their heads in unison, “No.”

Lawrenson added, “It’ll be difficult for them to even qualify for the Europa League.”

The Europa League was previously known as the UEFA Cup. Following a change in format, the full name was then called “UEFA Europa League”. After the change, the Europa League made some adjustments to the competition format and the qualification process. Previously, the champions of the cup competitions for the various countries would be allowed to participate in the UEFA Cup. If the champions of the cup competitions could participate in the Champions’ League, the runners-up would take their place in the UEFA Cup. This was no longer a viable method now. For the medium to small clubs that wished to enter a European competition, the barrier to entry had become higher.

And Nottingham Forest had already failed to qualify for the UEFA Champions’ League for two seasons in a row, having to settle for a spot in the UEFA Europa League.

To many clubs, participating in the Europa League was a result that deserved praise. However, Nottingham Forest had been achieving very impressive results in the highest European competition just

a few years back. Now that they had to settle for the Europa League, it gave people a feeling that they had “fallen”. After all, the influence and profits of Europa League could not be compared with that of the Champions’ League.

And there was something else that had affected Nottingham Forest’s performance. It was no longer a rumor but already a fact—Evan Doughty had always wanted to sell Nottingham Forest. How could a club chairman who had no intention to continue managing the club bring it forward? Up till now, Nottingham Forest had been changing managers so often that the media had already started to mock Nottingham Forest by saying the doors to their manager’s office was a “rotating door”.

One of the reasons why he failed to sell the club was because of poor results, which dropped their market value and therefore, nobody was interested in them. Nottingham is not a big city like Manchester, Liverpool or London after all. A small place is destined to have limited potential for growth. Therefore, the possibility of attracting a foreign investment group was very low. Another reason was because of price negotiation. There would be an occasional buyer, but Evan Doughty would always say that the price they offered was too low for him to accept. And so, this situation was stuck for two whole years. Every year, during preseason, during the January break and after the season ended, there would be news that said Doughty wanted to sell the club, but it was never fulfilled. The fans were disgusted by his lack of loyalty. Initially, they were furious at his behaviors, but now, they merely treated it as a joke and Evan Doughty became a clown in their eyes. The Robin Hood Grandstand of the Crimson Stadium would always have banners scolding Evan Doughty. It had already become a familiar sight here and during live broadcasts of the games, there would always be a close-up of that.

The good thing was they would always qualify for a European competition every year. The Champions’ League a few years back and the Europa League for the last couple of years. This meant they were still not in a stage where they could not make ends meet. However, the results for these competitions were no longer satisfactory. The frequent change of managers meant that people started to fear for their future, and they could not agree on a tactic to use. A new manager would bring with him a new tactic which would be abandoned mid-season when he was sacked, and everyone would have to start from scratch again...

Rinse and repeat, if they could still get good results after that, it could only mean that the English Premier League had no good teams left.

Once a team loses the ability and motivation to fight for the title, the team will inevitably find it hard to keep its players.

Michael Dawson, the center-back that Evan thought was good business, had been plagued with injuries ever since he joined the club, and he retired at the age of 34 due to injury. David Bentley had left Nottingham Forest for Blackburn and his transfer fee netted Nottingham Forest a cool 12 million pounds. Adriano Moke did not leave the club willingly, but he had no say over it. Both his agent and the club chairman wanted him gone because he could command a transfer fee of 18 million pounds. The agent could get a cut of the fee and he eventually left for Arsenal...

For the fans of Nottingham Forest, the four seasons after Twain left were the darkest times of the club. Ignoring the fact that the team won nothing, they had to witness the heroes of their times leave the club

every summer. It was as if they had returned to the start of the century when Nottingham Forest was still languishing in the lower divisions.

At that time, they missed Brian Clough, saying that, "If Clough was still here, he'll never let things become so bad." Who did they miss now? Tony Twain of course. Too bad Twain had already retired.

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"The target for the club in the new season is to qualify for the Champions' League? Ha! Be more realistic, mister chairman!" The fans from the surrounding areas were discussing about the future of the club in Burns' bar. There was a tone of mockery in their words when they mentioned the club chairman, Evan Doughty.

