

STARTING WITH REAL MADRID

Chapter 12: Let's See how You Fare!

Gao Shen and Beckham parted ways in the parking lot. One headed to the locker room, the other to the coach's office. Their conversation had no definitive conclusion, as Gao Shen couldn't make any strong promises to Beckham, and Beckham naturally couldn't commit to anything either. However, Gao Shen did express his heartfelt thoughts to Beckham.

He believed that Beckham was not just the idol star many perceived him to be. Despite his numerous off-field activities, these didn't affect his on-field performance. Gao Shen even told Beckham that, after Real Madrid's loss to Arsenal in the Champions League first-round knockout stage, Beckham was the only superstar who could leave the Bernabeu with his head held high.

"I've always believed that you should be one of the most pivotal players on the team. You should be in a position where you can maximize your impact—on the right, not in the middle."

Beckham's crosses are among the best in history, but they require someone in the front court to capitalize on them. The entire world knows Ronaldo isn't

known for his heading ability; the Brazilian prefers to solve problems with his feet.

At Manchester United, Beckham's best partner was Ruud van Nistelrooy, a classic center-forward. Over the years, Ruud van Nistelrooy missed Beckham's precise crosses from the right. The difference in performance between the Portuguese and the Englishman on the right flank was significant.

Ronaldo, Raul, Cassano, and even Baptista, who was temporarily pushed to the front line, are not traditional center-forwards, which has severely weakened Beckham's role on the right. Combined with a lack of defensive midfielders and the previous presence of Figo on the right, Beckham was naturally moved to the central midfield position.

Gao Shen's remarks were a reminder that the true Beckham was the one on the right wing.

The two talked for nearly 20 minutes. Gao Shen unreservedly shared his positioning and expectations for Beckham. But Beckham was not immediately convinced and did not promise to play for Gao Shen on the spot. Such scenes belong in online novels; in real life, it is not easy to convince someone.

After all, within this club and at this training base, no one believed Gao Shen would last long. Almost everyone thought he was just a pawn of the new chairman, Martin, used to suppress and weaken the team's superstars and prepare for Bosque's return to the Bernabeu.

In such circumstances, who would be willing to promise anything to Gao Shen? Who would trust any promises made by him?

In the end, Beckham only said that he was a professional player signed by Real Madrid.

"Don't worry, as long as I wear this jersey and can still play, I will fight to the end. This is my professional ethics!"

Beckham left after speaking. He didn't say he would support Gao Shen, nor did he promise not to oppose his coaching, but that was enough. If Beckham had agreed too quickly, Gao Shen would have been worried. As it stood, at least it showed he would consider it.

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As he approached the coach's office, Fernando Lucas greeted him, holding a report from the team doctor.

De la Red had gone to a nearby hospital with the team doctor for a detailed physical examination, especially focusing on his heart. The results showed that he was very healthy and had no heart problems.

This puzzled Gao Shen. Could it be that De la Red's condition developed later?

In any case, it meant that De la Red could be used with confidence for now.

"The office just received a fax from the French Football Association," Fernando Lucas reported quietly.

Gao Shen was a bit surprised. "What's it about?"

"France coach Domenech wants us to release Zidane for a national team match in mid-March, between the 27th and 28th rounds, against Slovenia."

Generally, when the national team calls up players, they must send a fax to the club in advance. The head coach must confirm before the player can leave to report to the national team. Sometimes, the club's head coach might even refuse the call-up.

Gao Shen was worried about not having a chance to talk to Zidane, and the French Football Association had just handed him an opportunity.

"Should you take advantage of this call-up to talk to Zidane?" Lucas raised his eyebrows.

Lucas was suggesting putting some pressure on Zidane through the national team's request.

But Gao Shen wasn't planning to do that. Such tactics might work for some people, but Zidane wasn't one of them. Moreover, Zidane's position in the national team was solid. Domenech trusted him and even built the team's tactics around him. This warm-up game was just for training and player inspection. Whether Zidane went or not wouldn't affect his national team standing.

If Gao Shen made a fuss about this call-up, wouldn't he come off as a villain?

There's such a thing as having a certain standard, after all.

Two Real Madrid presidents—Calderon was ridiculed as a clown, while Florentino was praised as a mogul. This was because of their levels of sophistication.

"You're still a bit green," Gao Shen said earnestly to Lucas, shaking his head.

As Gao Shen walked into the coach's office, Lucas was left wondering, why did he say I'm green?

How old are you, brother?

However, it had to be said that Gao Shen's behavior over the past two days had changed significantly. He seemed like a completely different person, making Lucas feel quite unfamiliar.

Perhaps this is what they call a transformation.

There's a saying: power is a man's courage!

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In European football, hiring a head coach usually involves hiring the entire team led by the head coach. The size of the team is negotiated between the head coach and the club, typically consisting of four or five people who work together.

However, there are special cases. When Luxemburgo was dismissed, he took his entire coaching team with him, leaving behind the coaches hired by Real Madrid. When Carlo was promoted from the second team to the first team, he brought only one assistant coach, Maqueda, and the rest of the first team's original staff remained unchanged.

As for Gao Shen, he was just an intern, not part of the coaching team, more like a temporary worker doing errands.

Every morning, before the team's training session, the coaching staff held a meeting. Usually, the head coach would explain the project arrangement for the next session or the entire day's training. For specific projects, the head

coach would provide detailed instructions, such as the goals and expected outcomes.

For instance, at Manchester United, Ferguson delegated training responsibilities to Queiroz many years ago. Queiroz was responsible for explaining the training tasks to the coaching staff daily, including targeted tactical drills. As he got older, Ferguson focused more on strategy and less on training.

When Gao Shen walked into the coach's office, Maqueda was leading a meeting with the first team coaches, explaining the training plans for the day.

Maqueda was a former Real Madrid player. After Carlo left, he was the senior-most in the office, so everyone was used to following his arrangements.

Upon seeing Gao Shen enter, Maqueda glanced at him but continued with his explanations. Although some wanted to greet Gao Shen, seeing Maqueda's attitude, they remained silent.

After all, no one knew how long Gao Shen would stay in this position.

Maqueda was quite satisfied with this situation. He wanted to make Gao Shen seem insignificant, perhaps even replaceable.

But at this moment, Gao Shen, who had said he would follow Maqueda's arrangements yesterday, suddenly interrupted him.

"Let me say a few words!" Gao Shen's voice wasn't loud, but it was clear.

Everyone looked over, surprised, while Maqueda was furious. However, he quickly calmed down and squeezed out a sneer. "Alright, go ahead."

Gao Shen waved his hand, "Don't worry, our players aren't that fragile. Just be cautious. Besides, our training intensity hasn't been high, and a midweek game will help stimulate their form."

Maqueda felt humiliated by the constant interruptions.

Even Carlo respected him, so why was he being treated this way now?

"Okay, we'll make the arrangements," Maqueda gritted his teeth but thought to himself: I'll see how you fare!

Gao Shen couldn't see Maqueda's eyes burning with anger, but he didn't have time to pay attention to it. Right now, every minute was precious. He had to prepare everything for the weekend derby against Atletico.

It just dawned on him that Ramos would be suspended for the weekend. He hadn't known that before. But in hindsight, it was true. Ramos was suspended for one game due to accumulated yellow cards.

This meant Gao Shen had to make some adjustments in the central defense selection.

Did it really have to be Raul Bravo and Elgra as center-backs?

Facing such challenges, Gao Shen had no choice but to adapt. For now, the most important thing was to talk to Zidane and Woodgate first.