"It'll be not bad if we can qualify for the Europa League!"

"Even though it's good to have lofty aspirations... It doesn't apply to Doughty. Even if the results of the team become better, it'll only increase his chips for selling the club..."

Twain ignored the serious discussion going on at the other side of the bar. He took his daughter, Theresa, with him to sit at one side and was trying to entertain her as she was starting to get bored.

"Theresa, do you want to hear a joke from Daddy?"

Theresa nodded her head.

"It was a very hot day and there are two bananas walking on the road. Suddenly, the banana walking in front said, 'It's so hot, I'm going to take off my clothes.' And he took his clothes off after that. Then the banana behind fell! Ha ha ha ha!" Twain burst into laughter himself, holding his stomach, after telling Theresa the joke, "Isn't it funny?"

Opposite him, Theresa pulled at the ends of her mouth, trying very hard to laugh. However, she could not complete such a difficult task after several attempts and she said to Twain in a sad tone, "Daddy, I can't laugh..."

This time, it was Kenny Burns' turn to burst into laughter.

Twain felt very awkward, "Okay then... I know that this joke is a little difficult for you to understand..." He scratched his head and turned to look at the bar owner who suddenly appeared. He changed the topic in a hurry, "Why are you not wiping the glasses?"

Burns placed a glass of freshly squeezed fruit juice in front of Theresa, "Theresa, this is my treat to you."

"Thank you, Uncle Kenny," Theresa's English was improving by leaps and bounds. A child's learning capability would always surprise an adult. Now, she can already understand some English and she can also converse in basic English.

Burns took this opportunity to sit next to Twain, "They all wish that you'll return..." He pointed at the fans at the other end who were still in a heated discussion, "But, they don't dare to tell you directly."

"Twain looked at Theresa drinking her juice opposite him, "I'm retired."

"Jordan retired three times and he came back three times too," Burns laughed.

Twain looked at him, but he did not sense any unusual expression from him. It was as if it was just a passing remark.

Burns collected the empty glasses on the table before walking slowly back behind the bar table. Twain looked at his back view behind him. This man used to be a famous thug in the English footballing world. He used to be someone that all his opponents feared. Legends said that if he took part in a competition somewhere, the hospitals nearby would set up a new "Burns" wing. Before the 1980 Champions' League final, he used a set of dentures to threaten the Ballon d'Or winner then, Kevin Keegan, causing him to play badly in the final. During the game, Keegan did not see much of the ball and Hamburger SV lost that match, allowing Nottingham Forest to retain their trophy. After he retired, he managed a bar here. His ability to make the leaders of the football hooligans listen to him definitely had something to do with his notorious reputation. But now, he had a head of white hair and his back was also slightly bent. No matter how one looked at him, he did not look like the butchering thug that everyone was afraid of.

This man later became a middle-aged uncle, wiping glasses daily behind a bar table. Now, he had already become an ordinary old man wiping glasses daily behind a bar table.

Twain turned back to look at his daughter, and he realized that his daughter was also looking at him, saying sheepishly, "Daddy, I can't finish it..."

Twain reached out to pat her on her head, "It's okay if you can't finish it. It's time to go back, Theresa."

With that, he left his seat and held Theresa's hand.

Theresa jumped down and held her daddy's hand as the two of them walked out.

"Goodbye pals," Twain waved at the fans who were still involved in a heated discussion.

When they realized that he was leaving, they stopped their discussion and looked at him, as if they had something to say, but nobody said anything. In the end, only Fat John shouted as Twain was about to walk out of the door, "Are you coming tomorrow, Tony?"

Twain turned back to look at him, "I can't say for sure. I can't be coming over here everyday. If I bring Theresa here everyday, I'm afraid she might turn bad. Ha ha!"

Twain did not stay to chat as he laughed and pushed open the door to leave.

Tony Twain had never thought that he was old. However, in the eyes of these people, Twain walking out slowly with his daughter in tow probably could be considered as an old man now.

He was not even fifty years old yet and his body was not considered old yet. However, his heart was already old. That nuclear-powered heart of a champion that never stopped beating had slowed down and was slowly becoming quiet. Now that he had won all the trophies that he should have won, what was left to excite him? Nothing, absolutely nothing. He had no reason to come back with a body that had a heart condition to satisfy the desires of the audience.

Maybe this was what he had always wanted. He had already planned long ago that he would leave in glory after winning the world cup. His glorious image would not be smeared, and people did not have to talk about the "the end of a hero".

However, to the audience, what was the point of watching a show if the most eye-catching leading character had left the stage? During the final concerts of the biggest stars, they would always be asked back for an encore by their fans, sing a few more songs, leave, and then called back for another encore, again and again to show their popularity.

Too bad they could not shout in front of Twain, "Come back Tony! Sing another song for us!"

"I hope that Tony can have a happy and healthy life, especially now that he has a daughter. By why do I prefer that guy who would be so animated on the sidelines, spitting at the fourth official?"

Skinny Bill muttered.

"I like that too..." Someone else muttered next to him.

Bill took a look and found that it was John. They looked at each other before laughing together.

"Why would he return? Forest is in a mess, come back here to smear his reputation as the Godfather of Champions? It's better if he doesn't come back..."

Both of them shook their heads at the same time.

Chapter 980: My Legend Is Still Here (Part 1)

The countdown to the 2018-19 Premier League season officially commenced when the Premier League champions Arsenal defeated the FA Cup champions Liverpool and lifted the FA Community Shield trophy.

All eyes were on the traditional 'big four' teams of England this season, with Manchester United and Arsenal being the teams that receive the most attention from the press and the rest of the world. There were not many people who talked about how England had just won the World Cup, or why Tony Twain had decided to retire.

Twain would often be surrounded by fans asking for either a photograph or an autograph when he takes his daughter out for a walk, but other than that, his life has been quite peaceful and he has never been bothered by the press. Twain does not like interacting with the press, but he likes interacting with football fans, especially fans of Nottingham Forest. Nottingham is his home ground, and every single Forest fan is just like a friend to him.

Of course, there were also times where Twain found himself in an awkward situation when he interacted with the Forest fans. For example, there would often be fans who ask him, "Will you come back, Tony?"

Twain knew very well what they meant when they asked that. Nottingham Forest is in a mess right now, and everyone is hoping for a great manager to come and rescue the team. They thought about who this 'great manager' could be, and the only person that comes to mind is Tony Twain.

Twain does not wish to sadden or disappoint the fans who hope that he would return to Nottingham Forest as the manager, but at the same time, he cannot take back the words that he said previously

either. Therefore, he would always respond to the fans with a wry smile, “I don’t know, who knows what will happen in the future?”

Sometime later, Twain received a call from John Motson. “Tony, are you interested in coming over to the BBC5?”

BBC5 is a sports channel just like the CCTV5 channel. Every single match involving the England national football team would be broadcasted on the BBC5. Twain has worked as a guest commentator for BBC5 for a short period of time in the past, and he has provided commentaries on the World Cup and Euro Cup before. However, he has not worked for them ever since he took on the role as the manager of the England national football team.

“Go over to the BBC5?” Twain was puzzled initially, but he understood what Motson was getting at shortly after. BBC was able to triumph over Sky UK and ITV last year, and they managed to get their hands on the broadcast rights for a portion of the Premier League matches. Now, they are trying to recruit people from all across the country to become commentators for those matches, and the only way they would be able to recruit a popular commentator like Twain would be to make use of Motson’s relationship with Twain.

“Yeah, I want you to come over and provide commentaries for the new Premier League season. Are you interested?”

“Ah, John... I still want to rest some more.” Twain shook his head and refused Motson’s offer. “I have only retired for two months. Surely the break that I deserve after working for the past 10 years is longer than two months?”

“That’s a shame...” Motson knew Twain’s disposition very well. Twain would not do anything that he is not inclined to do. Persuading him any further would just be a waste of saliva. Motson found it to be a shame that the British football fans would not be able to hear Twain’s interesting commentary for the upcoming Premier League season.

A day after Motson called, Twain received a call from Martin Taylor. Just like Motson, Taylor also invited him to be a guest commentator for Sky UK for the upcoming Premier League season. Taylor had retired years ago, but he still has the company’s best interests at heart since he had worked at the company for over 20 years. Hence, it is not surprising that he would try and recruit a good commentator such as Twain for his company even though he no longer works for Sky UK.

Nonetheless... Twain still rejected Taylor’s offer. His reason remained the same: he still wants to rest some more.

Twain was well aware that working for the television station would be a very good option for him if he wishes to continue working after leaving his managerial post. However, he likes his current laid back and carefree lifestyle, and he also wishes to continue taking care of Theresa. His daughter has only been in England for half a month. How could he possibly throw her aside for work? Shania is the one working now, and he should just concentrate on being a ‘house husband’ for now.

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The new Premier League season commenced on the 17th of August. The opening match featured Manchester United against the newly promoted side Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club, and Manchester United eventually went on to win 2:0 at home comfortably.

The Premier League was in full swing the following day. Nottingham Forest welcomed their first ever opponent for this season at their home grounds – Everton.

Nottingham Forest might not be performing well in recent times, but their ticket sales have been impressive. They sold a total of 38,000 season tickets for this season, which is roughly the same as the number of season tickets sold in past seasons. The number of season tickets that were sold when Nottingham Forest was at its peak cannot be used as a reference because the capacity of the City Ground Stadium is much smaller than the Crimson Stadium. 38,000 season tickets might be about 10,000 tickets lesser than the 55,000 season tickets sold by Manchester United this season, but when one takes into the account the size of Nottingham, 38,000 is definitely an impressive number.

One can tell from the number of tickets sold that Nottingham Forest is not encountering any financial issues, and the money earned from the ticket sales gives Evan the capital he needs when he has to bargain with the financial groups.

Not only that, one can also tell that the Nottingham Forest fans are 'die-hard' fans based on the number of season tickets sold. The Forest fans might be upset with the board of the club, but they still continue to support the club by buying the tickets to the matches. However, one of the fans said this when asked about why he was willing to buy season tickets, "I just take it as spending 35 pounds every home game to scold that son of a b*tch Evan Doughty."

The anger and hatred towards Evan Doughty is one that is shared by numerous Forest fans. Some of them even came together and formed a group called the 'Son of a B*tch Evan', and its members are the ones who create most of the banners that insult Evan Doughty at the Robin Hood stand.

Twain sat down on the floor and watched his daughter play with her rag doll after they finished eating the lunch meal that Twain had prepared. A moment later, he asked his daughter, "Theresa. Do you want to go out and play with Daddy?"

"Okay." Theresa stopped whatever she was doing and lifted her head to look at Twain. She was generally well-behaved and rarely disobeyed her parents.

"Okay. Then, do you want to watch a match with Daddy?" Twain magically dished out two match tickets from behind his back and waved them before Theresa's face.

Theresa tilted her head and mulled over what her dad just said. It took her a while to understand what he meant by 'match'. Thereafter, she nodded her head and replied, "Okay."

Twain was overjoyed. He quickly scooped up Theresa into his arms before planting a kiss on her tender cheeks.

"Let us leave at once!" He got into the car with Theresa in his arms and drove towards the Crimson Stadium that was located in the south-western part of Nottingham.

In truth, Twain did not plan to bring his daughter with him at the start. However, it is too dangerous to leave his daughter all alone at home. Thus, he decided to bring her along and let her experience the

atmosphere at the stadium when a match takes place. Who knows? Maybe Theresa would start liking football! Her mother dislikes football, but if Theresa ends up liking football, then it would be two against one, and the majority would win!

Twain was the manager of Nottingham Forest for 11 years. He might not have been a Forest fan before he was appointed as the manager of the club, but now, he is a die-hard Forest fan. Just like all the other Forest fans, he too has invested a lot of his time and emotion into the club after so many years at the helm. It does not matter how disappointing Forest has become. Twain has been consistently buying the season tickets for Nottingham Forest every single year ever since he was the manager of the club, and he did not stop buying the tickets during the four years when he was the manager of the England national football team either.

The truth was that he has never actually watched a Forest match from the stands as an ordinary football fan before. There are only two situations in which he would watch a match from the stands: the first is when he is sent to the stands by either the referee or the Football Association for verbally abusing them, and the second is when he comes to watch the performances of the Forest players as the manager of the England national football team. All in all, he has never watched a Forest match as an 'ordinary football fan' before.

Watching as an 'ordinary football fan' meant that he would not analyse the tactics being used by both teams and he would not try and find a flaw in either side's tactics as well. He would not think about what he would do at halftime or what he would change in the next match either... Basically, he would not watch the match as a 'football manager'.

Twain felt very happy when he thought about how he would be able to watch the match without any burdens being placed on him, and he began humming a song as he drove.

Theresa looked like a doll as she sat on the passenger seat next to Twain with a seat belt on. She turned her head to look at her father, and she most likely is not able to understand why he is so happy. Why would her father be happier than her when they are going out to play?

Twain was not in a hurry to step out of the car when they arrived at the stadium. The first thing he did was to don a pair of sunglasses and a baseball cap. Thereafter, he turned his collar upwards and donned a pair of sunglasses on Theresa as well. The sunglasses was so big that it covered half of Theresa's face. He then placed a hat over her head and made sure that both of them would not be recognized by anyone else at first glance. Once he was satisfied, he opened the car door and stepped outside. He then held Theresa in his arms and followed the crowd towards the stadium.

Twain lifted his head to look at the gigantic Crimson Stadium before him as he trailed behind the crowd. This was the first time he has been able to admire the new stadium's exterior while being so relaxed. He has always entered the stadium via a special tunnel in the past – the manager of the England national football team would definitely not enter the stadium alongside the rest of the spectators.

This stadium took six years to construct and there were also several accidents that occurred during its construction. However, the finished product was truly magnificent... It is no wonder Evan sounds so confident when he says that 'the stadium is the best stadium in the world'. The stadium looks utterly imposing on the outside, and one can already tell how it would feel to be inside just by looking at the

outside. Sadly... This great stadium has only witnessed Nottingham Forest's decline over the past few years.

Twain sighed softly before turning his head to look at the fans all around him.

It did not matter how Forest performed the previous season. The new season is about to begin, and the fans are all brimming with hope. To the fans, the club's board and the team were separate entities. There were numerous fans around him who were discussing about the upcoming match excitedly. They were speculating about how George Wood would perform during the match, and they were also wondering if Aaron Mitchell would score a goal later on...

A group of fans near Twain continued to discuss about the match for some time before the conversation topic suddenly shifted onto the new Forest manager.

"McAllister is no good as a manager... Look at the kind of manager this club hires! Nottingham Forest is a club that won five Champions League trophies! How can they let a nobody be the manager?"

"That's right! I don't think there's any other manager besides Tony Twain who is able to manage Forest's locker room..."

"It's a shame that Tony has retired... He's barely 50 years old..."

"How great it would be if he could return..."

"That's right!"

Theresa, who was in Twain's arms all this while, suddenly leaned towards Twain's ear and asked, "Daddy, are they calling you?"

Twain instantly felt very embarrassed after hearing his daughter's words. It has been two months, but he still has yet to tell Theresa what his previous job was. On one hand, he thinks that Theresa is still too young to understand what a 'football manager' is, and on the other hand, he does not think that there is a need to talk about what he used to do now that he has retired.

He kept bringing Theresa over to Kenny's bar a while back, and Fat John and his gang would refer to him as 'Tony' every time they ran into him. That has allowed Theresa to memorize the name 'Tony'. She is still young, so she does not know that there are countless other people named 'Tony' in this world. She probably thinks that only her dad is called 'Tony'.

"Er... No, they are talking about a different 'Tony'." Twain was unwilling to explain the situation to Theresa because he was afraid that the fans around them would recognize him. He became self-conscious and pulled down his cap further before saying, "Let's go in, Theresa."

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Twain held his daughter in his arms as he slowly ascended the steps towards the stands. However, he was not in a hurry to find his seat once he had reached the top of the stairs. Instead, he stood at the entrance for a moment. He could see everything in front and beneath him from where he stood. The stands opposite of him were fully occupied, and there were players doing their warm-ups on the green pitch below. The fans of both teams streamed towards their respective seats in the stadium and began singing songs.

Twain did not find those scenes before him to be foreign. But, he could not help but feel fired up now that he was seeing those scenes from the stands. This is what football is all about!

Theresa, who was being held in Twain's arms, suddenly cupped her ears with her hands. She found the stadium to be too noisy... The noise that is produced by the fans at every match can be quite frightening. The FC Schalke 04 fans once set a record for shouting during a certain period of a home match. Their shouts were deemed to be as loud as the noise that a plane makes during take-off, and it is likely that the shouts in the Crimson Stadium right now are as loud as that too.

Fortunately, Twain came prepared. He dished out a pair of furry earmuffs and placed them over Theresa's ears. The noise in the stadium was instantly reduced by a quite a bit.

"Let's go, darling." Twain patted Theresa's face gently before walking away from the entrance with her in his arms.

A broadcast was being played in the stadium, and it called for the fans to welcome the Everton fans. Numerous fans responded to the broadcast by standing to their feet and singing songs for the Everton fans at the top of their lungs. Of course, they did not exactly welcome them amicably. Twain searched for his seat with Theresa sprawled on his back. Theresa kept looking around at the people around her, and she showed keen curiosity about what they were doing. She was no longer as afraid as when she first entered the stands.

Twain soon found his seat and he sat down quietly. He did not stand to his feet and shout chants like 'Die, Everton' like the other fans around him.

Honestly, a stadium is truly not the kind of place that one should bring their kids to, because swear words are constantly thrown about by the fans and a kid can be negatively influenced when they stay in such an environment for long. Twain still remembers a picture that he saw on the internet when he was a Chinese football fan. The picture showed a kid pointing his middle finger at the camera while standing at the stands and being dressed in a jersey of one of the football clubs in England. The shape of his mouth clearly suggested that the word that he said was 'f*ck'.

Well, it is not like Theresa can understand whatever the Forest fans are saying right now. They are speaking in their incomprehensible Nottingham accent and using slang words that only people living in Nottingham would understand.

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The fans cheered for every single Nottingham Forest player who was starting in the match when they made their way onto the pitch. Twain had remained seated initially, but he eventually stood up and joined the other fans as they shouted 'St. George!'. He felt compelled to shout partly because he was influenced by the atmosphere and partly because he felt that he would attract attention to himself if he remained seated while everyone else was shouting and cheering.

Twain felt pleased and proud when he saw Wood appear on the pitch. That lad has become the leader of the team, and he even seems a little domineering now.

Theresa pointed at Wood, who had his back towards her, and shouted excitedly, “Big brother! Big brother!” Twain did not expect Theresa to recognize Wood. He had brought her along when he visited Sophia and Wood’s house previously.

Fortunately, the fans around them were even more excited than she was, and no one paid much attention to a little girl. Twain was shocked that his daughter was able to recognize Wood without even having to see his face. She had only seen him once, but she was able to tell that it was him from behind. Theresa has remarkable memory!

When Twain directed his attention back onto the pitch, he noticed that the players for both teams had already walked onto the pitch. They formed two separate lines on the left and right side of the referee and posed for a photo. Twain scanned the Forest players who were standing on the pitch, and he realized that most of the players on the team were strangers to him.

It was not that he knew nothing about them. He knew their names and positions that they play in.

But, that’s it. His knowledge of them is limited to just their names and positions. He knew nothing else about them, and that is why they feel like strangers to him.

He reminisced about the time when he was still a manager of Nottingham Forest ten years ago. Back then, he thought of every player, even the substitutes, as a part of his family and he knew them inside out. When they stood together, they formed a whole. They were a sea of red, and their name was ‘Nottingham Forest’.

But, what about now?

The players looked like 11 separate entities as they stood on the pitch. George Wood, Mario Balotelli, Gareth Bale, Nkoulou, Joe Mattock and Chris Cohen... They were all standing side by side together, but they were not a team.

The fans around Twain continued to shout at the top of their voices, “Forest! Forest! Nottingham Forest!”

But, no one knows just how much of those cheers are actually heard by the players...